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# Soft Power as the New Norm: How the Chinese-Russian Strategic Partnership (Soft) Balances American Hegemony in an Era of Unipolarity

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FLORIDA INTERNATIONAL UNIVERSITY

Miami, Florida

SOFT POWER AS THE NEW NORM:  
HOW THE CHINESE-RUSSIAN STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP (SOFT) BALANCES  
AMERICAN HEGEMONY IN AN ERA OF UNIPOLARITY

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the

requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

in

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

by

Chaka Ferguson

2011

To: Dean Kenneth Furton  
College of Arts and Sciences

This dissertation, written by Chaka Ferguson, and entitled Soft Power as the New Norm: How the Chinese-Russian Strategic Partnership (Soft) Balances American Hegemony in an Era of Unipolarity, having been approved in respect to style and intellectual content, is referred to you for judgment.

We have read this dissertation and recommend that it be approved.

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Date of Defense: March 28, 2011

The dissertation of Chaka Ferguson is approved.

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Interim Dean Kevin O'Shea  
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Florida International University, 2011

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## DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation to my wife and love of my life, Natolyn Jones-Ferguson, my children and my parents. They are my inspiration, and without them, the completion of this work would not have been possible.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

There were many people who contributed to the completion of this dissertation. Among them, I would like to thank Dr. Mohiaddin Mesbahi for his mentorship and for helping me develop the theoretical and analytical frameworks for my study. He has guided me both intellectually and professionally, and without him, I would not have completed this process. I am indebted to him and he has my eternal gratitude. I would also like to thank Dr. Thomas Breslin for helping select the fascinating topic for my dissertation. I also am grateful to the Florida Education Fund (FEF) and the McKnight Fellowship program for their generous funding and scholarly training. The McKnight conferences and writing workshops were essential to the successful completion of my doctoral candidacy. In particular, I would like to thank Dr. Lawrence Morehouse and Mr. Charles Jackson of the FEF for their integral support throughout this process. My accomplishments could not have been achieved without their assistance and the support network they have created through the McKnight Fellowship program.

ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION  
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HOW THE CHINESE-RUSSIAN STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP (SOFT) BALANCES  
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by

Chaka Ferguson

Florida International University, 2011

Miami, Florida

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This study explores how great powers not allied with the United States formulate their grand strategies in a unipolar international system. Specifically, it analyzes the strategies China and Russia have developed to deal with U.S. hegemony by examining how Moscow and Beijing have responded to American intervention in Central Asia. The study argues that China and Russia have adopted a soft balancing strategy of to indirectly balance the United States at the regional level. This strategy uses normative capabilities such as soft power, alternative institutions and regionalization to offset the overwhelming material hardware of the hegemon.

The theoretical and methodological approach of this dissertation is neoclassical realism. Chinese and Russian balancing efforts against the United States are based on their domestic dynamics as well as systemic constraints. Neoclassical realism provides a bridge between the internal characteristics of states and the environment which those states are situated. Because China and Russia do not have the hardware (military or economic power) to directly challenge the United States, they must resort to their

software (soft power and norms) to indirectly counter American preferences and set the agenda to obtain their own interests. Neoclassical realism maintains that soft power is an extension of hard power and a reflection of the internal makeup of states.

The dissertation uses the heuristic case study method to demonstrate the efficacy of soft balancing. Such case studies help to facilitate theory construction and are not necessarily the demonstrable final say on how states behave under given contexts. Nevertheless, it finds that China and Russia have increased their soft power to counterbalance the United States in certain regions of the world, Central Asia in particular. The conclusion explains how soft balancing can be integrated into the overall balance-of-power framework to explain Chinese and Russian responses to U.S. hegemony. It also suggests that an analysis of norms and soft power should be integrated into the study of grand strategy, including both foreign policy and military doctrine.

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

ABM Treaty —Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty  
ASEAN – Association of Southeast Asian Nations  
ASBM – Anti-ship Ballistic Missiles  
ATC – Anti-Terrorism Center  
BRIC – Brazil, Russia, India and China  
CCP – Chinese Communist Party  
CIS – Commonwealth of Independent States  
CNC – Council of National Coordinators of the SCO  
CSTO – Collective Security Treaty Organization  
CST – Collective Security Treaty  
FSB – Russian Federal Security Bureau  
GPS – Global Positioning System  
HGC – Heads of Government Council  
HCS – Council of Heads of States  
ICBM – Intercontinental Ballistic Missile  
K2 – Karshi-Khanabad base  
MARV – Maneuverable Reentry Vehicles  
NATO – North Atlantic Treaty Organization  
NMD – National Missile Defense  
OSCE – Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe  
PLA – People’s Liberation Army  
PLAN – People’s Liberation Army Navy  
PRC – People’s Republic of China  
RATS – Regional Anti-Terrorism Structure  
RSC – Regional Security Complex  
RSCT – Regional Security Complex Theory (formerly RATS)  
START – Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty  
SCO – Shanghai Cooperation Organization  
SLBM – Submarine Launched Ballistic Missile  
SSBN – Nuclear-powered Ballistic Missile Submarines  
UN – United Nations  
UNSC – United Nations Security Council

# CHAPTER I

## A NEW (SOFT) BALANCING ACT

### Introduction

Since the end of the Cold War nearly two decades ago, scholars and policymakers have debated how great powers would respond to an era of American unipolarity. The collapse of the Soviet Union ended the bipolar rivalry between East and West and left the United States as the undisputed hegemonic power on the planet. A number of scenarios were presented after the Cold War – some sobering, others more auspicious – to address this unique moment in world history. Some worried (or hoped) that the United States would be able stride the world as Gulliver unbound, pursuing its foreign policies in a unilateralist fashion. The world’s great powers had no choice but to kowtow to the Washington consensus or be left in its wake.<sup>1</sup> Others predicted that disaffected great powers not allied with Washington would form balancing coalitions against the United States in an attempt to return the international order to one of multipolarity.<sup>2</sup> Still others suggested that great powers would willingly accept Washington’s lead if they were allowed to partake in the public goods generated by the liberal international order established after World War II. Indeed, scholars of similar theoretical persuasions have supported and opposed the hypotheses outlined above. For example, some realists

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<sup>1</sup> For the strongest argument on this front, see Charles Krauthammer, “The Unipolar Moment,” *Foreign Affairs* 70, no. 1, (1990-91): 23-33; Charles Krauthammer, “The Unipolar Moment Revisited,” *The National Interest*, Winter (2002-2003): 5-17; William C. Wohlforth, “The Stability of a Unipolar World,” *International Security* 24, no. 1, (Summer 1999): 5-41; Michael Mastanduno, “Preserving the Unipolar Moment: Realist Theories and U.S. Grand Strategy after the Cold War,” *International Security* 21, no. 4, (Spring, 1997): 49-88.

<sup>2</sup> Kenneth Waltz, “Structural Realism After the Cold War,” *International Security* 25, no. 1, (December 1997): 5-41; Christopher Layne, “The Unipolar Illusion Revisited: The Coming End of the United States’ Unipolar Moment,” *International Security* 31, no. 2, (Fall 2006): pp 7-41.

support the contention that balancing is unlikely against the United States in the near future, whereas other realists cite recent behavior by some great powers as evidence of nascent balancing strategies.<sup>3</sup>

The present study wades into this contentious debate concerning great power strategic reactions to American hegemony. The main question posed here is how will great powers *not allied* with the United States formulate their grand strategies in a unipolar international system? In other words, will they bandwagon with the United States or attempt to balance American hegemony or some combination of both? Will conflict or cooperation define their overall relations with the United States? Will they seek to return the system to one of multipolarity or are they satisfied with the stability provided under American hegemonic leadership? Moreover, from a theoretical and analytical standpoint, what are the major causal determinants of great power behavior in a unipolar system? Are they mainly exogenous or endogenous? Which theoretical frameworks can best explain such complexity? And finally, will the study of great power behavior under unipolarity contribute new insights to International Relations theory?

To start with the last question first, the answer is yes. A hegemonic system provides a unique opportunity to analyze how great powers will react to extreme

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<sup>3</sup> For example, see G. John Ikenberry, Michael Mastanduno, and William C. Wohlforth, "Introduction: Unipolarity, State Behavior, and Systemic Consequences," *World Politics* 61, no. 1 (Jan. 2009): 1-27; Stephen Walt, "Alliances in a Unipolar World," *World Politics*, 61, no. 1 (Jan. 2009): 86-120 and William C. Wohlforth, "Unipolarity, Status Competition, and Great Power War," *World Politics* 61, no. 1 (Jan. 2009): 28-57; John G. Ikenberry, ed., *America Unrivaled: The Future of Balance of Power*, (New York: Cornell University Press, 2002); T.V. Paul, "Soft Balancing in the Age of U.S. Primacy," *International Security* 30, no. 1, (summer 2005): 46-71; Robert Pape, "Soft Balancing Against the United States," *International Security*, 30, no. 1, (summer 2005): 7-45; T.V. Paul, James J. Wirtz and Michael Fortmann, eds., *Balance of Power: Theory and Practice in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2004); Kai He and Huiyun Feng, "If Not Soft Balancing, Then What? Reconsidering Soft Balancing and U.S. Policy Toward China," *Security Studies* 17, no. 2, (2008): 363-395; Stephen Walt, *Taming American Power: The Global Response to U.S. Primacy*, (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2005).

imbalances of power. Traditional International Relations theory focused on the role of alliances and arms buildups to *prevent* the rise of a hegemonic power. However, little has been written about balancing against an *actual* hegemon, and current theory is weak in explaining or predicting what happens when the balance of power breaks down and a state achieves hegemony. The current study hopes to help fill that void.

Consistent with the theoretical tradition of realism, I argue that great powers not allied with Washington are likely to balance against U.S. hegemony and have, in fact, begun to do so. Unlike previous eras, great power balancing in the current unipolar system is likely to use indirect measures to ward off hegemonic ambitions. Traditional defensive alliances and internal arms buildups are ineffective strategies in a system where the sole hegemonic power's material capabilities far outstrip those of all its nearest competitors combined. Therefore, great powers that view America's globalizing influence as a threat or constraint must adopt alternative strategies to insulate themselves from U.S. *imperium*. Thus, this study argues, the grand strategy likely to be adopted by great powers not allied with the United States will be one of "soft balancing."<sup>4</sup> A soft balancing strategy adopts indirect means or "low level efforts" such as the formation of limited diplomatic coalitions, ententes, regional alignments and use of international institutions to restrain hegemonic power.<sup>5</sup>

The aim of my study, then, is two-fold: the first objective is to identify and explain the causal determinants that drive great powers – in this case China and Russia –

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<sup>4</sup> See Robert Pape, "Soft Balancing Against the United States;" Paul, "Soft Balancing in the Age of U.S. Primacy;" and Robert Art, "Striking the Balance" *International Security* 30, no. (Winter 2005-06): 177-185.

<sup>5</sup> Pape, "Soft Balancing Against the United States."

to soft balancing. The second interrelated goal is to improve realist theory by including variables often neglected by realist scholars, specifically normative or soft power capabilities, into the realist framework.<sup>6</sup> In a hegemonic system, norms can be viewed as one of three pillars that uphold world order – the other two are military and political/economic pillars. The latter two “material” capabilities are necessary for the former, but the former reinforces the latter in a feedback loop, a point generally recognized by Gramscian and liberal theorists of hegemony, but largely neglected by realists.<sup>7</sup> The thrust of my argument is that the structure of the international system is the main determinant of great power behavior, but the system must include a third dimension of capabilities, which are normative. The insertion of normative capabilities might seem an odd addition to realism, but it is an important rectification that will lead to many insights about state behavior in contemporary international politics. For example, Mesbahi has shown that norms function within a third social domain of capabilities separate from, but interrelated with, military and economic dimensions at the strategic

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<sup>6</sup> For strong arguments of realism’s failure to address normative issues, see Stefano Guzzini, “Structural Power: The Limits of Neorealist Power Analysis,” *International Organization* 47, no. 3, (Summer 1993): 443-478; Jennifer Sterling-Folker, “Realism and the Constructivist Challenge: Rejecting, Reconstructing or Rereading,” *International Studies Review* 4, no. 1, (Spring 2002): 73-79; Ken Booth, “Security in Anarchy: Utopian Realism in Theory and Practice,” *International Affairs* 67, no. 3, (July 1991): 527-545; For a major treatment on this topics, see Robert Keohane, ed., *Neorealism and its Critics*, (New York: Columbia University, 1986). The Liberal tradition of International Relations has taken the lead in dealing with the concept of normative or “soft” power. See Joseph Nye, *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics*, (New York: Public Affairs, 2004).

<sup>7</sup> For liberal conceptions, see G. John Ikenberry, *After Victory: Institutions, Strategic Restraint, and The Rebuilding of Order After Major Wars*, (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2001) and Robert Keohane, *After Hegemony*, (Princeton University Press, 1984); for Gramscian views see Stephen Gill, ed., *Gramsci, Historical Materialism and International Relations*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993) and Robert W. Cox and Timothy J. Sinclair, *Approaches to World Order*, (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 1996); for a constructivist stance, see John G. Ruggie, *Winning the Peace: America and World Order in the New Era*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996). This point is also made in the emerging field of critical geopolitics. See Mehdi Parvizi Amineh and Henk Houweling, *Central Eurasia in Global Politics: Conflict, Security and Development*, (Boston: Brill NV, 2004).

level.<sup>8</sup> These dynamics work symbiotically, he argues, but can be analyzed separately.

However, triangulating these concepts requires a synthesis of theory into a coherent framework, something which an eclectic approach can accomplish.<sup>9</sup>

Specifically, this study explores the strategies China and Russia have developed to deal with U.S. hegemony by examining how the two great powers have responded to American intervention in Central Asia. In general, realism anticipates that great powers not aligned with a hegemonic power will seek to balance it, especially if a hegemonic power encroaches territorially.<sup>10</sup> One way to achieve some measure of independence in a unipolar world is the creation of regional spheres of influence as a buffer to hegemonic encroachment. Under hegemony, the fear of encirclement is exacerbated by the projection of soft power because a hegemonic system is one of rule rather than one simply of brute force.<sup>11</sup> In other words, “as a world-system wide phenomenon,

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<sup>8</sup> The theoretical and analytical frameworks developed in this study were influenced by, and adapted from, Mesbahi’s research on the normative dimensions of state power, particularly in American-Iranian relations. See Mohiaddin Mesbahi, “Public Diplomacy, Power and Normative Challenges,” paper presented at International Conference on Bridging the Divide Between the United States and Muslim World Through Arts and Ideas: Possibilities and Limitations,” June 6-7, 2009, New York University. Also see Mesbahi, “The Iranian Islamic Revolution and the International System: 30 Years of Mutual Impact,” paper presented at The Islamic Revolution 30 Years After, Sharif University, Tehran, December 22-23, 2008; Mohiaddin Mesbahi, “Iran and Central Asia: Paradigm and Policy,” *Central Asian Survey* 23, no. 2, (June 2004): 109-139; Mesbahi, “Iran’s Foreign Policy Towards Russia, Central Asia and the Caucasus,” in John L. Esposito and R.K. Ramazani, eds., *Iran at the Crossroads*, (New York: Palgrave, 2001).

<sup>9</sup> Mesbahi, Mohiaddin, “Central Eurasia in Global Politics: Conflict, Security, and Development by Mehdi Parvizi Amineh and Henk Houweling.” *Slavic Review* 65, no. 1 (Spring 2006): 179-180.

<sup>10</sup> David J. Myers, *Regional Hegemons: Threat Perception and Strategic Response*, (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1991); John J. Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics*, (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2001). There are exceptions to this: some realists argue that maritime great powers, unlike their continental counterparts, are not likely to face balancing coalitions. See Jack S. Levy and William R. Thompson, “Balancing on Land and at Sea: Do States Ally Against the Leading Global Power?” *International Security* 35, no. 1, (Summer 2010): 7-43.

<sup>11</sup> As Joseph Nye notes, soft power can lead to attraction *or* repulsion of the hegemon’s political and normative agenda. See “Foreword,” in Watanabe Yasushi and David L. McConnell, eds., *Soft Power*

hegemony denotes a unipolar structure of capability matched by a unipolar structure of influence.”<sup>12</sup> Unlike previous great powers, which faced military and economic challenges,<sup>13</sup> China and Russia also face normative challenges from the United States. The normative dimension is a crucial variable in understanding responses to American hegemony because it links domestic factors to systemic level structures and is the crux of a soft balancing strategy.

For example, Russian foreign policy vis-à-vis the United States is shaped by both the internal characteristics of the Russian polity and American capabilities. Regardless of political ideology, members of the Russian foreign policy elite have advocated for a multipolar international system.<sup>14</sup> However, whether elites believe that this objective could be achieved by cooperating with, or competing against, the United States is based partly on the values of those in power. For example, the so-called Euro-Atlanticist school of Russian foreign policy embraced the values of a Western model of development and eventual rapprochement with the United States after the dissolution of the Soviet Union, whereas the neo-Euro-Asian school valued the reassertion of the Russian state as a pole

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*Superpowers: Cultural and National Assets of Japan and the United States*, (Armonk, N.Y.: M.E. Sharpe, 2008).

<sup>12</sup> David Wilkinson, “Unipolarity Without Hegemony,” *International Studies Review* 1, no. 2 (1999): 142.

<sup>13</sup> Paul Kennedy’s magisterial work, *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers*, demonstrates the role of material capabilities in the international system. However, Kennedy’s work, like many before him, focused on bipolar and multipolar systems, where emphasis on material capabilities is paramount. The gap between relative strength of the great powers in those systems is not large, and therefore, traditional balancing methods were adopted. In a unipolar system, there is a gulf between the capabilities of the superpower and the other great powers. See Kennedy, *The Rise and Fall of Great Powers: Economic Change and Military Conflict from 1500 to 2000*, (New York: Random House, 1987).

<sup>14</sup> Mohiaddin Mesbahi, “Russian Foreign Policy and Security in Central Asia,” *Central Asian Survey* 12, no. 2, (1993): 181-215.

of power to balance the West.<sup>15</sup> Similar to Russian foreign policy, Chinese relations with the United States have a domestic dimension to them as well. Akin to the neo-Euro-Asian school in Russia, “many Chinese increasingly fear [that the United States] will not just seek to contain China’s foreign policies, but will also actively seek to convert China’s society and polity in America’s own image.”<sup>16</sup>

To be sure, how China and Russia perceive norms they consider to be Western or American colors their responses to U.S. hegemony; however, these concerns are the outgrowth of U.S. military and economic might, as realists maintain, not the norms in and of themselves.<sup>17</sup> Similar Western norms are advocated by smaller European states, which are of little strategic concern to Russia and China. Nevertheless, the normative component of hegemony becomes increasingly significant because of the ability of the superpower to project its domestic ideology on a universal plane. The projection can be demonstrated by the U.S. promotion of the so-called “Colored Revolutions” in Central Asia and the Caucasus in the mid-2000s. These “revolutions” clearly disturbed China, Russia and the autocratic rulers of the smaller Central Asian states, who perceive the advancement of Western notions of democracy and human rights a threat to their rule.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Mesbahi, “Russian Foreign Policy and Security in Central Asia,” 185 and Mohiaddin Mesbahi, “Regional and Global Powers and the International Relations of Central Asia” in Adeed Dawisha and Karen Dawisha, eds., *The Making of Foreign Policy in Russia and the New States of Eurasia*, (New York: M.E. Sharpe, 1995).

<sup>16</sup> Peter Hays Gries, “Forecasting U.S.-China Relations, 2015,” *Asian Security* 2, no. 1, (2006): 75. Also see Yizhou Wang, “China’s State Security in a Time of Peaceful Development: A New Issue on Research Agenda,” *China & World Economy* 15, no. 1, (2007): 77-86.

<sup>17</sup> For an opposing viewpoint on the causative role of norms in state behavior, see John Gerard Ruggie, “What Makes the World Hang Together? Neo-Utilitarianism and the Social Constructivist Challenge,” *International Organization* 52, no. 4, (Autumn 1998): 855-885.

<sup>18</sup> Stephen Blank, “U.S. Interests in Central Asia and their Challenges,” *Demokratizatsiya: The Journal of Post-Soviet Democratization* 15, no. 3, (Summer 2007): 312-334; Eugene Rumer, “The United States and

Until recently, realism largely has failed to address the distribution of normative capabilities across the international system and how this capability affects great power relations.<sup>19</sup> As outlined above, rectifying this negligence requires the inclusion of domestic variables such as identity and political ideology because a hegemonic power will seek to remake other states in its own image.<sup>20</sup> Indeed, classical realists readily recognized the importance of ideas, and structural realists were not completely indifferent to them, although neither incorporated or integrated them into their theories. Hans Morgenthau noted the “cultural” component of imperialism; E.H. Carr wrote about the “harmony of interests” a great power sought to achieve by projecting its interests onto the system; Kenneth Waltz viewed the “white man’s burden” to “civilize” native peoples as a Western ploy to achieve its hegemony in the developing world; Robert Gilpin argued a major objective of states was to increase their influence over each other to fulfill “political, economic, and *ideological* interests [emphasis added]”; and John Mearsheimer recognized the power of nationalism as an ideology.<sup>21</sup> As Murielle Cozette maintains,

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Central Asia: In Search of a Strategy,” in *Central Asia: Views from Washington, Moscow and Beijing*, (Armonk, N.Y: ME Sharpe, 2007) and Dmitri Trenin, “Russia and Global Security Norms,” *The Washington Quarterly* 27, no. 2, (Spring 2004): 63-77.

<sup>19</sup> For some of the more trenchant criticisms of realism’s inability to adequately incorporate domestic factors such as identity and ideology into its framework and still remain “realist” see Jeffrey W. Legro and Andrew Moravcsik, “Is Anybody Still a Realist?” *International Security* 24, no. 2 (Autumn, 1999): 5-55; 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* 91, no. 4, (Dec. 1997): 899-912. On the problem of realism’s lack of a social dimension, see John Gerard Ruggie, “What Makes the World Hang Together?” and Sterling-Folker, “Realism and the Constructivist Challenge.” The author argues that realism can, and should, incorporate domestic factors into its paradigm. Neoclassical realists have made a strong case for this position, which is dealt with below and more thoroughly in Chapter 2.

<sup>20</sup> Robert Jervis, “The Remaking of a Unipolar World,” *The Washington Quarterly* 29, no. 3, (2005): 7-19.

<sup>21</sup> Hans Morgenthau, *Politics Among Nations*, (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1973); E.H. Carr, *The Twenty Years’ Crisis: 1919-1939*, (New York: Palgrave, 1981); Kenneth Waltz, *Theory of International Politics*,

realists understand the importance of ideas: “but were cautious of cloaking interests in a guise of moral principles. ... While not providing a precise vision of the future of humankind, realism certainly recognizes that meaningful political action is always infused by something that transcends pure power politics; that is, by an ideal for which to stand, and a belief that it can be realized, however imperfectly.”<sup>22</sup> Despite an awareness of norms, identities and ideas, realism largely neglected ideational or normative factors except in an *ad hoc* manner.<sup>23</sup> However, critics of realism’s indifference to norms have been generally aimed at structural or neorealism.<sup>24</sup>

Although cloaking interests in moral principles is a valid concern, soft power is not incompatible with the tradition. Joseph Nye, who introduced the concept of “soft power” to mainstream International Relations scholarship, argues that there is no conflict between realism and soft power and that concept goes at least as far back as Machiavelli, if not further.<sup>25</sup> The concept of “soft” or “normative” power, according to Nye, fell out

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(New York: McGraw-Hill, 1979); Robert Gilpin, *War and Change in World Politics*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1981): 24; John Mearsheimer, “Back to the Future: Instability in Europe After the Cold War,” *International Security* 15, no. 1 (Spring 2002): 5-56.

<sup>22</sup> Murielle Cozette, “What Lies Ahead: Classical Realism on the Future of International Relations,” *International Studies Review* 10, no. 4 (2008): 678.

<sup>23</sup> Although realists generally have not integrated norms into their theoretical frameworks, “most realists recognize states are not simply motivated by considerations of the balance of power or relative capabilities. They also pursue distinct normative or ideological agendas, usually in response to domestic political factors, which might include spreading religion, championing the rights of the oppressed or furthering a particular political cause. However, in practice, most states have proved ‘rational’ in the sense that they are keenly aware of structural distribution of power in the system, and do not pursue their normative agendas at the expense of their vital national interests,” writes Adrian Hyde-Price in “A ‘tragic-actor’? A Realist Perspective on ‘Ethical Power Europe,’” *International Affairs*, 84, no. 1 (2008): 3.

<sup>24</sup> Robert Keohane and Lisa Martin, “The Promise of Institutional Theory,” *International Security* 20, no. 1, (Summer 1995): 39-51.

<sup>25</sup> Joseph Nye, *The Paradox of American Power: Why the World’s Only Superpower Can’t Go It Alone*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003); Joseph Nye, *Bound to Lead: The Changing Nature of*

of the realist framework as a result of neorealism's attempts to make power measurable for their structural judgments.<sup>26</sup> "Power was reduced to measurable, tangible resources. It was something that could be dropped on your foot or on cities, rather than something that might change your mind about wanting to drop anything in the first place."<sup>27</sup> Indeed, Chinese diplomats have recognized potential of soft power throughout the millennia. From the Qing dynasty to Mao and into the modern day, China has maintained an "active cultural diplomacy" toward other nations.<sup>28</sup>

To address the limitations of the classical and neorealist approach to power politics, I utilize a neoclassical realist framework to help explain Chinese and Russian responses to American hegemony.<sup>29</sup> The theory most closely aligned with the study of power politics continues to be realism (both in its classical and structural guises) and this study takes the position that realism still provides the best explanations for interstate relations, although it must be reoriented or readapted to specific systemic configurations and contemporary contexts. Systemic structure continues to drive great power behavior; however, neoclassical realism argues specific great power responses and policies derive

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*American Power*, (New York: Basic Books, 1990); Joseph Nye, *The Paradox of American Power: Why the World's Only Superpower Can't Go It Alone*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003).

<sup>26</sup> Nye, "Foreword," in *Soft Power Superpowers*, xii.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>28</sup> Thomas A. Breslin, *Beyond Pain: The Role of Pleasure and Culture in the Making of Foreign Affairs*, (Westport, Conn.: Praeger, 2002).

<sup>29</sup> Randall L. Schweller and David Priess, "A Tale of Two Realisms: Expanding the Institutions," *Mershon International Studies Review* 41, no. 1 (May 1997): 1-32. For similar approaches, see Stephen G. Brooks "Dueling Realisms," *International Organization* 51, no. 3 (summer 1997): 445-477; and Brian Rathburn, "A Rose by Any Other Name: Neoclassical Realism as the Logical and Necessary Extension of Structural Realism," *Security Studies* 17, no. 2, (2008): 294-321; Gideon Rose, "Neoclassical Realism and Theories of Foreign Policy," *World Politics* 51, no. 1, (October 1998): 144-72.

their hue not only from system polarity, but global norms and regional and domestic dynamics as well. As Brian Rathburn notes, “Anarchy in structural realism provides strong incentives for states to accumulate power, but we cannot understand power without reference to what happens within states and how people think and what they believe.”<sup>30</sup>

Realism, specifically its “neo” variant, long has neglected the role of non-material capabilities and human agency, which has contributed to the misjudgments made by many neorealists after the Cold War.<sup>31</sup> The crude version of hegemony adopted by realists also has limited the efficacy of realist theory in explaining state behavior in a unipolar world, where global norms can be more threatening than armies and navies.

Robert Jervis makes this case when he points out that a hegemonic project goes beyond simple material dominance; hegemony has ideological or normative as well as economic and military components. “For the United States, the frontier is ideological rather than geographic, but the basic point is the same: preservation of a desirable and ordered zone requires taming or subduing areas and ideologies of potential disturbance.”<sup>32</sup> The reverse of this logic runs true as well. If ideology or norms are an important element in establishing hegemony, they could be important in de-establishing hegemony as well. From this standpoint, soft balancing becomes a viable strategy to

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<sup>30</sup> Rathburn, “A Rose by any Other Name,” 301.

<sup>31</sup> Structural realists have made a number of erroneous predictions after the Cold War, particularly that great power rivalry would break out in Europe and hard balancing would occur against the United States. See for example, Mearsheimer, “Back to the Future”; Waltz., “Structural Realism After the Cold War”; Christopher Layne, “The Unipolar Illusion: Why New Great Powers Will Rise,” *International Security* 17, no. 4, (Spring, 1993): 5-51.

<sup>32</sup> Jervis, “The Remaking of a Unipolar World,” 13.

restrain hegemonic ambitions when great powers cannot match the material might of the hegemonic power. In fact, adding norms to the repertoire of great power capabilities does not undermine the realist paradigm, but rather enhances it. As Mesbahi notes, realism can be “enriched” by including soft power as a capability, which can have an incommensurate qualitative affect as a multiplier of hard power.<sup>33</sup>

## **Problem**

As mentioned earlier in the document, one goal of my research project is to determine the causal mechanism that shape great power reactions in a unipolar system. The contention put forth in this study is that great powers not allied with the United States will favor a “soft balancing” strategy to balance American power rather than bandwagon. Such a strategy uses low level or indirect measures to restrain American power by focusing on the political and normative dimensions of hegemony. In addition, states adopting a soft balancing posture are likely to create or utilize regional spheres of influence as a buffer to U.S. hegemonic reach. In a unipolar era, regions could be considered “poles of power” where great powers can coordinate to fend off hegemonic interventions.<sup>34</sup> The end of the Cold War and rise of American unipolarity also led to the formation of “regional security complexes,” which provide actors greater autonomy and more room for maneuver in a hegemonic system.<sup>35</sup> In fact, regions can be viewed as

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<sup>33</sup> Mohiaddin Mesbahi, “Public Diplomacy, Power and Normative Challenges”

<sup>34</sup> Andrew Hurrell, *On Global Order: Power Values, and the Constitution of International Society*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007): especially 243-261.

<sup>35</sup> Barry Buzan and Ole Wæver, *Regions as Powers: The Structure of International Security*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003); Peter J. Katzenstein, *A World of Regions: Asia and Europe in the American Imperium*, (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2005). On Central Asia and the Caucasus as a regional security complex, see Mohiaddin Mesbahi, “Eurasia between Russia, Turkey and Iran,” in Maria

balancing mechanisms distinct from traditional alliance politics.<sup>36</sup> Soft balancing also can occur in a military context when states adopt tactics that seek to indirectly offset U.S. supremacy through denial of forward basing rights through diplomatic means, hindering American command and control capabilities by targeting satellites, and politically constraining American maneuverability through institutions such as the UN Security Council and regional organizations such as the Shanghai Cooperation Organization.

### **Why China and Russia**

China and Russia provide an opportune case to test great power reactions to hegemony, specifically the concept of soft balancing. Both are considered great powers and rank among the largest states in the world in traditional great power metrics: military spending, population, GDP, territory and influence. Neither state is ally or enemy of Washington. Explaining their behavior has been problematic because, although they are status quo powers, neither is integrated into the Western world order. Indeed, their position in the Western order could be deemed “non-fraternal”<sup>37</sup> and they are considered by some as “fellow travelers out of the periphery” of Western power.<sup>38</sup> Furthermore, the study of great powers is still important for contemporary International Relations because they are largely responsible for setting the rules of engagement in global politics.

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Raquel Freire and Roger Kanet, eds., *Key Players and Regional Dynamics in Eurasia: The Return of the 'Great Game,'* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2010).

<sup>36</sup> David A. Lake and Patrick M. Morgan, *Regional Orders: Building Security in a New World*, (University Park, Penn.: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1997).

<sup>37</sup> Mesbahi, “Russian Foreign Policy and Security in Central Asia.”

<sup>38</sup> Yong Deng, *China's Struggle for Status: The Realignment of International Relations*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 151.

China and Russia also provide a suitable test case for soft balancing because their reactions to American hegemony are disputed and could be subject to falsifiability, although such a goal is not easily achievable in a case study.<sup>39</sup> Some scholars argue that the two great powers are not balancing U.S. hegemony whereas others maintain that the strategy is one of “soft bandwagoning” or hedging rather than balancing.<sup>40</sup> A major problem, however, is that many analyses of Sino-Russian relations are theoretically or analytically incoherent. Many theorists simultaneously argue that Russia and China have joined forces to counterbalance the United States, but that they are not actually *balancing* the United States. Regional specialists also are at odds over whether the Sino-Russo partnership in Central Asia constitutes balancing or some other behavior.<sup>41</sup> For example, regional and area specialists have identified consistent behavior by China and Russia to oppose U.S. policies in Central Asia (and other regions of the world), yet deny any larger phenomenon is at work. In fact, some of their own analyses contain antipodal views on Chinese and Russian behavior.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> The term “reactions” is used in this context because it is relatively neutral. Reactions to American hegemony can be positive or negative (depending on the reference of an actor) or there could be no reaction at all. Reactions can range from hard balancing to inaction.

<sup>40</sup> Rosemary Foot, “Chinese Strategies in a U.S.-Hegemonic Global Order: Accommodating and Hedging,” *International Affairs* 82, no. 1 (2006): 77-94.

<sup>41</sup> Albrecht Rothacher, “Allying with an Axis of Evil? The Ambivalent Role of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization in Central Asia,” *Royal United Services Institute* 153, no. 1 (Feb. 2008): 68-73; Ingmar Oldberg, “The Shanghai Cooperation Organization: Powerhouse or Paper Tiger?” paper published by Swedish Defense Research Agency, June 2007.

<sup>42</sup> Two prominent examples of this are Alexander Lukin, *The Bear Watches the Dragon: Russia’s Perceptions of China and the Evolution of Russian-Chinese Relations since the 18th Century*, (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 2003) and Bobo Lo, *Axis of Convenience: Moscow, Beijing and the New Global Geopolitics*, (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 2008). Both books argue that China and Russia have cooperated to constrain or counterbalance U.S. hegemony, but that such behavior should not be considered balancing.

Rajan Menon's recent report on Sino-Russo relations, for example, is indicative of such analyses. Menon, a specialist in Russian regional policy in Central Asia, argues that viewing strategic partnership as a reaction to "the new Cold War" amounts to sophistry and rejects "the erroneous belief that that Russia and China have formed a de facto anti-American alliance."<sup>43</sup> Yet further in the report, Menon writes that Russia and China have used the SCO to oppose U.S. intervention in Central Asia and have joined forces to oppose NATO expansion. More importantly, however, is Russia and China's security predicament in a unipolar world. "The appropriate response to such a challenge in Moscow and Beijing's view is for other governments to organize a multipolar order, in which new centers of power *counterbalance* the lone superpower, or 'hegemon' [emphasis added],"<sup>44</sup>

It is generally recognized that China and Russia do not view the United States as an existential or territorial threat; that is, neither great power expects the United States to violate their territorial sovereignty absent some unforeseen circumstances (the same holds true for the United States). Yet, if territorial violation were not a concern, why then would China and Russia try to "organize a multipolar order" to "counterbalance the lone superpower"? Again, viewing norms as a system-level capability helps to explain this quandary. Because the United States already has established military supremacy, Christopher Layne argues its "quest for hegemony is driven instead by an ideational, deterritorialized conception of security divorced from the traditional metrics of great

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<sup>43</sup> Rajan Menon, "The China-Russia Relationship: What it Involves, Where it is Headed, and how it Matters for the United States," *A Century Foundation Report*, (2009): 12

<sup>44</sup> Menon, "The China-Russian Relationship," 17.

power grand strategy: the distribution of power in the international system and geography.”<sup>45</sup> In other words, the United States pursues material *and* ideological interests in Central Asia and elsewhere, although from a realist viewpoint, the former outweighs the latter. In this case, “norms or ideal interests can considerably reinforce, legitimize and help sustain a realpolitik inclination to intervene when they are accompanied by major material interests or proximity to [a] Great Power or its major allies.”<sup>46</sup>

### **Why Central Asia**

A decade into the 21<sup>st</sup> century, there are only a few regions in the world that possess the prerequisites necessary for such “soft” balancing to take place. Specifically, great power responses to unipolarity are likely to occur in regions where a hegemonic power has intervened as an “off-shore” balancer.”<sup>47</sup> It is likely in these regions that great powers outside of the Western order will challenge Washington’s diktat. One such region is Central Asia, where great powers Russia and China have formed a “strategic partnership,” which, at least publicly, is aimed at returning the international system to one of multipolarity. This partnership has manifested itself in regional institutions such as the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), which has evolved from a regional security regime into a platform to reduce American influence in Central Asia. Conceivably, the region could serve as a focal point for great power balancing in contemporary international affairs.

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<sup>45</sup> Layne, “The Unipolar Illusion Revisited,” 40.

<sup>46</sup> Benjamin Miller, “Integrated Realism and Hegemonic Military Intervention in Unipolarity” in Andrew K. Hanami, ed., *Perspectives on Structural Realism*, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003): 37.

<sup>47</sup> On the role of “off-shore balancing,” see Mearsheimer, *Tragedy*.

Similar to the era of the Great Game,<sup>48</sup> contemporary Central Asia “has become an arena where several nations hope to extend their influence, and fear the consequences of their opponents doing so.”<sup>49</sup> Central Asia, like the Middle East, is also a region where great power rivalry is extant and acute, though not necessarily hostile.<sup>50</sup> Both exogenous and endogenous factors have shaped the formation of the region. In the case of China and Russia, each has strategic, economic, energy and security interests in the region. Regional dynamics, such as the threat of transnational terrorism and the “Islamic factor” have fostered regional cooperation between China and Russia<sup>51</sup> and the presence of U.S. troops in the region has hardened it. As Menon points out, “For now, there is an intersection of interests between Russia and China because of the shared suspicion of the American military presence in the region, symbolized by U.S. access to the Kyrgyz airbase at Manas; the common concern about Islamic radicalism in Central Asia; and ‘the strategic partnership’ formed in response to a U.S.-dominated unipolar world.”<sup>52</sup> Nevertheless, elements of cooperation exist between the three major powers and latent conflict between China and Russia could undermine any alignment against the United States.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> Kuniholm, Bruce R., “9/11, the Great Game, and the Vision Thing: The Need for (And Elements of) a More Comprehensive Bush Doctrine,” *The Journal of American History* 89, no. 2, (Sep. 2002): 426-428.

<sup>49</sup> Mark N. Katz, “Emerging Patterns in the International Relations of Central Asia,” in Dawisha and Dawisha, eds., *The Making of Foreign Policy in Russia and the New States of Eurasia*.

<sup>50</sup> Rumer, *Central Asia: Views from Washington, Moscow and Beijing*; Amineh and Houweling, *Central Eurasia in Global Politics*; Roy Allison and Lena Jonson, eds., *Central Asian Security: The New International Context*, (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institute Press, 2001).

<sup>51</sup> Mesbahi, “Regional and Global Powers and the International Relations of Central Asia.”

<sup>52</sup> Rajan Menon, “Introduction: Central Asia in the Twenty First Century,” in *Central Asia: Views from Washington, Moscow and Beijing*, 12.

<sup>53</sup> Anatoly Klimenko, “Russia and China as Strategic Partners in Central Asia: A Way to Improve Regional Security,” *Far Eastern Affairs* 33, no. 2, (2005): 1-20.

Central Asia also constitutes a “regional security complex,” defined by Buzan and Wæver as “a set of units whose major processes of securitization, de-securitization, or both are so interlinked that their security problems cannot reasonably be analyzed or resolved apart from one another.”<sup>54</sup> As a regional security complex, Central Asia can be studied as an autonomous unit and serve as a test ground for soft balancing. Advocates of soft balancing argue that the means are largely political and indirect rather than military because of the disparity in power relations between great powers and the United States. Another major component of soft balancing is regionalization or the creation of regional spheres of influence. Many of these tactics have been utilized in Central Asia, where China and Russia have tried to block Western nations and organizations from the region.<sup>55</sup>

### **Organization of Study**

This study has two objectives – theoretical and analytical – and the structure of the study builds toward those goals. The introduction outlined the theoretical problems facing the concept of “balance of power” and how this lack of cohesion has made it difficult to explain the Sino-Russo partnership. To achieve these dual purposes, the study attempts to merge theory and analysis. Such an approach should make the work appealing to scholars and policy analysts.

Chapter Two discusses the theoretical tradition adopted by this study (realism) methodology and case selection. Although the work falls largely within the realist tradition, Chapter Two makes a case for theoretical eclecticism. In fact, neoclassical

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<sup>54</sup> Buzan and Wæver, *Regions as Powers*, 44.

<sup>55</sup> Alyson J.K. Bailes, “The Shanghai Cooperation Organization and Europe,” *China and Eurasian Forum Quarterly* 5, no. 3, (2007): 13-18.

realism provides a bridge to other paradigms and methodological procedures because it focuses on the interplay between domestic and external factors. Competing schools of thoughts are rarely completely incommensurable and there is plenty of fruitful ground for cross-fertilization of theories.

Chapter Three explores the concept of “balance of power” and its different variations, including soft balancing, which is the strategy this study argues has been adopted by China and Russia against the United States. It provides definitions of some key concepts, such as hegemony, capabilities and power projection, and describes what behavior could constitute balancing. Chapter Three also incorporates normative capabilities into the balance-of-power framework, which I argued above, has been neglected to the detriment of realist theory. Furthermore, it seeks to develop a systematic methodology that can test for occurrences of such a strategy. This goal is necessary to distinguish soft balancing from harder varieties and to specify the domain under which it applies. Such a framework would help analysts as well because it could eliminate much of the ambiguity surrounding the Chinese-Russian strategic partnership.

In Chapter Four, the study describes how Central Asia has evolved into a “regional security complex” (RSC) since the end of the Cold War, and more recently, following American military intervention in the region after the September 11, 2001 attacks. It maintains that the intervention of the United States in the region facilitated a “strategic partnership” between China and Russia, which used the SCO and other mechanisms as a counterbalance to U.S. influence. Chapter Three also focuses on the strategic vision Beijing, Moscow and Washington have of Central Asia. Strategic vision

involves the long-term security, military, economic and normative objectives each actor has in the region and how those regional objectives fit in their overall global vision.<sup>56</sup>

The Chinese and Russian conception of soft power and international norms is dealt with in Chapter Five. Beijing and Moscow have their own interpretation of democracy and international institutions, which compete with those of the United States, although retaining the same terminology. The struggle to define international norms can help states achieve “milieu goals” that create an international environment conducive for their preferences. China and Russia often work in concert within international and regional mechanisms to balance the United States at the normative level, which is a form of “strategic language politics.”<sup>57</sup> Such rivalry over language follows the logic of soft balancing, where rivalry among great powers takes place across the normative rather than material dimension of power. Analyzing the role norms plays in the balance of power also links the domestic to the international. The soft power China and Russia would like to promote is a reflection of their domestic culture and vision of world order. Defining the rules of the game is just as important as playing the game itself.

Chapter Six focuses on the specific soft balancing responses China and Russia have adopted to counter American intervention in Central Asia. It examines how China and Russia have used the Central Asian security complex to counterbalance the American

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<sup>56</sup> For this study, I combine the conceptions of “grand strategy” utilized by Barry Posen and Robert Art. I share the view that states pursue both security and non-security goals. However, the means to achieve these goals do not have to rely solely on military action; as Posen argues, military, political and economic means also can be used. See Robert J. Art, “A Defensible Defense: America’s Grand Strategy after the Cold War,” *International Security* 15, no. 4, (Spring 1991): 5-53 and Barry Posen, *The Sources of Military Doctrine: France, Britain, and Germany between the World Wars* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1994).

<sup>57</sup> The term “strategic language politics” is adopted from William A. Callahan ‘Future imperfect: The European Union's encounter with China (and the United States),’ *Journal of Strategic Studies* 30, no. 4, (2007): 777-807.

presence in Central Asia. It analyzes Russian and Chinese bilateral relations with one another, their multilateral relations with the smaller Central Asian republics, and their influence in regional institutions such as SCO. The chapter demonstrates how states can use regional spheres of influence as well as deploy normative measures, such as alternative conceptions of democracy and differing institutional arrangements, to offset ideas and ideologies that they find threatening.

In Chapter Seven, the study examines Chinese and Russian foreign policy and military strategy from the theoretical standpoint of soft balancing. There has been a dearth of literature the role soft balancing plays in military rivalry and this chapter seeks to fill that vacuum. The chapter explores how China and Russia have tried to use soft balancing to undercut U.S. military superiority without engaging American power directly. For example, Chinese defense doctrine in regards to the United States is predicated on the concept of “strategic denial” or “anti-access,” a goal that Russia shares. Moreover, Chinese and Russian strategists include “soft” or “normative” power as strategic capabilities in their military doctrines and foreign policy. Alternative norms, such as the concept of “sovereign democracy,” allow China and Russia to deliberately ignore human rights issues in order to achieve diplomatic advantage with respect to the United States.

The conclusion discusses the policy implications of the new Central Asian “great game” and the role regionalization could play in the future. Regional dynamics could affect the balance of power in the international system. Russia and China (and to a lesser extent Iran, India and the EU powers) each seeks a return to multipolarity and would like to establish themselves as leaders in their respective subsystems. From a geopolitical

standpoint, changing security relations in Central Asia could affect energy distribution in the region (through pipeline reconfigurations, for example), the battle against Islamic extremism and terrorism, and attempts to reduce weapons proliferation and drug trafficking. The outcome of great power rivalry in Central Asia will have ramifications not only for the region, but for the entire international system.

Lastly, a much more rigorously defined concept of soft balancing can help analysts of the contemporary international system make informed decisions about foreign and defense policy. New analytics are required to study the strategic role of language politics in international affairs and to assess the effect of soft power on the overall strategic balance of power. Failure to understand these new dynamics could lead to flawed policy. Underestimating the Sino-Russian strategic partnership, for example, could leave U.S. policymakers unprepared for the dissemination of new norms and economic development models antithetical to Western interests. On the other hand, fears of a full-blown Chinese-Russian anti-Western alliance could cause American policymakers to overreact diplomatically and militarily, and unnecessarily raise tensions between the United States and a newly-formed Eurasian bloc. Such an outcome would be a self-fulfilling prophecy, and indeed a tragedy of great power politics.

## CHAPTER II

### THEORETICAL OVERVIEW AND METHODOLOGY

#### The Role of Theory in Social Science

Despite their differences, all theories share the assumption that theory in itself is important to understanding the world; all explanations of the world are based upon some theoretical assumption, whether acknowledged or not. Indeed, outcomes cannot be explained without recourse to cause and effect. Fundamentally, theories simply attempt to demonstrate how A causes or leads to B. Explaining causation, however, does not mean that theories can predict all outcomes. Evolutionary theory, for example, explains how living organisms change over time, but evolutionary theory cannot predict what a specific organism will evolve into in the future.

This study takes the position that, although theory is extremely important, it should not straightjacket the study of social phenomena. Scholars should not be enslaved to theory; theory should serve scholarship. Theory should not be devoid of validity or devolve into mere abstractions; it should be applicable to the “real” world. Therefore, sound International Relations theory must be grounded in history, geography, politics and other social science disciplines. Theory should provide a holistic framework that helps identify and explain patterns. Similar to a roadmap, theory is a guidepost that can direct us, although we might not be able to see all the bumps along the way. A broader conception of theory does not give license to pick and choose evidence that backs up our preconceived notions about phenomena while throwing out evidence that can disconfirm our views. Rather, we should recognize that elegant theories cannot capture all the

complexity of social relations. To capture that complexity, this work strongly advocates for theoretical eclecticism. Just as astrophysicists, for example, have borrowed from quantum mechanics to improve their understanding of black holes, International Relations theorists similarly can adopt insights from other social sciences to better explain relations between states.

To that end, this chapter discusses the main theoretical paradigm to be used in this study, realism, and demonstrates how realism can be improved by incorporating ideas from other schools of thoughts.

### **Theoretical Approach**

The theoretical and methodological approach to this study is neoclassical realism. The neoclassical paradigm provides a sophisticated, overarching framework that can subsume the eclectic themes enumerated in Chapter One into a streamlined explanation of great power responses to American hegemony. Although sharing similar ontological and epistemological assumptions, neoclassical realism was developed as a response to the “hyperrealism” advanced by structural realists such as John Mearsheimer and Kenneth Waltz before him.<sup>58</sup> “Its purpose is to argue that, although the neorealist movement has added much to our understanding of international affairs through its careful examination of the impact of polarity on state behavior, it also has jettisoned the concern for unit attributes and interactions that was crucial to traditional realist theory.”<sup>59</sup>

Despite some important differences, neoclassical realism holds a set of assumptions about international politics that places it into the overall realist research

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<sup>58</sup> Schweller and Priess, “A Tale of Two Realisms.”

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid*, 2.

program. These attributes, which all realists accept to one degree or another, constitute the “hardcore” of the paradigm. They are: an acceptance of anarchy as the organizing principle of the international system; a focus on the international system as a main variable affecting state behavior; a state-centric approach; a view of international politics as competitive; an emphasis on material factors; and an assumption that states are egoistic and autonomous actors that pursue self-help.<sup>60</sup>

Yet there are areas where neoclassical realism clearly diverges from its brethren. For example, neoclassical realists depart from classical realism’s strict emphasis on the domestic origins of foreign policy and neorealism’s strict focus on systemic constraints. These extremes, as Stephen G. Brooks points out, are the result of an overreliance on particular aspects of human nature – aggression (classical) and fear (neo) – to generate hypotheses. Furthermore, the adherents of classical and neorealism both assume that states rely primarily on the use of threat of military force to secure their objectives and concentrate solely on the balance of military capabilities.<sup>61</sup> Neoclassical realists do not object to these assumptions, but rather argue that states can adopt a wide range of strategies to counter threat. Military means are a major component of statecraft, though not always the primary option.

The limitations in neorealism’s approach to international politics were highlighted after the Cold War. Changes in the bipolar system ushered in a new wave of complexity that “so overwhelmed neorealism’s ultra-parsimonious, structural formulation that it now

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<sup>60</sup> Brooks, “Dueling Realisms.”

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*

appears more as a theoretical straightjacket than a progressive research paradigm.”<sup>62</sup> The main deficiency of neorealism was its inability to account for the rules that govern the international system. These “rules” do not arise solely out of materiality, although that is a necessary component of rule formation, but from social systems as well, an aspect of international politics largely discounted by neorealists.<sup>63</sup>

Here, the neoclassical conception of hegemony shares much in common with Gramscian, neo-Marxian and liberal notions, which account for the role of domestic and international institutions to imbed norms that constrain actors.<sup>64</sup> Peter Katzenstein, a constructivist theorist, articulates this point when he writes: “The primary foundation of rights and rules is in the power and interests of the dominant groups or states in a social system.... In every social system the dominant actors assert their rights and impose rules on lesser members in order to advance their particular interests.”<sup>65</sup>

There are several benefits for using a neoclassical realist framework to analyze Russian and Chinese response to U.S. hegemony. First, the non-probabilistic nature of neoclassical realism opens it to productive dialogue with non-realist paradigms.<sup>66</sup> “Domestic politics and ideas are fair game for realism, and neoclassical realists have taken up this mantle.”<sup>67</sup> The challenge, however, is “to do so while remaining consistent

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<sup>62</sup> Schweller and Priess, 9.

<sup>63</sup> Folker, “Realism and the Constructivist Challenge.”

<sup>64</sup> Peter J. Katzenstein, ed., *The Culture of National Security: Norms and Identity in World Politics*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), see especially Chapters 1 and 2.

<sup>65</sup> Schweller and Priess, 10.

<sup>66</sup> Brooks, “Dueling Realisms.”

<sup>67</sup> Rathburn, “A Rose by any other Name,” 301.

with what scholars from both approaches consider their core assumptions.”<sup>68</sup> The problem of incommensurability is not as difficult to overcome as might seem at first glance because there is a great deal of consonance and overlap among paradigms.

According to Mohiaddin Mesbahi, many of the disputes among paradigmatic approaches are over terminology rather than substance:

One can, for example, defend realism, especially the traditional version, for recognizing the ambiguity of the notion of interest and understanding the role of the mythology of power and prestige, not just material interest, as a driving force; or the Kantian variety of liberalism, which both assumes a certain connection between typology/identity and behavior and the composite nature of the actor; or Gramscian Marxism (to which critical geopolitics is indebted) for recognizing that the role of ideas is key to hegemony and self-assertion and resistance; or constructivism, especially the rule-oriented version that recognizes the co-constitutionality of agent and structure. A more nuanced understanding of competing paradigms reveals fewer distinctions and more complementarity and mutual enrichment and borrowing.<sup>69</sup>

Neoclassical realism is also similar to some neoliberal and neo-Marxist approaches because it focuses on the interplay between systemic and domestic factors without abandoning neorealism’s emphasis on structural constraints. Gideon Rose describes how scholars studying the interaction between exogenous and endogenous forces can remain realist in nature: “[Neoclassical realism] explicitly incorporates both external and internal variables, updating and systematizing certain insights drawn from classical realist thought. Its adherents argue that the scope and ambition of a country’s foreign policy is driven first and foremost by its place in the international system and specifically by its relative material power capabilities. This is why they are realist. They argue further, however, that the impact of such power capabilities on foreign policy is

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<sup>68</sup> Folker, “Realism and the Constructivist Challenge,” 74.

<sup>69</sup> Mesbahi “Central Eurasia in Global Politics,” 179.

indirect and complex, because systemic pressures must be translated through intervening variables at the unit level. This is why they are neoclassical.”<sup>70</sup>

Furthermore, neoclassical realism opens the “black box” of the state for investigation. This is an important rectification for those who view the reification of the state as problematic. Neoclassical and classical realists do not deny that domestic interests groups advance their foreign policy goals by pressuring the state to formulate and implement policies favored by particular interests. Indeed, those who capture the helm of state are in position to decide the state’s interests. However, as realists argue, once interests are articulated, states will pursue them the best way they can. Interests accrete from below and then are carried out above by those autonomous “black boxes.” Nonetheless, how states pursue interests – and whether they are obtained – is greatly determined by their position within the international system. Although powerful domestic lobbies can push their objectives on the state as they please, states do not always have the willingness or capacity to carry them out.

For neoclassical realists, the state is more holistic than for advocates of structural realism, who generally ignore domestic characteristics or utilize endogenous factors when they see fit. Steve E. Lobell, Norrin M. Ripsman, Jeffrey Taliaferro describe the more complex conception of the state as “top-down.”

Neoclassical realism acknowledges there is no universally accepted definition of the state. Nonetheless, a starting point is Weber’s classical definition of the state as a human community that claims the monopoly on the legitimate use of force. Neoclassical realism presents a ‘top-down’ conception of the state, which means systemic forces ultimately drive external behavior. The executive ... is best perceived equipped to perceive systemic constraints and deduce the national interest. Nonetheless, while the executive is potentially autonomous from society,

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<sup>70</sup> Rose, “Neoclassical Realism and Theories of Foreign Policy,” 146.

in many contexts political arrangements frequently compel it to bargain with domestic actors (such as the legislature, political parties, economic sectors, classes or the public as a whole) in order to enact policy or extract resources to implement policy choices.<sup>71</sup>

The interplay between the state and society is invariably complex and the case of China and Russia highlights such indeterminacy. The domestic bargaining among sectors (bureaucracies, lobbies, parties, etc.) in China, Russia and the United States, however, is beyond the scope of this study. Nevertheless, other domestic factors are pertinent to the balance of power in Central Asia. Many analysts, for example, postulate that the latent conflicts between Moscow and Beijing will eventually undermine their “strategic partnership” and any attempts to counterbalance U.S. hegemony. The conflicts, of course, are the result of tension between domestic and foreign interests. Russia, for instance, is concerned about the rapid population growth of ethnic Han along its Siberian border with China and the rise of China as an economic and military powerhouse.<sup>72</sup> China is increasingly concerned about potential overreliance on Russia for obtaining energy and weapons. Nationalists within both countries are wary of the other. Yet overshadowing all of these concerns is the specter of U.S. hegemony.

The arms trade between China and Russia illuminates the necessity of analyzing both endogenous and exogenous factors to explain their relationship. From a neorealist standpoint, Russia should be wary of feeding the beast by transferring advanced weapons and platforms to the Chinese dragon. Although the domestic military industrial complex

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<sup>71</sup> Steve E. Lobell, Norrin M. Ripsman, Jeffrey Taliaferro, eds., *Neoclassical Realism, the State and Foreign Policy*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 25.

<sup>72</sup> Elizabeth Wishnick, “Russia and China: Brothers Again?” *Asian Survey* 41, no. 5, (Se-Oct. 2001): 797-821.

factors heavily into Russia's decision to sell weaponry to China, Robert H. Donaldson and John A. Donaldson find that identity plays an important role, too.<sup>73</sup> They write: "Russia's status and identity as a superpower remain important to its conception of its self-importance and role in the international arena. For a significant segment of the foreign policy and security elite in Russia, fear of U.S. domination is mixed with wounded pride and resentment ... [and] China's identity as Asia's most important and powerful country clashes with the goals and interests of the United States."<sup>74</sup>

Neoclassical realism argues that domestic factors, ideas and identities do make a difference, but are shaped by significant systemic pressures. The case of arms transfers above is indicative of this as well. Russian and Chinese identities are fashioned largely by their global standing in relation to the United States, and their arms trade is a result of their relative weakness in regards to U.S. capabilities. Another example is both states' overall grand strategies. China's concept of "peaceful rise," for instance, can be viewed as a strategy to avert the disastrous outcomes of Japanese and German attempts at hegemony during World War II. Yet, this trajectory is still dependent on outside factors, including American opposition to Chinese desires to reunify with Taiwan.<sup>75</sup> In the case of Russia, alliance patterns and regional cooperation, too, result from identity shaped by external relations. In its relations with the Muslim world, Russia, like the West, fears the rise of Islamic radicalism. Yet tensions between Islam and the West might present Russia

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<sup>73</sup> Robert H. Donaldson and John A. Donaldson, "The Arms Trade in Russian-Chinese Relations: Identity, Domestic Politics, and Geopolitical Positioning," *International Studies Quarterly* 47, no.4, (2003): 709-732.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid*, 727.

<sup>75</sup> Akihiko Tanaka, Global and Regional Geo-strategic Implications of China's Emergence," *Asian Economic Policy Review* 1, no. 1, (2006): 180-196.

with an historical opportunity to make overtures with Muslim states in Central Asia and the Middle East, despite the potential for a clash of civilizations. Both these examples demonstrate the complex interplay between exogenous and endogenous factors. Realists give greater weight to external constraints, but neither variable can be quantified by any reliable measure, a problem that is addressed in the proceeding sections.

### **Selection of Case Study**

The case to be evaluated is contemporary and constantly evolving. However, the focus will be on Russian and Chinese reactions to American intervention in the region since the September 11, 2001 attacks, which resulted in the U.S.-led war against al Qaeda forces and the Taliban regime in Afghanistan. Using 9/11 as a benchmark narrows the scope of the case to a period of about a decade, although the United States had made initial and limited forays into the region before that point. The region will be defined as the five former Soviet Republics of Central Asia (Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan), China and Russia. The Shanghai Cooperation Organization is a linchpin that organizes these states into a regional security complex (save the obscurantist and isolationist Turkmenistan, which is a non-member). Other important extra-regional actors include SCO observers Iran, India, Mongolia and Pakistan; and Afghanistan, the European Union and Turkey, however the policies and interests of these states are addressed only insofar they relate directly to the Chinese-Russian strategic partnership. Finally, although this study is of a contemporary case, a brief historical overview of the region's dynamics will be provided in the fourth chapter.

In terms of scope, this analysis is restricted to the strategic reactions of China and Russia to the United States and does not include in depth analysis of the five smaller

states of former Soviet Central Asia. These states have attempted to utilize the SCO and their bilateral relations with China, Russia and the United States to leverage concessions from each other and the great powers, but as small states, their behavior is peripheral to a study focusing on the strategies of great powers. The interests of the smaller states, therefore, will be analyzed largely in the context of their interaction with the three major powers, for example, how democratization, terrorism or energy security in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan affects the overall balance of power in the region. The internal dynamics of the smaller states is beyond the scope of this study.

### **Methodology**

This case study should be viewed as a heuristic project that helps to facilitate theory construction, not necessarily the demonstrable final say on how states behave under unipolarity. Furthermore, it adopts an eclectic approach to theorizing through the utilization of insights from other paradigms to enhance the efficacy of realist theory. There are strengths and weaknesses to utilizing heuristic case studies and eclectic theoretical approaches, but overall, this study maintains that such a research program advances our knowledge of the world, although with some important caveats.

Heuristic case studies, as Alexander George explains, are “used as a means of stimulating the imagination in order to discern important *new* [emphasis in original] general problems, identify possible theoretical solutions, and formulate potentially generalizable relations that were not previously apparent. In other words, the case study is regarded as an opportunity to learn more about the complexity of the problem studied, to develop further the existing framework, and to refine and elaborate the initially

available theory employed by the investigator in order to provide an explanation of the particular case examined.”<sup>76</sup>

A single case study also can be “useful for evaluating causal explanations if it is part of a research program [and] if there are other single observations, perhaps gathered by other researchers, against which it can be compared, it is no longer a single observation.”<sup>77</sup> In the case of the Chinese-Russian relationship, there is a bountiful literature, much of it at odds, on their responses to American unipolarity, in general, and U.S. intervention into Central Asia, in specific. There is also emerging research on the role of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization in the international system. Much of the literature on this burgeoning institution, however, has come from Chinese, Russian and Central Asian area specialists, who have not systematically analyzed the SCO through the contextual framework of IR theory.<sup>78</sup> This study maintains that viewing the SCO through the lens of IR theory could help reconcile some of the disparate and diverging views of Chinese and Russian reactions and the role of the SCO, which range from highly alarmist to extremely skeptical. Addressing the void of SCO analysis in IR scholarship also could provide new theoretical and analytical tools to better understand the contemporary international system.

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<sup>76</sup> Alexander George, “Case Studies and Theory Development: The Method of Structured, Focused Comparison,” in Paul Gordon Lauren, ed., *Diplomacy*, (New York: Free Press, 1979), 51-52.

<sup>77</sup> Gary King, Robert O. Keohane and Sidney Verba, *Designing Social Inquiry: Scientific Inference in Qualitative Research*, (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1994), 211.

<sup>78</sup> Exceptions are Sangtu Ko, “Strategic Partnership in a Unipolar System,” *Issues and Studies* 42, no. 3, (Sept. 2006): 203-225 and Kathleen A. Collins and William C. Wohlforth, “Central Asia: Defying the ‘Great Game’ Expectations,” in *Strategic Asia 2003-04: Fragility and Crisis*, eds. Richard Ellings and Aaron L. Friedberg, (Seattle: National Bureau of Asian Research, 2003).

Furthermore, the study contributes to the growing debate about soft balancing. The concept is still relatively in its early stages and there is much dispute about its efficacy in explaining state behavior. Proponents of soft balancing argue there is a need to flesh out its methodological concepts, provide empirical evidence of its efficacy, and theoretically incorporate it into the overall balance of power of schema. This study attempts to do all.

### **Toward Theoretical Eclecticism**

Although this study mainly adheres to a neoclassical framework, it explicitly incorporates insights from other theoretical paradigms. Peter Katzenstein, a major proponent of theoretical eclecticism, argues that although there are risks to synthesizing paradigms, the potential payoffs are worth it.<sup>79</sup> “The recognition of the existence of, and possible complementarities between, multiple research traditions holds forth the prospect of translating the analytic languages and theoretical insights of each in the process of improving transparadigmatic knowledge on specific substantive problems.”<sup>80</sup>

Despite some scholars’ misgivings about integrating paradigms,<sup>81</sup> cross-fertilization across different approaches can lead to productive new theory. Building a broader conception of hegemony, for instance, can be achieved while maintaining parsimony by synthesizing compatible elements into a new whole. On issues of ontology and epistemology, liberalism, historical structuralism (particularly Marxism) and certain

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<sup>79</sup>J.J. Suh, Peter Katzenstein and Allen Carlson, eds., *Rethinking Security in East Asia: Identity, Power and Efficiency*, (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2004).

<sup>80</sup> Peter J. Katzenstein and Rudra Sil, “Rethinking Asian Security: A Case for Analytical Eclecticism,” in *Rethinking Security in East Asia*, 4.

<sup>81</sup> This is a problem specifically if new insights are subsumed within a theory that contradicts the underlying assumptions of theory; see Legro and Moravcsik, “Is Anybody Still a Realist?”

versions of constructivism do not diverge much from realism, despite some deep methodological differences.<sup>82</sup> Ontologically, for historical structuralists, liberals and realists, material forces are the main cause of state behavior.<sup>83</sup> Some constructivists also view the structure of the international system as a constraint on actor behavior; although for constructivists these structures include international norms.<sup>84</sup> Nevertheless, constructivists should not hold a monopoly on norms. Realists should – must – also address the role norms play in the system.

On the role of international norms, however, an assessment of the contemporary international scene demonstrates that the collective ideas of the major Western powers have been a source of concern for China, Russia and other middle powers such as Iran and Venezuela.<sup>85</sup> “What is clear is that states have often differed in their reactions to international rules – some accepting them, others no. Such attitudes can enhance or undermine overall order.”<sup>86</sup> In fact, the concept of soft balancing was developed to explain how disaffected weaker states would respond to a hegemonic order they deemed

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<sup>82</sup> For example, although both realists and liberals view the international system as anarchic, they differ over how much cooperation can overcome it. Realists and historical materialists generally focus on relative gains and the distribution of wealth within a system, yet they disagree on whether the system’s main actors are states or classes. Marxists, like realists, consider “the purpose of economic and political activity to be the redistribution of wealth and power.” All three traditions generally privilege material forces as the driver for social and cultural change; see Theodore H. Cohn, *Global Political Economy Theory and Practice*, (New York: Longman, 2002), 121 For an extended comparison of the three major paradigms, see Michael Doyle, *Ways of War and Peace*, (Norton, New York, 1997) and Cohn, *Global Political Economy*, especially 76-83 and 135-138.

<sup>83</sup> Like Marxism, there are structural and historicist renderings of realism; see R.B.J. Walker, “Realism, Change and International Political Theory,” *International Studies Quarterly* 31, no. 1, (1987): 68

<sup>84</sup> Alexander Wendt, *Social Theory of International Relations*, (Cambridge University Press, New York, 1999).

<sup>85</sup> Michael Dodson and Manojchhr Dorraj, “Populism and Foreign Policy in Venezuela and Iran,” *The Whitehead Journal of Diplomacy and International Relations* 9, no. 1, (Winter-Spring 2008): 71-87.

<sup>86</sup> Jeffrey W. Legro, *Rethinking World Order: Great Power Strategies and International Order*, (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2005), 2.

unsatisfactory. In sum, neoclassical realism offers a viable framework for bridging the philosophical gap between competing paradigms and weaving their compatible insights into a synthetic whole.

### **Scope and Limitations**

International Relations theory in general, and realist theory in particular, is an ongoing process. My work is designed to be a contribution to the larger body of realist thought by offering an explanation of the behavior of great powers under unipolarity.<sup>87</sup> In fact, it could be considered what Imre Lakatos referred to as a “progressive research program.”<sup>88</sup> Nevertheless, the study does not claim to offer a deterministic theory of international politics, but rather a guide to how states are likely to respond to a unipolar world structure. Although social science theory attempts to predict events, it cannot do so in terms of numerical probabilities as the natural sciences, but only in large-scale trends and generalizations.<sup>89</sup> For the purposes of this study, I share the view that social sciences must accommodate indeterminacy, irregularity and unpredictability.<sup>90</sup> Although we may strive for prediction, we may have to settle for less accurate forecasts. As John Lewis

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<sup>87</sup> Stephen Walt makes this point: “A refinement that limits the domain of a theory (i.e., by showing that it only operates under circumscribed conditions) is still an improvement over the prior but incorrect claim that the theory possessed a broader explanatory range.” See Stephen Walt, “The Progressive Power of Realism,” *The American Political Science Review* 9, no. 4 (Dec. 1997): 931-935.

<sup>88</sup> Imre Lakatos and Alan Musgrave, eds., *Criticism and the Growth of Knowledge*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970).

<sup>89</sup> Kenneth Waltz, “The Origins of War in Neorealist Theory,” *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 18, no. 4, (Spring 1988): 615-628.

<sup>90</sup> John Lewis Gaddis, “International Relations Theory and the End of the Cold War,” *International Security* 17, no. 3, (Winter 1992-93): 5-58.

Gaddis writes, forecasts can be neither deterministic nor conditional; they are probabilistic statements (If A, then probably B).<sup>91</sup>

The drawback of such an approach is the oft-cited problem of indeterminacy, which is faced by many researchers.<sup>92</sup> Suffice it to say, the social sciences, including International Relations, are currently ill-equipped to render precise predictions about social phenomena and such clairvoyance is highly unlikely: “There are so many complexities and ambiguities in the foreign policy process that many influences are likely to be found in any explanation of any particular policy shift.”<sup>93</sup>

The same largely holds true for Chinese and Russian responses to U.S. hegemony. Different scholars have offered different causal explanations for Russian and Chinese reactions to U.S. intervention in Central Asia, even though they generally concur on the outcomes. The objective of this research project is to reconcile some of the disparate explanations through a neoclassical realist conceptual framework. If such a framework can identify a consistent pattern of behavior by China and Russia to undermine, counterbalance or counteract U.S. ambitions in the region, then there might be a larger phenomenon at work. The goal, then, is to determine which factors, if any, are the major causes of Chinese and Russian behavior. Realists argue that the causes generally lie

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<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.* 6, especially footnote 2.

<sup>92</sup> For a good historical overview, see Paul Diesing, *How Does Social Science Work? Reflections on Practice*, (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1991). For the problem of indeterminacy as specifically related to International Relations theory, see Gaddis, “International Relations Theory and the End of the Cold War” and Robert Jervis, “The Future of World Politics: Will it Resemble the Past?” *International Security* 16, no. 3, (Winter 1991-93): 39-73; as it pertains to U.S. Chinese relations, see Aaron L. Friedberg, “The Future of U.S.-Chinese Relations: Is Conflict Inevitable,” *International Security* 30, no. 2, (Fall 2005): 7-45.

<sup>93</sup> Ronald W. Cox, *Power and Profits: U.S. Policy in Central America*, (Lexington, Ky.: University of Kentucky Press, 1994), 19.

within the system – for example, the intervention of a hegemonic power into a region – although they recognize outcomes are shaped by other mitigating factors. Studies of this sort, which offer large-scale generalizations, make falsification difficult, though not impossible. However, I concur with Paul Diesing that “disconfirmation is very useful, but it is a limited, peripheral process that leads to modification rather than total rejection of a theory.”<sup>94</sup> Furthermore, if adaptations to a theory can explain more than its predecessors, then it should be viewed as progressive.<sup>95</sup> This is what Thomas Kuhn meant when he wrote in *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* that: “to be accepted as a paradigm, a theory must seem better than its competitors, but it need not, and in fact never does, explain all the facts which it can be confronted.”<sup>96</sup>

In the author’s view, this study does offer a much more comprehensive and holistic account of great power behavior under unipolarity than recent works. There are few analyses that systematically examine a case of purported soft balancing at the length attempted in this study. Few works of Chinese-Russian relations adopt any explicit theoretical orientation; and those that do give only cursory treatment in the length of a chapter or less. Furthermore, there is a dearth of the role of norms and soft balancing across the military dimension (Chapter Six) of state relations. The transformation of military doctrine to include norms is beyond the scope of this study. However, it does begin the conversation on how normative power can affect, and change, hard power and the role soft power could play in the future of great power relations.

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<sup>94</sup> Diesing, *How Does Social Science Work*, 318.

<sup>95</sup> Walt, “The Progressive Power of Realism.”

<sup>96</sup> Thomas Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, (Chicago University Press, 1962), 17-18.

## CHAPTER III

### SOFT BALANCING AS A HARD CONCEPT

“America acts like a pachyderm, rather than a T. rex. This beast inspires discomfort, not existential angst.”

– Josef Joffe<sup>97</sup>

The “balance of power” is an essentially contested concept because there is no consensus for its meaning. Yet despite the “elasticity” of the notion, the fundamental or basic objective that underlies most balance of power abstractions involves what Dana Zinnes describes as a “a particular distribution of power among the states of that system such that no single state and no existing alliance has an ‘overwhelming’ or ‘preponderant’ amount of power.”<sup>98</sup> Under Zinnes definition of balance of power, the concept could be both strategy and/or outcome. Therefore, it is necessary to distinguish between “balancing” and “balance of power” for analytical purposes. In his theoretical model, T.V. Paul offers a clear distinction between the two, which will be followed in this study: “In tune with the commonly understood meanings of the terms, *balancing* is viewed as a state strategy or foreign policy behavior while *balance of power* are regarded as outcomes at the systemic or subsystemic levels, that is, as conditions of power equilibrium among key states [emphasis in the original].”<sup>99</sup>

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<sup>97</sup> Josef Joffe, “Defying History and Theory: The United States as the ‘Last Remaining Superpower’”, in G. John Ikenberry, ed., *America Unrivaled: The Future of Balance of Power*, (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2002), 178.

<sup>98</sup> Dana Zinnes, “An Analytical Study of the Balance of Power Theories,” *Journal of Peace Research* 3, no. 4, (1967): 270-85 as quoted in Michael Sheehan, *The Balance of Power: History and Theory*, (New York: Routledge, 1996), 4.

<sup>99</sup> T.V. Paul, “Introduction,” *Balance of Power: Theory and Practice in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, eds. T.V. Paul, James J. Wirtz and Michel Fortmann, (Stanford University Press, 2004), 2.

To be sure, balancing is one of a range of possible strategies that can be adopted by states to pursue their interests as well as a possible outcome of state behavior, whether intentional or not. However, a strategic “balance” (or “equilibrium”) is not fated to occur, as some neorealists are wont to argue, and states do not automatically balance against rising power despite other factors, such as domestic politics, elite perceptions, aggressive intentions or geography. History is replete with cases of states and polities that failed to balance, underbalanced, remained neutral or chose other strategies such as bandwagoning or buck-passing.<sup>100</sup> History also shows us “that threat is not a necessary derivative of power and that the emergence of powerful states has not always been accompanied by the rise of a challenger or counter coalition. Consider the cases of nineteenth-century Britain, which controlled three-quarters of the world and yet remained in ‘splendid isolation,’ as well as the emergence of the United States as a Great Power before World War I without the formation of a balancing alliance.”<sup>101</sup> In other words, balance of power is not a tautology, rather a probable, though not destined, outcome.

Consistent with the theme of this research project, this chapter utilizes the neoclassical realist framework and draws on the theoretical eclecticism outlined in Chapter Two to analyze and locate soft balancing within the balance of power framework. First, it provides a review of classical and structural balance of power theories to demonstrate that different systemic configurations generate different balance of power logics: alliances are more suitable to multipolar systems; internal arms buildups are more effective in bipolar systems; and soft balancing is likely the best balancing

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<sup>100</sup> Stuart Kaufman, Richard Little and William C. Wohlforth, eds., *The Balance of Power in World History*, (Palgrave MacMillan, New York, 2007).

<sup>101</sup> Schweller and Priess, “A Tale of Two Realisms: Expanding the Institutions Debate,” 17.

strategy in a unipolar system. Such an analysis can help locate state behavior along a continuum of strategies rather than just view balancing as an either-all proposition. Secondly, it attempts to identify the relevant exogenous and endogenous factors that affect balancing behavior and outcomes under unipolarity. External constraints might induce certain balancing strategies, but whether states decide to balance or not is located in the domestic level of politics. Finally, this section examines more specifically the literature on soft balancing and attempts to develop a methodology that can test for occurrences of such behavior. Developing a methodology is necessary to distinguish soft from hard balancing and specify the domain under which soft balancing applies. Developing a third balance-of-power logic provides sound theoretical footing for proponents of soft balancing who argue it is a distinct form of state behavior adopted by countries such as Russia and China to counter U.S. hegemonic ambitions.

### **Balance of Power: An Overview**

Balance of power is one of the four foundations of realist theory, whether in its classical or structural variants.<sup>102</sup> Classical realists such as Hans Morgenthau viewed balance of power as a mechanism to ensure the survival of the system through equilibrium of the units. “Consequently, it is the purpose of all such equilibrium to maintain the stability of the system without destroying the multiplicity of the elements composing it.”<sup>103</sup> Similar to Morgenthau was Hedley Bull’s version of balance of power. For Bull, balance of power logic requires only two neighboring states in anarchy seeking to survive (what he called a “simple” or bipolar balance of power system as opposed to

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<sup>102</sup> The other three pillars are anarchy as the operating principle of the international system, states as the units of the system and the distribution of capabilities among the units as the main variable for change.

<sup>103</sup> Morgenthau, *Politics Among Nations*, 169.

“complex” or multipolar balance of power system). Unlike the mechanistic view of structural realists, Bull’s logic doesn’t necessarily presume that states are unconsciously guided to balance due to the anarchic structure of the international system – balancing can be either “fortuitous” or “contrived.”<sup>104</sup> For Bull, the existence of general balance of power serves to prevent the system from being transformed by conquest into a universal empire; the existence of a local balance of power protects the independence of states from absorption by a neighboring predominant power; and both the general and local balance of power provide the conditions on which other institutions of international order depend to exist.<sup>105</sup> Kissinger buttresses this point when he argues that balances of power often come about *de facto* based on systemic pressures, but also can be the conscious policy of statesmen, who must “tend” or manage balances whether balancing is conscious or not.<sup>106</sup>

Neorealists, such as Kenneth Waltz, approached theory differently than their predecessors, but their assumptions generally corresponded to those of Morgenthau and Bull.<sup>107</sup> Under Waltzian theory, for balance-of-power politics to prevail, only two requirements must be met: the international order must be anarchic and states wish to

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<sup>104</sup> “A fortuitous balance of power is one that arises without any conscious effort on the part of either of the parties to bring it into being,” Bull writes, whereas “a contrived balance is one that owes its existence at least partially to the conscious policies of one or both sides.” Hedley Bull, *The Anarchical Society*, (Columbia University Press, New York, 2002), 100

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid*, 102.

<sup>106</sup> Henry Kissinger, *Diplomacy*, (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1994).

<sup>107</sup> Waltz’s greatest departure from classical realists such as Morgenthau and Bull was his view that power-seeking by states was not rooted in human nature, but rather in the structure of the international system (anarchy) itself. Structural realists tend to place the cause of war and peace on exogenous factors, whereas classical realists focus on endogenous variables, such as the limitations domestic actors face under anarchy. See Kenneth Waltz, “The Origins of War in Neorealist Theory,” *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 18, no. 4, (Spring 1988): 615-628. For a major treatment of the difference between structural and classical realism see Michael Doyle, *Ways of War and Peace*, (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1997). Also see Robert Jackson, *Classical and Modern Thought on International Relations*, (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2005), 32.

survive.<sup>108</sup> In a self-help system, when states face a threatening power, they will seek to form a balancing alliance whether consciously or not. Waltz's theory simply explains the interests and motives of states, rather than describing what they will actually do, and therefore offers little utility as an analytic.

Other theorists have attempted to rectify Waltz's sparse balance-of-power theory by adding variables or revising assumptions of state behavior under anarchy to better predict state behavior. Offensive realists such as John Mearsheimer, for example, argue that great powers don't simply seek to survive in an anarchic system, but attempt to dominate it because "survival mandates aggressive behavior" and dominance is the best way to ensure survival.<sup>109</sup> On the other hand, defensive realists such as Jack Snyder maintain that great powers are more secure when they refrain from power maximization and seek to defend the status quo.<sup>110</sup>

Stephen Walt formulated a "balance of threat" theory by adding "intent" to the traditional metrics of economic strength, military power and population size in determining balancing outcomes. "States that are viewed aggressively are likely to provoke others to balance against them," Walt suggests.<sup>111</sup> Walt's addition of "intent" resolves some of the existing anomalies in balance of power theory by explaining why great powers did not initially balance against the United States after the end of the Cold

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<sup>108</sup> Waltz, *Theory of International Politics*.

<sup>109</sup> Mearsheimer, *Tragedy of Great Power Politics*, 21.

<sup>110</sup> Jack L. Snyder, *Myths of Empire: Domestic Politics and International Ambition*. (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1991).

<sup>111</sup> Stephen M. Walt, *Origins of Alliance*, (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1987), 25.

War.<sup>112</sup> In the specific case of the United States, Walt writes: “The anomaly of states failing to balance U.S. power vanishes when we focus not on power but on *threats* [emphasis in original]. Although the United States is enormously powerful relative to other states, it has not been perceived as a major threat by most other powers.”<sup>113</sup>

Other factors also played a role in limiting balancing against the United States; its geographic isolation relative to other great powers has made it difficult for the U.S. to engage in territorial expansionism; and because other great powers lie in close proximity to each other rather than the United States, they tend to worry more about one another than American power.<sup>114</sup> However, as offensive realism predicts, the wake of the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks induced the United States to pursue a more unilateral foreign policy and assertively intervene in regions once considered off limits during the Cold War.<sup>115</sup>

In the abstract, balance of power simply predicts that states will seek to arrest the rise of a threatening power (either because of its capabilities, intents or a combination of both), at the regional or global level. Both classical realism and neorealism generally agree on this ontological premise, but on different epistemological grounds.<sup>116</sup> Although balance of power as a system is a foundation of realism, the two traditions do diverge

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<sup>112</sup> Walt, “The Progressive Power of Realism.”

<sup>113</sup> Walt, *Taming American Power*, 124.

<sup>114</sup> The United States has expanded its territory throughout history, but primarily at the expense of smaller and weaker states or indigenous populations.

<sup>115</sup> Robert Jervis, “Understanding the Bush Doctrine,” *Political Science Quarterly* 118, no. 3 (2003): 365-88. Also see Brian C. Schmidt and Michael C. Williams, “The Bush Doctrine and the Iraq War: Neoconservatives Versus Realists,” *Security Studies* 17, no. 2, (2008): 191-220.

<sup>116</sup> Sheehan, *The Balance of Power: Theory and History*.

from there, with classical realism focusing more on agency (foreign policy/strategy) and neorealists more on structure (system-wide distribution of capabilities/outcomes).<sup>117</sup> The divergence between theory and practice should not be viewed as “degenerative,” but rather complementary. Indeed, neoclassical realism has provided a bridge between the two realist strands. Brian Rathburn demonstrates that a convergence of neorealism and classical realism can better explain balance of power both as a system (theory) and strategy (practice):

Neoclassical realism in particular can be defended as having a coherent logic that incorporates ideas and domestic politics in the way we would expect structural realism to do so. This is the natural outgrowth of neorealism, serving it in two ways. First, ideas and domestic political variables are significant factors in a state’s ability to harness latent material power. ... Second, on questions other than power, it is not that ideas and domestic politics do not play a role in structural realism, only that the system is biased against such influences, so that any effect is generally circumscribed to negatively affecting foreign policy. Neoclassical realism explains when states cannot properly adapt to systemic constraints and points out the serious consequences that result.<sup>118</sup>

Given the almost doctrinal acceptance of balance of power theory among both classical and neorealists, the absence of hard balancing against the United States poses an anomaly. The existence of this anomaly can result in either one of two outcomes – the wholesale abandonment of the theory or the reformulation of theory to account for discrepancies. Following in the rich tradition of balance of power scholars, this study

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<sup>117</sup> Schweller and Priess, “A Tale of Two Realisms: Expanding the Institutions,” 7. Stephen G. Brooks views the two main branches as divergent, although reconciling the two could lead to progress by focusing on probabilities rather than the strict determinism and inflexibility of neorealism; see “Dueling Realisms,” 445-477.

<sup>118</sup> Rathbun, “A Rose by Any Other Name,” 296.

attempts the latter by adopting a neoclassical realist framework.<sup>119</sup> Before this task can be undertaken, this chapter reviews the limitations of balance of power theory by addressing several factors that might cause the balance of power to break down.

### **A Disappearing (Balancing) Act**

Critics of soft balancing theories have cited a number of reasons why American hegemony has gone unbalanced. William Wohlforth and Stephen Brooks argue that American predominance in every critical dimension of power explains why no challengers have arisen.<sup>120</sup> Since no potential rival can match the United States in material capabilities, there is no need to try, and bandwagoning is the preferred strategy by other great powers in a unipolar system. And despite America's war-making and aggressive unilateral behavior abroad since the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks, Keir A. Lieber and Gerard Alexander maintain that U.S. power is not threatening enough to provoke a countervailing coalition. "The major powers are not balancing against the United States because of the nature of U.S. grand strategy in the post-September 11 world. There is no doubt that this strategy is ambitious, assertive, and backed by tremendous offensive military capability. But it is also highly selective and not broadly threatening."<sup>121</sup>

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<sup>119</sup> As Schweller and Priess point out, "Although neorealism has been of immense value, the complexity of contemporary world politics requires a systems theory that can incorporate the characteristics of states, their interactions, and a more comprehensive view of system structure than is captured by the concept of polarity. This need for a more elaborate theory does not mean, as many liberals and constructivists have suggested, that realist theory is dead and should be buried. ... To the contrary, realism contains all the elements necessary to construct a theory of world politics applicable to the twenty-first century," in "A Tale of Two Realisms," 24.

<sup>120</sup> Stephen G. Brooks and William C. Wohlforth, "American Primacy in Perspective," *Foreign Affairs* 81, no. 4, (July-Aug. 2002): 20-33.

<sup>121</sup> Lieber and Gerard, "Waiting for Balancing: Why the World is not Pushing Back," 133.

Great powers also might find American hegemony less dangerous because it is a maritime rather than a continental power. According to Jack S. Levy and William R. Thompson, great-power balancing coalitions are more likely to form against states amassing high concentrations of military power in autonomous continental systems rather than states amassing high concentrations of naval (and air) power and wealth in the global maritime system.<sup>122</sup> Dominant continental powers raise armies, which are more likely to seek territorial empires and threaten the borders of other states. Dominant maritime powers raise navies to protect and expand trade.<sup>123</sup> Because the strategies and behaviors of great sea powers differ from their continental counterparts, their interaction with other great powers is dissimilar. Levy and Thompson argue that, although maritime powers are unlikely to educe coalitional balancing, they could face soft balancing coalitions and internal balancing. “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.”<sup>124</sup>

On the other hand, China and Russia might prefer to bandwagon with U.S. hegemony rather than balance it. Rosemary Foot makes the case that China’s strategy is not soft-balancing, but rather “soft bandwagoning.” Under this strategy, China tries to make its interests coincide with those of Washington. “In this sense, while Beijing’s strategy can be viewed as accommodation with the current U.S.-dominated global order,

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<sup>122</sup> Levy and Thompson, “Balancing on Land and at Sea.”

<sup>123</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>124</sup> *Ibid.*, 36.

it also contains an important ‘hedging’ element, or insurance policy, through which China seeks to secure its future.”<sup>125</sup> Foot states flatly that: “China is neither part of, nor determinedly seeking, to build anti-hegemonic coalitions. Consequently, other emerging states such as Brazil, India and Russia should not expect too much in the way of sustained cooperation from China on this front, assuming they are interested in forming such coalitions.”<sup>126</sup>

Systemic, though not necessarily structural, changes also could affect the balance of power. Even discounting the use of nuclear weapons, war among developed nations would be so devastating that to undertake it would be irrational and thus militates against costly balancing.<sup>127</sup> Economic interdependence, too, has made war among great powers largely obsolete, argues Richard Rosecrance.<sup>128</sup> Democratic peace theorists, such as Bruce Russett and John R. O’Neal, maintain that the liberal nature of the United States makes it less threatening to other great powers, especially if they are democratic as well.<sup>129</sup> Liberals point to the role that international institutions play in tamping down the

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<sup>125</sup> Foot, “Chinese Strategies in a U.S.-Hegemonic Global Order,” 88.

<sup>126</sup> Foot, “Chinese Strategies in a U.S.-Hegemonic Global Order,” 94. Many others share this view. See, for example, Bates Gill, Matthew Oresman, Zbigniew Brzezinski, “China’s New Journey to the West: China’s Emergence in Central Asia and its Implications for U.S. Interests,” *A Report from the CSIS Freeman Chair in China Studies*, August 2003, published by Center for Strategic and International Studies.

<sup>127</sup> John Mueller, *Retreat From Doomsday: The Obsolescence of Major War*, (New York: Basic Books, 1989).

<sup>128</sup> Richard Rosecrance, “Power and International Relations: The Rise of China and its Effects,” *International Studies Perspectives* 7, no. 1, (2006): 31-35.

<sup>129</sup> Bruce Russett and John R. O’Neal, *Triangulating Peace: Democracy, Interdependence and International Organizations*, (New York: W.W. Norton, 2001); Also see G. John Ikenberry, “Institutions, Strategic Restraint, and the Persistence of the American World Order,” *International Security* 23, no. 3 (Winter 1998-90): 43-78.

balance of power. Such institutions, G. John Ikenberry posits, are crucial “in establishing order and securing cooperation between unequal states.”<sup>130</sup>

Theorists taking a constructivist approach have pointed to changing identities, ideologies and shared norms among great powers to account for the decrease in balancing behavior.<sup>131</sup> For them, threats are not the result of intentions *per se*, but rather how states *construe* another’s intentions. In the case of the United States, its liberal character makes it less threatening than other great powers because the domestic nature of the United States allows it to pursue a multilateral foreign policy. The main causal mechanism is thus located internally. “A multilateral vision of world order is singularly compatible with America’s collective self-concept as a nation. Indeed, the vision taps into the very *idea* of America [emphasis in original]”<sup>132</sup>

For these scholars, the balance-of-power mechanism is reduced in a unipolar world because power is too concentrated in the hegemon; is militated by the liberal nature of the United States and/or its character as a maritime power; overcome by globalization and economic interdependence; or circumvented by the changing norms of great power relations in the contemporary international system. If they are correct, then what does this say for Waltz’s inviolable and immutable theory of balance of power? After all, even if a

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<sup>130</sup> Ikenberry, *After Victory*, 17. For another major work in this vein, see Keohane, *After Hegemony*.

<sup>131</sup> Wendt, *Social Theory of International Politics* and Jeffrey W. Legro, *Rethinking World Order: Great Power Strategies and International Order*, (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2005); for an empirical view, see Rey Koslowski and Friedrich V. Kratochwil, “Understanding Change in International Politics: The Soviet Empire's Demise and the International System,” *International Organization* 48, no. 2 (Spring, 1994): 215-247.

<sup>132</sup> Ruggie, *Winning the Peace*, 25.

great power behaves with moderation, restraint and forbearance, “unbalanced power, whoever wields it, is a potential danger to others.”<sup>133</sup>

### **Systems Logic of Balance of Power**

A central argument of this study is that the configuration of the international system is the main determinant of the type of balancing strategy states are likely to adopt. In other words, the main independent variable is the polarity of the system, an exogenous factor, and the dependent variable is the balancing outcome. Realists have mainly focused on the balancing outcome of multipolar and unipolar systems.<sup>134</sup> The debate has centered on which system is the most stable, and therefore, the most likely to foster peace. It was not until the end of the Cold War that realists began to carefully analyze the stability of unipolar systems.<sup>135</sup>

Scholars such as Robert Pape argue that unipolarity is a distinct system with its own balancing logic different from that of bipolar and multipolar systems (see Figure 3-1). Pape’s theoretical insights can be viewed as an extension of classical realism. For example, Hans Morgenthau recognized that “the reduction of the number of nations that are able to play a major role in international politics has had a deteriorating effect upon the operation of the balance of power.”<sup>136</sup> Although Morgenthau never extended this

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<sup>133</sup> Waltz, “Structural Realism after the Cold War,” 28.

<sup>134</sup> Mearsheimer, “Back to the Future”; Waltz, *Theory of International Politics*, Chapter 6; Gilpin, *War & Change in World Politics*, 88-93; Doyle, *Ways of War and Peace*, Chapter 5.

<sup>135</sup> Wohlforth, “The Stability of a Unipolar World,” and Michael Mastanduno, “Preserving the Unipolar Moment.” For an opposing view, see Layne, “The Unipolar Illusion Revisited” and Kenneth Waltz, “The Emerging Structure of International Politics,” *International Security* 18, no. 2, (Fall 1994): 44-79. This paper does not delve into which of the three systems is more stable, but whether balancing outcomes are shaped by systemic configuration.

logic in *Politics Among Nations*, simple propositions can be drawn from his inference. Morgenthau’s balance of power framework was shaped mainly by the classic multipolar system of Continental Europe. Therefore, the reduction of five great powers to two would deteriorate the balance of power if “balance of power” is viewed simply in terms of alliance politics. However, what is occurring is not “deterioration” in the balance of power, but a transformation of one balance of power logic into another. Realists shaped by the first two World Wars and the Cold War understood the differing logics of multipolar and bipolar systems, but apparently failed to envision a unipolar world because none of their works before the end of the Cold War account for it.

| <i>Type of System</i> | <i>Logic of Balancing</i> |
|-----------------------|---------------------------|
| Unipolar              | Non-Military alignments   |
| Bipolar               | Arms buildups             |
| Multipolarity         | Alliances                 |

Despite the criticisms, recent neoclassical realist theory has focused on efforts by China and Russia to counteract the United States by analyzing exogenous and endogenous factors.<sup>137</sup> The two external factors that largely account for the operation of

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<sup>136</sup> Morgenthau, *Politics Among Nations*, 339.

<sup>137</sup> This is if one considers the absence of balancing at the systemic level against the United States as a reason to abandon balance of power theory *in toto*. Balancing continues to occur in regional systems, and the United States continues to play a role as an offshore balancer to stabilize regions. For example, Denny Roy argues that smaller Southeast Asian states have begun to engage in “low intensity balancing” or “soft balancing” vis-à-vis China via the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) in “Southeast Asia and China: Balancing or Bandwagoning,” *Contemporary Southeast Asia* 27, no. 2 (2005): 305-322. “The most common approach in Southeast Asia to a rising China is low-intensity balancing with the United States, combined with efforts to assure or engage China,” 319. These strategies are similar to those Beijing and Moscow have adopted to repel American encroachment in Central Asia. Also see, Yuen Foong Khong, “Coping With Strategic Uncertainty: The Role of Institutions and Soft Balancing in Southeast Asia’s Post-

the balance of power in the international system are the number of great powers and the spread of nuclear weapons.<sup>138</sup> Kenneth Waltz pointed to the proliferation of nuclear weapons among great powers for the mitigation of balancing behavior: “In a world of second-strike nuclear forces, alliances have little effect on the strategic balance.”<sup>139</sup> And, as mentioned above, Morgenthau noted the reduction of the number of great powers also suppresses balancing behavior.<sup>140</sup>

The nature of the international system also can affect balancing strategies.<sup>141</sup> In a multipolar system, the increased number of great powers enlarges the pool of possible dyads for alliance formation. This was manifested in the Eighteenth Century Europe, considered to be the classical age of balance of power. “All the assumptions of the structural model were in place: international anarchy, coherent states as rational positionalists, and a multipolar distribution with Britain, France, Prussia, and Austria constituting the classic system of five great powers.”<sup>142</sup> The use of alliances was less

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Cold War Strategy,” in *Rethinking Security in East Asia; Identity*. For the role of the U.S. as an off-shore balancer in Europe, see Robert Art, “Why Western Europe Needs the United States and NATO,” *Political Science Quarterly* 111, no. 1, (Spring 1996): 1-39. For the role of the U.S. as an off-shore balancer in the Middle East, see Michael Ryan Kraig, “Forging a New Security Order for the Persian Gulf,” *Middle East Policy* 13, no. 1, (Spring 2006): 84-101.

<sup>138</sup> A third problem could be collective action, see Pape, “Soft Balancing Against the United States.”

<sup>139</sup> Kenneth Waltz, “Nuclear Myths and Political Realities,” *The American Political Science Review* 84, no.3, (Sep, 1990), 741. For a counterargument, see Scott D. Sagan, “The Perils of Proliferation: Organization Theory, Deterrence Theory, and the Spread of Nuclear Weapons,” *International Security* 18, no. 4 (Spring, 1994): 66-107.

<sup>140</sup> Morgenthau, *Politics Among Nations*, 339.

<sup>141</sup> See Susan B. Martin, “From Balance of Power to Balancing: The Long and Winding Road,” in Hanami, *Perspectives on Structural Realism*. Kai He and Huiyun Feng, offer an opposing view on this front: “We suggest that soft balancing is not a unique behavior under unipolarity; rather, it is a rational state behavior shaped by two systemic variables: power disparity and economic dependence among states” in Kai He and Huiyun Feng, “If Not Soft Balancing, Then What? Reconsidering Soft Balancing and U.S. Policy Toward China,” *Security Studies* 17, (2008): 363–395.

effective as a balancing strategy during the Cold War bipolar system, where defections from either bloc had little impact on the overall strategic balance. As Waltz explained:

The withdrawal of France from NATO's command structure and the defection of China from the Soviet bloc failed even to tilt the central balance. Early in the Cold War, Americans spoke with alarm about the threat of monolithic communism arising from the combined strength of the Soviet Union and China, yet the bloc's disintegration caused scarcely a ripple. American officials did not proclaim that with China's defection, America's defense budget could safely be reduced by 20 or 10 percent or even be reduced at all. Similarly, when France stopped playing its part in NATO's military plans, American officials did not proclaim that defense spending had to be increased for that reason.<sup>143</sup>

In a unipolar system, the capabilities of the hegemonic state or superpower so far outstrip those of its nearest competitors that neither alliance formations nor internal arms buildups are effective. Although aspiring hegemonic powers of the past such as Napoleonic France and Nazi Germany eventually provoked balancing coalitions, the United States is "likely to buck the historical trend. Bounded by oceans to the east and west and weak, friendly powers to the north and south, the United States is both less vulnerable than previous aspiring hegemons and also less threatening to others. The main potential challengers to its unipolarity, meanwhile— China, Russia, Japan, and Germany—are in the opposite position."<sup>144</sup>

Endogenous factors enter the equation as well, including uncertainty combined with risk-loving preferences, conflict-averse preferences, offensive technological

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<sup>142</sup> Doyle, *Ways of War and Peace*, 176. As Doyle further points out, multipolarity resulted in a number of shifting alliances: "Austria switched from the long tradition of its enmity to France in order to join Russia in a war against upstart Prussia, France's former ally. Britain correspondingly shifted its traditional Continental alliance from Austria to Prussia, in part to reduce the threat to its vulnerable Hanoverian dependency but also and more importantly because Austria was no longer prepared to balance against France, Britain's major, if not sole rival. Russia entered the European balance against Prussia," 177.

<sup>143</sup> Waltz, "Structural Realism after the Cold War," 19.

<sup>144</sup> Brooks and Wohlforth, "American Primacy in Perspective," 24.

advantages, economic growth, and technological and political rigidities in the formation of alliances and rivalries.<sup>145</sup> The novelty of unipolarity also is cited as a factor for the lack of hard balancing against the United States. Indeed, “*The world is in a great geopolitical adjustment process* [emphasis in the original],” writes G. John Ikenberry, who finds that great power reactions aimed against the United States have been ad hoc because they are still learning and adapting to a new international system.<sup>146</sup> Uncertainty also arises from the inability of actors to immediately assess all the variables that make up national power (such as national will and morale and effective government). As Morgenthau notes:

It is impossible for the observer of the contemporary scene or the explorer of future trends to assess even with approximate accuracy the relative contributions of these elements may make to power differentials. Furthermore, the quality of these contributions is subject to incessant change, unnoticeable at the moment the change actually takes place and revealed only in the actual test of crisis and war. Rational calculation of the relative strength of several nations, which is the very lifeblood of the balance of power, becomes a series of guesses the corrections of which can be ascertained only in retrospect.<sup>147</sup>

Structural realists attempted to streamline theory by removing many of the endogenous variables of power cited by Morgenthau, Kissinger and other classical realists. Such abstract models explain how structure constrains units and shapes behavior of actors over the long term, but cannot adequately address how individual units will respond to barriers at any given moment. Structural theories, specifically Waltz’s mechanistic version, have often been cited as the embodiment of the balance of power in

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<sup>145</sup> Horowitz, “The Balance of Power: Formal Perfection and Practical Flaws.”

<sup>146</sup> Ikenberry, “Strategic Reactions to American Preeminence.” It is debatable whether 20 years of unipolarity could still be considered “novel.” However, two decades is a rather insignificant when weighed against the entirety of international relations history.

<sup>147</sup> Morgenthau, *Politics Among Nations*, 204.

the realist tradition. This is unfortunate because Waltz's sparse model is the start for much realist theorizing, not the end. Waltz's archetype resulted in a rigid view of balance of power, but others have demonstrated that balancing in the international system is fluid.<sup>148</sup> Recent neoclassical reformulations have expanded the view of balance of power to account for the fluidity of systemic outcomes. Indeed, if balance of power is viewed as a continuum, a dynamic rather than static process is conveyed. State policies could range from soft balancing to soft bandwagoning (see figure 3-2).<sup>149</sup> The remainder of this chapter develops a framework that can be used to determine whether states such as China and Russia indeed are soft balancing against the United States.

### **Soft Balancing as a Hard Concept**

Balancing of the hard variety is a core tenet of the realist research program. Unlike hard balancing, however, soft balancing is likely to involve alignments rather than arms buildups and formal alliances. Glenn Snyder's definition of an alliance provides a strong description of what is generally thought of as traditional external balancing: "formal associations of states for the use [or nonuse] of military force, in specified circumstances, against states outside their own membership."<sup>150</sup> Snyder's theory of alliance politics is based on the Austro-German alliance of 1879, which was targeted at France, and the Franco-Russian alliance of 1891-1894, which countered the Austro-

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<sup>148</sup> "Statesmen involved in a balance of power system are unlikely to follow all the prescribed 'rules.' They may not automatically support the weaker side; inhibited perhaps by recent animosity or religious bitterness, they may not feel the most powerful state in the system is necessarily the one to be most feared. For this reason, Inis Claude urged caution 'when academic theorists succumb to the urge to codify the operations of the balance of power system ... the theorists misleads when he undertakes to reduce to rigid patterns what is in reality a fluid process,'" in Sheehan, *The Balance of Power*, 86.

<sup>149</sup> The concept of soft bandwagoning is beyond the scope of this study.

<sup>150</sup> Glenn Snyder, *Alliance Politics*, (Cornell University Press, Ithaca, N.Y., 1997), 4.

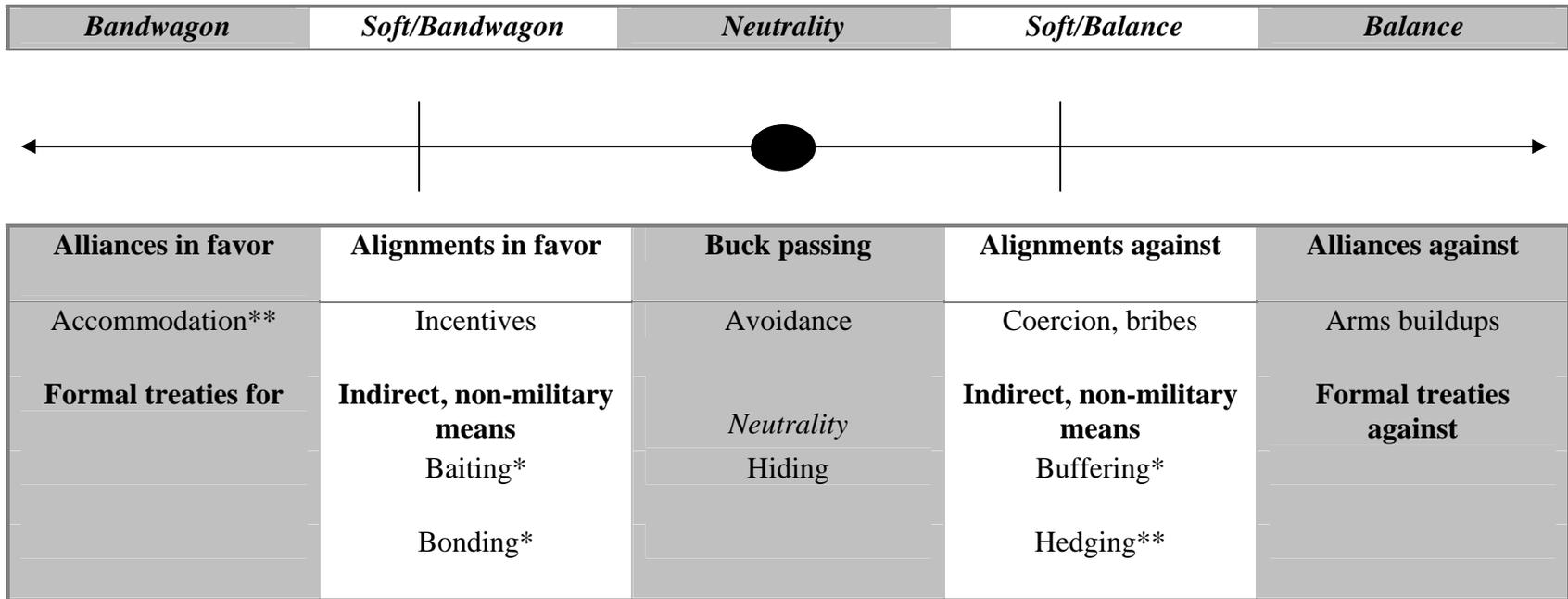
German pact. Although Snyder's work is more about alliance formation than balancing itself, it does demonstrate what external balancing behavior might look like.

Another form of hard balancing is an arms buildup by one or more states to roughly match the power of the targeted state, or to at least develop defenses effective enough to make invasion cost prohibitive.<sup>151</sup> Neither of these versions of hard balancing appears to be relevant to contemporary international affairs. No state has undertaken a massive arms buildup to match the military might of the United States and no formal alliances have been established against the U.S. because of the high costs.

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<sup>151</sup> For a good overview of the evolution of balance of power strategies and theory, see Sheehan, *The Balance of Power*, especially chapters 3 and 4.

Table 3-2: Model of the Balance of Power Continuum



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\*The terms engagement, resistance, baiting, buffering and bonding come from Ikenberry, "Strategic Reactions to American Preeminence."

\*\*The terms accommodation and hedging comes from Foot, "Chinese Strategies in a U.S.-Hegemonic Global Order."

Strategies of Engagement\*

Strategies of Resistance\*

### *New “balancing” strategies*

Soft balancing began to surface as a concept in the mid-2000s to account for the conspicuous absence of hard balancing against the United States after the demise of the Cold War. Proponents of soft balancing argued that, contrary to predictions that the “balance of power” had no utility in a post-Cold War world, balancing strategies were indeed emerging. Supporters maintained that the balance of power dynamic still persisted in international politics, but that changes in the configuration of the international system required new balancing logics. They also argued that the absence of strategic balance as an outcome did not mean that states were abandoning balancing as a strategy because balancing is not always a successful policy. Furthermore, balancing strategies in a unipolar world would require new tactics to deal with an existing hegemonic power, a rare phenomenon in world history.<sup>152</sup>

Soft balancing theorists describe that strategy as the adoption of indirect tactics to counterbalance U.S. interests. Robert Pape, a leading soft balance theorist, defines it as: “Actions that do not directly challenge U.S. military preponderance but that use nonmilitary tools to delay, frustrate, and undermine aggressive unilateral U.S. military

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<sup>152</sup> There is debate over whether hegemony is a frequent or rare phenomenon in world history. Andre Gunder Frank and David Wilkinson argue that hegemony is rare, a contention shared by the author. See Christopher Chase-Dunn; Peter Taylor; Giovanni Arrighi; Robert Cox; Henk Overbeek; Barry Gills; Andre Gunder Frank; George Modelski; David Wilkinson, “Hegemony and Social Change,” *Mershon International Studies Review* 38, no. 2. (October 1994): 361-376. Kaufman, Little and Wohlforth take the opposition, viewing hegemony as quite frequent in international history. See Kaufman *et al*, *Balance of Power in World History*, (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2007). One problem for the confusion is the conflation of hegemony with more frequent empires. Hegemony should be considered an analytically distinct concept from empire. See John Agnew, *Hegemony: The New Shape of Global Power*, (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2005); and Mark Haugaard and Howard H. Lentner, eds., *Hegemony and Power: Consensus and Coercion in Contemporary Politics*, (New York: Lexington Books, 2006).

policies.”<sup>153</sup> This can be through international institutions, economic statecraft and diplomatic arrangements. T.V. Paul offers a similar description, concluding that “in the post-Cold War era, second-tier major power states have been increasingly resorting to soft balancing strategies to counter the growing military might and unilateral tendencies of the United States without harming their economic ties to it.”<sup>154</sup> Regionalism is a major component of the soft balancing concepts laid out by Pape, Paul and Robert Art, each of whom argues that soft balancing encompasses regional security concerns great powers face from the power projection capabilities of an off-shore hegemonic power.<sup>155</sup>

Another major proponent, Stephen Walt, amended soft balancing concepts by incorporating them within his “balance of threat” paradigm. According to Walt, hard balancing focuses on the overall balance of power and seeks to assemble a countervailing coalition that will be strong enough to keep the dominant power in check, whereas soft balancing does not seek or expect to alter the overall distribution of capabilities. Instead, a soft balancing strategy accepts the status quo, but seeks to obtain better outcomes within it. In the current era of U.S. dominance, therefore, soft balancing is the “conscious coordination of diplomatic action in order to obtain outcomes contrary to U.S. preferences – outcomes that could not be gained if the balancers did not give each other some degree of mutual support.”<sup>156</sup>

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<sup>153</sup> Pape, “Soft Balancing Against the United States,” 18.

<sup>154</sup> Paul, “Soft Balancing in the Age of U.S. Primacy,” 70.

<sup>155</sup> Robert Art, “Correspondence: Striking the Balance,” *International Security* 30, no. 3 (Winter 2005-06): 177-196.

<sup>156</sup> Walt, *Taming American Power*,” 126.

Christopher Layne's calls such behavior "leash slipping" when states try to free themselves from the yoke of the U.S. liberal order.<sup>157</sup> Layne's notion of "leash slipping" is crucial because it imbeds a normative component into the soft balancing framework. As Layne points out, the U.S. "quest for hegemony is driven instead by an ideational, *detrterritorialized* conception of security divorced from the traditional metrics of great power grand strategy: the distribution of power in the international system and geography [emphasis mine]."<sup>158</sup> In the liberal economic order established by the United States after World War II, leash slipping is less about the fear of being attacked by a "predatory land-grabber" than a way for states "to conduct an independent foreign policy."<sup>159</sup>

As a liberal and maritime hegemonic power, the United States is unique. British hegemony and naval supremacy in the late Nineteenth and early Twentieth centuries, though similar, does not compare to American hegemony in a unipolar system because U.S. capabilities relative to its challengers are far more superior than Britain's capabilities compared to its rivals at the time. Nevertheless, both states faced no serious balancing coalitions because their goals were generally to extend control over markets rather than territory.<sup>160</sup> The wealth and power of these liberal hegemons allowed them to create normative structures that benefited their interests. Although the concerns some great powers have about U.S. hegemony are in many cases ideational or normative, these are effects rather than causes. Normative threats emanate from domestic sources, but their

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<sup>157</sup> Layne, "The Unipolar Illusion Revisited."

<sup>158</sup> *Ibid.* 40.

<sup>159</sup> Layne, "The Unipolar Illusion Revisited," 40. The term "predatory land grabber" comes from Paul, "Soft Balancing in the Age of U.S. Primacy."

<sup>160</sup> Levy and Thompson, "Balancing on Land and at Sea."

gravity is the result of a state's position within the international system, a central tenet of structural realism.<sup>161</sup>

*Theoretical limitations of soft balancing*

Kenneth Waltz viewed unbalanced power as threatening in itself, and posited that such a threat will provoke a reaction from other actors within the international system. Smaller states are likely to bandwagon with the hegemon, but other great powers have more options at their disposal. Walt's addition of "threat" to the soft balancing framework, however, rectifies some of the anomalies in Waltz's theory because it explains why the American military presence in Europe is not considered menacing by the states in that region, whereas a smaller U.S. footprint in Central Asia has provoked consternation among the Russians and Chinese.<sup>162</sup> Walt's concept of soft balancing, however, is so broad that it covers issue areas ranging from global climate change to international trade; any act that seeks to undermine American policy, from European objection to genetically modified foods to French/German/Russian opposition to the Second Gulf War is tantamount to balancing. This expansive view limits the utility of Walt's version of soft balancing because it does not offer criteria to distinguish between soft balancing and diplomatic bargaining or friction among states; even allies at times have conflicts and try to block the interests of one another. Furthermore, including such

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<sup>161</sup> Art, "Correspondence: Striking the Balance," 185.

<sup>162</sup> There are other differences between Western Europe and Central Asia that help explain the disparate reactions to American influence in those regions. In Western Europe, the United States acts as an off-shore balancer and brings stability by tamping down great power rivalry. With no rising hegemons, America is less likely to pose a threat to European states. In Central Asia, China is a rising power and Russia harbors revanchist intentions, therefore the U.S. presence there is seen as much more threatening. For a thorough discussion on "off-shore" balancing, see Mearsheimer, *Tragedy*. Also see Art, "Why Western Europe Needs the United States and NATO."

“low politics” under the rubric of balancing diminishes the stature of balance of power, which generally has been limited to the arena of “high politics” and security.

Other formulations of soft balancing also lack some theoretical cohesion at one level or the other. Paul’s notion of soft balancing involves “the formation of limited diplomatic coalitions or ententes, especially in the United Nations, with the implicit threat of upgrading their alliances if the United States goes beyond its stated goals.”<sup>163</sup> Pape characterizes balancing as the use of “assets [which] include military forces, economic power and leverage, formal alliances, informal alignments, and voting or veto power in international organizations. The first three can be conceived of as hard assets; the last two as soft assets.”<sup>164</sup> According to Pape, these “assets” can include territorial denial (especially basing rights), entangling diplomacy, economic strengthening (regional trading blocs, e.g.), and signals of resolve to balance.<sup>165</sup>

Although these definitions broadly describe what can be considered soft balancing, critics rightfully argue that the tactics they suggest, by themselves, are hard to distinguish from other state behavior and are not formulated in a manner that can be systematically tested. Indeed, how can one differentiate the denial of basing rights as a measure of soft balancing from a maneuver by a government to quell public displeasure with a foreign military force stationed in its country? And by what mechanism can the United Nations be used to balance against U.S. power other than a possible Security

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<sup>163</sup> Paul, “Soft Balancing in the Age of U.S. Primacy,” 47. The weakness of this argument is that some U.S. goals could be unstated.

<sup>164</sup> Pape, “Soft Balancing Against the United States,” 10.

<sup>165</sup> *Ibid.*

Council veto given that little authority resides in the General Assembly?<sup>166</sup> Nevertheless, proponents of soft balancing have laid the groundwork for a fruitful theory, even if their conceptions suffer from imprecision. Below, combined is what the author believes to be the most important elements in determining a soft-balancing strategy.

### **Analytical Framework**

A review of soft balancing literature finds that it is largely a regional strategy designed to counter American influence in geographic areas proximate to other great powers. Regionalism is a central aspect of soft balancing because great powers need not exert themselves challenging the United States at the systemic level. In this study, soft balancing is defined as *nonmilitary alignments of at least two states (external) and/or the increase of soft power by one state (internal) designed to reduce or remove the military presence and external influences of another power at the regional or global level.*

Analytically, a state's increase in soft or normative power to counter that of another state or states could be considered soft balancing. Additionally, an alignment that adopts the three following tactics can evince soft balancing behavior: attempts to reduce the military presence of the external actor from a specific region; the removal of any local actors allied politically with the external great power; and decreasing economic, cultural and normative influences associated with the outside great power from the region. The first tactic is necessary to identify a soft-balancing strategy, the latter two sufficient for soft balancing. Below, the framework's terms and concepts are further explicated.

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<sup>166</sup> UN Security Council vetoes could be used to balance a state, however a veto could come from a single council member as opposed to a coalition of them, and for a variety of reasons that might or might not include an intention to balance.

*Systemic Configuration: Hegemonic and Unipolar*

Proponents of soft balancing argue that it is most likely to be practiced in unipolar systems. A unipolar system is hegemonic because it consists of only one superpower. Multiple regional hegemonies could exist at one time, but such a system would be multipolar rather than a unipolar at the global level if the regional hegemonies were relatively close in their material capabilities. Nevertheless, there is vigorous debate among scholars and analysts over whether the United States is actually a hegemonic power.<sup>167</sup> A number of terms have been used to describe America's current preponderance in the international system – superpower, hyperpower, hegemon and neo-empire are some examples. Substantively, there is little that distinguishes these terms and they generally convey the concept of hegemony adopted in this study: a state that not only can project its military capabilities abroad, but economic and cultural norms, too.<sup>168</sup>

Some scholars maintain there can be unipolarity without hegemony, but this position appears untenable.<sup>169</sup> A unipolar system is by default a hegemonic system because only one state has the means to project power globally. Furthermore, hegemony is about leadership and establishing rules and norms to govern the world political

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<sup>167</sup> For some recent literature, see Marc J. O'Reilly and Wesley B. Renfro, "Evolving Empire: America's 'Emirates' Strategy in the Persian Gulf," *International Studies Perspectives* 8, no. 2, (2007): 137-151; Elke Krahnemann, "American Hegemony or Global Governance? Competing Visions of International Security," *International Studies Review* 7, no. 4, (2005), 532; Benjamin Miller, "The International System and Regional Balance in the Middle East," in *Balance of Power*; Jervis, "The Remaking of a Unipolar World."

<sup>168</sup> "American power is not just expressed in military capabilities. It is also manifest in its expansive culture and economy," writes G. John Ikenberry in *America Unrivaled*, 5. This view also incorporates the Gramscian notion of hegemony: see Robert W. Cox, "Labor and Hegemony," *International Organization* 31, no. 3, (Summer 1977): 385-424; Stephen Gill and David Law, "Global Hegemony and the Structural Power of Capital," *International Studies Quarterly* 33, no. 4, (December 1989): 475-499; Thomas R. Bates, "Gramsci and the Theory of Hegemony," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 36, no. 2, (April-June 1975): 351-366.

<sup>169</sup> Wilkinson, "Unipolarity Without Hegemony," 141.

economy.<sup>170</sup> Nevertheless, brute material capabilities are necessary to establish what Gramscians refer to as a “hegemonic bloc” or “dominant ideology.” In the current international system, the United State is the only power capable of establishing such a world order. William Wohlforth makes a strong case for this viewpoint: “To qualify as polar powers, states must score well on *all* the components of power: size of population and territory; resource endowment; economic capabilities; military strength; and ‘competence’ ... Two states measured up in 1990. One is gone. No new pole has appeared: 2-1=1. The system is unipolar.”<sup>171</sup>

Analytically, hegemony can be examined over three dimensions of capabilities: military, political/economic and normative. A state that can project power across these three planes of capabilities could establish hegemony in a regional or international system. Power projection is the ability of a state to effectively deploy its assets across international borders. From a military standpoint, this means a state that can invade and occupy territory that is non-contiguous and maintains a global network of bases on foreign soil. From a political-economic standpoint, this means a state that takes the main role in creating international institutions that govern different issue areas in international politics, such as trade, monetary and security affairs; examples would include institutions in the economic realm, such as the WTO and IMF, and political realm, such as the United Nations, and security

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<sup>170</sup> Leadership of a political or social system is a core tenet of Gramscian, neo-Marxist and Liberal versions of hegemony, although some realists make this case, too. On the Liberal version, see Scott C. James and David A. Lake, “The Second Face of Hegemony: Britain’s Repeal of the Corn Laws and the American Walker Tarrif of 1846,” *International Organization* 43, no. 1, (Winter 1989): 1-29; On neo-Marxist conceptions, see John Agnew, “The New Global Economy: Time-Space Compression, Geopolitics and Global Uneven Development,” *Journal of World-Systems Research* 2, no. 2, (Fall 2001): 133-154. Charles P. Kindleberger makes the most well-known case for an economic hegemon in *The World in Depression 1929-1939* (Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 1986).

<sup>171</sup> Wohlforth, “The Stability of a Unipolar World,” 10. Also see Ikenberry *et al* “Introduction: Unipolarity, State Behavior, and Systemic Consequences.”

realm, NATO as well as bilateral treaties with other major powers. In these organizations, the hegemonic power should have the leadership position. In the normative realm, power projection would be the creation of the “rules of the game” established by the hegemonic power. These rules can be codified in international institutions, treaties, law, organizations and regimes.<sup>172</sup>

A hegemonic state also should have the world’s leading currency and can use its economic and political might to punish states bilaterally or through multilateral diplomacy and institutions.<sup>173</sup> Projecting economic and political power also could be viewed as the “vanguard of globalization,”<sup>174</sup> for example, when multinational corporations from a home country are dominant around the globe and have a number of subsidiaries or affiliates in a host country on multiple continents. By projecting power in the normative sphere, a great power must play a prominent role in establishing international law and regimes; for example on human rights and democracy, but also through the globalization and propagation of its culture, which can include consumerism, sports and entertainment.<sup>175</sup> The normative sphere also could be disseminated through non-governmental

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<sup>172</sup> See Stephen D. Krasner, *International Regimes*, (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1983); on the role of law in the international system, see Judith Goldstein, Miles Kahler, Robert O. Keohane, Anne-Marie Slaughter, “Legalization and World Politics,” *International Organization* 54, no. 3, (Summer 2000): 385-399; and Anne-Marie Slaughter, Andrew S. Tulumello, Stepan Wood, “International Law and International Relations Theory: A New Generation of Interdisciplinary Scholarship,” *The American Journal of International Law* 92, no. 3 (July 1998): 367-397. For a major treatment, see Michael Byers and Georg Nolte, *United States Hegemony and the Foundations of International Law*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

<sup>173</sup> See, for example, David M. Andrews, ed., *International Monetary Power*, (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2006).

<sup>174</sup> Michael Cox, “Sept. 11 and U.S. Hegemony – Or Will the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Be American Too?” *International Studies Perspectives* 3, no. 1, (2002): 53-70.

<sup>175</sup> For an example of cultural assets as a form of power, see Watanabe Yasushi and David L. McConnell, eds., *Soft Power Superpowers: Cultural and National Assets of Japan and the United States*, (Armonk, N.Y.: M.E. Sharpe, 2008).

organizations (NGOs), which like militaries and multinational corporations are the gendarmes of the hegemonic power. A state that is dominant in all three faces could be considered hegemonic.

Although hegemonic powers must have sufficient military capabilities to protect the international political economy that it dominates and rebuff challenges from adversaries, systemic-level factors are not sufficient alone. Indeed, “a great power “must have control over raw materials, control over sources of capital, control over markets, and competitive advantages in the production of highly valued goods. ... The importance of controlling sources of raw materials has provided a traditional justification for territorial expansion and imperialism.”<sup>176</sup> But as Robert Keohane argues, hegemony should go beyond the “crude” power theory of the strong state. “Strength alone does not give a hegemon the incentive to project power abroad. Domestic attitudes, political structures, and decision making processes are also important.”<sup>177</sup> Even in decline, a state can remain hegemonic if the status quo is locked into place through extant institutions.<sup>178</sup>

### *Regions in the Balance*

Because the hegemonic power’s capabilities at the global level are much greater than its closest competitors, attempts at balancing in a unipolar system are likely to occur at the regional level. “Although not stated in so many words, the military doctrines and defense plans of second-ranked powers, including those of China and Russia, rule out a

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<sup>176</sup> Keohane, *After Hegemony*, 32.

<sup>177</sup> Keohane, *After Hegemony*, 35. Ikenberry also makes this point in “Institutions, Strategic Restraint and the Persistence of American Order,” 44.

<sup>178</sup> Keohane, *After Hegemony* and Ikenberry, *After Victory*. Realists also make the point that institutions will benefit the powerful states that create them, even if those states are on decline. See John J. Mearsheimer, “The False Promise of International Institutions,” *International Security* 19, no. 3, (Winter 1994-95): 5-49.

major war with the United States and increasingly focus instead on regional and internal security challenges.”<sup>179</sup> In fact, regions can become a balancing mechanism distinct from traditional alliance politics and arm buildups. Regional powers view the intrusion of a superpower into their sphere of interest as threatening. “In order to attain international significance, regional systems must be able to refract power projected by external actors from the larger global environment.”<sup>180</sup> Indeed, regional security complexes can be viewed as poles of powers themselves and “in that context, they may get treated as if they mattered to the global balance of power.”<sup>181</sup>

Regions have been important to international politics longer than superpowers because no states or polities were able to project power globally until recently.<sup>182</sup> In antiquity, the Persian invasion of the Greek city-state system in the Fifth Century BCE led to the temporary formation of a regional balancing strategy, including alliance between future rivals Athens and Sparta.<sup>183</sup> More recently, scholars have looked at the role of regions in the Middle East, Southeast Asia, East Asia, Central Asia and across Africa and Latin America.<sup>184</sup>

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<sup>179</sup> Paul, “Soft Balancing in the Age of U.S. Primacy,” 53.

<sup>180</sup> Myers, *Regional Hegemons*, 10.

<sup>181</sup> Buzan, *Regions as Powers*, 37.

<sup>182</sup> Buzan, *Regions as Powers*.

<sup>183</sup> Richard Little, “The Greek City States in the Fifth Century BC: Persia and the Balance of Power,” in *Balance of Power in World History*, 55.

<sup>184</sup> Suh *et al*, *Rethinking Security in East Asia*; Amineh and Houweling, *Central Eurasia in Global Politics*; and Katzenstein, *A World of Regions*.

Regions also can be viewed as sites of contestation in the international system. According to John Mearsheimer, regions are a major variable in the international balance of power. Powerful states attempt to dominate their regions because domination is the most optimal way to ensure survival. If a great power establishes regional hegemony, it can use that as a launching pad for global dominance. However, hegemony could lead to a security dilemma because “regional hegemons in one region of the globe will attempt to check aspiring hegemons in other regions because they fear that a rival great power that dominates its own region will be an especially powerful foe.”<sup>185</sup> Yet attempts at offshore balancing, or the strategy adopted by a regional hegemon to keep others from achieving the same status, is likely to be met by countervailing coalitions.<sup>186</sup> Nevertheless, Mearsheimer’s theoretical implications are supported by U.S. defense policy on peer competitors and the possible use of nuclear weapons; the Pentagon’s concern with emerging powers such as China, and Iran in the Persian Gulf, for instance, can be discerned in its development of offensive nuclear weapons.<sup>187</sup>

The formation of regional spheres of influences or regional security complexes is an important element of soft balancing. However, these complexes do not have to be formal arrangements or explicitly aimed at rebuffing the encroachment of a hegemonic power. In fact, any coordination between great powers to use a region as a buffer in a

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<sup>185</sup> Mearsheimer, *Tragedy*, 41.

<sup>186</sup> Christopher Layne, “The War on Terrorism and the Balance of Power,” in *Balance of Power* and Pape, “Striking the Balance.”

<sup>187</sup> Lieber and Press, “The End of MAD?” Maintaining military primacy has been a cornerstone of U.S. defense policy since the end of the Cold War and is spelled out in the 2006 U.S. National Security Strategy and the more recent 2010 U.S. National Security Strategy, which advocates continued American leadership of the international system. For an overview, see Robert J. Lieber, *The American Era: Power and Strategy for the 21st Century* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

unipolar system is likely to be in the form of indirect alignments or partnerships rather than formal alliances as was the case in past balancing strategies.

#### *Non-military alignments*

In contrast to formal *alliances*, Glenn Snyder defines *alignments* as tacit agreements “based solely on common interests, although the latter can be as consequential as formal arrangements.”<sup>188</sup> For Snyder, alliances are ways of strengthening alignments and are based on elements of specificity, legal and moral obligation, and reciprocity that are usually lacking from informal alignments, which generally don’t have an explicit pledge of military support. Applying Snyder’s work to balancing provides a demarcation between the soft and hard varieties.

#### *Strategic Partnerships as Soft Balancing*

The strategic partnership between Russia and China follows the logic of alignment patterns and thus can be an important element in soft balancing. From a bilateral standpoint, strategic partnerships are simply about achieving mutual interests, for example improving trade and security relations. However, from geopolitical perspective, strategic partnerships can help weaker states gain leverage against a hegemonic power by joining forces in international institutions or through regional complexes. In this case, the axiom “two is better than one” counts. Furthermore, strategic partners can lessen the influence of the hegemon by offering another axis or pole of power for smaller and emerging powers dissatisfied with the status quo. By forming a strategic partnership at the geopolitical level, states can increase their influence greatly.

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<sup>188</sup> Snyder, *Alliance Politics*, 4.

Unlike traditional alliances, however, the Sino-Russian “strategic partnership” is more about political, rather than military, deterrence, an association that corresponds to a soft balancing strategy. For the partnership to be “strategic, it must entail building a larger framework for global and regional security, rather than just bilateral cooperation.”<sup>189</sup> According to Sangtu Ko, the strategic component of the Russian-Chinese relationship was institutionalized and extended beyond bilateral relations when the two powers cooperated to create the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, which added a regional dimension to the partnership in Central Asia. As Ko notes, “the SCO’s creation might be seen as the first step in a Chinese and Russian policy of renouncing the U.S. vision of a world dominated by a single pole.”<sup>190</sup>

Although not a formal defense treaty, the “strategic partnership” between Russia and China falls under the alignment concept and goes further than a simple regional security regime or bilateral coordination. Forming a partnership “implies a long-term reciprocal commitment” and “broad consistency of purpose.”<sup>191</sup> In addition, the partnership must be vital to each member’s mutual interests and both sides must attach great importance to it.<sup>192</sup> The partnership allows both sides to coordinate their expectations while at the same time offering each considerable freedom of action to

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<sup>189</sup> Ko, “Strategic Partnership in a Unipolar System,” 209.

<sup>190</sup> *Ibid.* 216-217.

<sup>191</sup> Bobo Lo, *Axis of Convenience: Moscow, Beijing and the New Global Geopolitics*, (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 2008), 41.

<sup>192</sup> Yu Bin, “Living with Russia in the Post-9/11 World,” in Simon Shen and Jean-Marc F. Blanchard, eds., *Multidimensional Diplomacy of Contemporary China*, (New York: Lexington Press, 2010), 196.

pursue other interests. In this case, the partnership combines tactical expediency with strategic calculus and provides a unified front internationally.<sup>193</sup>

Indeed, the “strategic partnership” could be conceived of as a new model in contemporary alliance formation. The partnership or alignment is as much about gaining leverage against the United States as it is about bilateral relations. For example, in 2006 and 2007, there was near 100 percent similarity in Chinese and Russian votes in the UNSC, including vetoes.<sup>194</sup> “For China, cooperation with Russia helps to promote greater multipolarity and multilateralism, lessening U.S. influence. Russian leaders share Chinese elites’ discomfort with U.S. power and relative predominance, in particular with the U.S. perceived penchant for military alliances, regime change, democracy promotion, and unilateral diplomatic and military actions.”<sup>195</sup>

### *Tactics*

The main goal of soft balancing would be an attempt by the alignment or partnership to reduce or remove any military bases, garrisons, air fields or naval ports maintained by the outside hegemon or great power. Secondly, a soft-balancing alignment could seek to co-opt, and if unable, to remove or replace, any head of a state (party or individual) in the specific region which has aligned or allied with the outside actor. Of tertiary concern, the members of the alignment or partnership might seek to remove or eliminate indirect influences in a specific region associated with the outside great power, such as non-governmental organizations (NGOs) supported by the outside

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<sup>193</sup> Lo, *Axis of Convenience*.

<sup>194</sup> Evan S. Medeiros, *China’s International Behavior: Activism, Opportunism, a Diversification*, (Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND Corporation, 2009).

<sup>195</sup> *Ibid.*

actor, multinational corporations (MNCs) based in the great power and cultural institutions (subversive elements of cinema, media, artwork, music, etc.) derived from the outside actor (see table 3-3).

| Table 3-3: Instruments of Soft Balancing |   |  |   |
|--|---|--|---|
|  | Military  | Political  | Economic  |
| <b>Goals</b>                             | Reduction of outside military forces  | Reduction of outside normative influence   | Reduction of outside economic influence   |
| <b>Tactics</b>                           | Pressure on regional leaders to remove foreign troops from region                         | Pressure on regional leaders to break ties with outside power  | Pressure on regional leaders to break ties with outside power   |
|  | Support for non-state actors or proxies to harass outside military forces or remove bases | Covert ops to remove leaders tied to outside power; use of bribes or coercion to break ties              | Use of bribes, coercion to reduce outside influence and make favorable conditions for                             |
|  | Military support to opposition forces of external power                                   | Political support to opposition forces of external power; creation of alternative norms and institutions | Use of institutions or organizations to create favorable conditions for alignments MNCs and other economic actors |

These ends can be achieved by a number of means: the use of covert operations, coercion or military assistance to opposition forces to remove regional officials who have allied with the outside hegemonic power; bribes or other incentives to buy the support of regional political, economic, cultural and religious leaders; the use of proxies or non-state actors to attack or harass U.S. facilities in the region; and the use of other inducements, such as economic and military aid to autocratic rulers with “no strings attached,” and providing cover for autocratic leaders in international institutions such as the United Nations. Each tactic singularly could be used to pursue a myriad of state interests. However, if these tactics are combined systematically in the presence of an external actor, those tactics could be taken as evidence of the formation of a soft balancing

alignment. The overarching goal of this strategy would be to increase the costs of intervention by a hegemonic power, which would reduce its capabilities over the long-term.

### **Geopolitical and Strategic Objectives of Soft Balancing Alignment**

Although a soft balancing strategy utilizes non-confrontational means to counteract hegemonic power, the goal is to achieve tangible outcomes.<sup>196</sup> Unlike hard balancing, soft balancing is not adopted by great powers seeking security from hegemonic attack; for them the United States is not an existential threat. Strategically, however, soft balancing alignments are formed to create more favorable conditions for great powers to obtain interests at odds with the reigning hegemon. For example, removing American political influence and military forces from Central Asia could help China and Russia obtain major geopolitical and geostrategic interests in the region. A significant strategic objective for Russia is to limit any American role in deciding the routes of gas and natural oil pipelines through Central Asia and the Caucasus. The United States prefers pipeline routes to Western allies bypass Russia and attempts to bolster the independence of the smaller republics from Moscow to increase American leverage in the region.<sup>197</sup> Such an outcome could severely reduce Russian revenues from energy rents and weaken the Russian economy and defense sectors. Energy security, too, is a long-term concern to the Chinese defense sector and economy, and procuring adequate supplies from Central Asia is a strategic priority.<sup>198</sup> To be sure, China and Russia

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<sup>196</sup> Walt, "Alliances in a Unipolar World."

<sup>197</sup> Richard Giragosian, "The Strategic Central Asian Arena," *China and Eurasia Forum Quarterly* 4, no. 1 (2006) p. 133-153

approach Central Asian energy resources from different perspectives – China as an importer and Russia as an exporter – yet they share a common interest in counterbalancing U.S. influence in the region and cooperating on energy matters.<sup>199</sup>

Broadly, great powers mainly pursue soft balancing because it can create conditions favorable to obtaining preferences contrary to those of the hegemonic power without direct confrontation. Soft balancing is done largely through diplomatic maneuvers and in institutional arrangements (states also can incorporate soft balancing measures into their military doctrines, which are taken up in Chapter Six). Like other soft balancing theories, under this framework, the alignment does not confront the outside great power/hegemon directly (it doesn't even have to be named), and therefore, is unlikely to be subject to military reprisals.<sup>200</sup> The balancing effort is localized to a specific region (sphere of influence or regional security complex), and if successful, the removal of the great power's influence (hard and soft power) opens space for members of the regional alliance to "conduct an independent foreign policy" outside the framework of the normative and rule-based liberal order managed by the United States. These tactics also follow the logic of offensive realism of Mearsheimer. If hegemons (e.g., the United

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<sup>198</sup> Tianshu Chu, Fereidun Fesharaki and Kang Wu, "China's Energy in Transition: Regional and Global Implications," *Asian Economic Policy Review* 1, no. 1, (2006): 134-152.

<sup>199</sup> Artyom Matusov, "Energy Cooperation in the SCO: Club or Gathering?" *China and Eurasia Forum Quarterly*, Vol. 5, No. 3, (2007): 83-99.

<sup>200</sup> There have been a number of occasions in history where great powers have used proxies and other indirect aid against one another without provoking a great power war. A few prominent examples include Soviet and Chinese assistance to North Vietnam forces against the United States; U.S. assistance to the Afghan mujahedeen against Soviet troops in Afghanistan; and Iranian aid to Shiite militias in Iraq against American forces. See for example, John Prados, "Notes on the CIA's Secret War in Afghanistan," *The Journal of American History* 89, no. 2, (Sep. 2002): 466-471; Richard E. Bissell, "Soviet Use of Proxies: The Case of Yemen," *Soviet Studies* 30, no. 1 (January 1978): 87-106; Anthony Cordesman, "Iran 'Hegemon' or 'Weakling'" a report for the Center for Strategic and International Studies, Feb. 28, 2007; for a good overview, see Odd Arne Westad, *The Global Cold War: Third World Interventions and the Making of Our Times*, (Cambridge University Press, 2007).

States) in one region of the world are expected to balance against potential hegemony elsewhere (e.g., China or Russia), one should logically expect a counteraction by the state or states being off-shore balanced *against* (an “off-shore defense”). In an era of unipolarity, great powers do not have the material capabilities to physically evict a hegemon or superpower from their region. Therefore, states that wish to achieve their strategic interests must resort to soft balancing if they “wish for ways to fend off [America’s] benign ministrations.”<sup>201</sup>

### **Conclusion**

This chapter endeavored to explain how different systemic configurations affected the balancing strategies adopted by great powers. It also aimed to develop a more rigorous framework that could test whether states are using a soft balancing strategy to counteract U.S. hegemonic ambitions. When determining whether states are utilizing a soft balancing strategy, the level of analysis should focus on regional systems rather than at the international level because of the limited capabilities great powers have in carrying out a global balance-of-power strategy against the reigning hegemon. Soft balancing also relies on balancing against “soft power” capabilities rather than traditional military balances. An expanded and more sophisticated conception of hegemony reveals that it is open to challenges on three fronts and that countering one dimension can reduce the role of the others, or at least restrain them. Finally, from a theoretical standpoint, the framework outlined in this study also integrates soft balancing into the realist paradigm. Security is a main interest of states, but insecurity does not come solely from existential threats. Access to energy resources and a climate of political stability are important

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<sup>201</sup> Waltz, “Structural Realism After the Cold War,” 3.

priorities, too, and each can be undermined by outside powers. Realist theories focus on competition for security and power, and it matters only by degree whether that competition is in the form of military confrontation or normative rivalry.

The next chapter examines Central Asia as a regional security complex, which is the main unit of analysis in a soft balancing strategy, and the strategic vision each of the major players have for the region. The chapter provides a contextual backdrop for the contemporary chess game in Central Asia and links the theoretical insights expounded upon in this chapter to the geopolitical realities currently faced by China and Russia.

## CHAPTER IV

### THE EVOLUTION OF THE CENTRAL ASIAN SECURITY COMPLEX

The current study argues that regional security complexes are likely to be a main component of soft balancing. Indeed, soft balancing theorists have maintained that regionalization is an appealing strategy for great powers trying to insulate themselves from U.S. hegemony (see Chapter Two). Nevertheless, soft balancing theories have taken regionalization as given and provide cursory, if any, analysis of regional dynamics and formation. An underlying assumption of regions as a “balancing” mechanism, thus, is that regions can be conceived of as autonomous units. Construing regions as autonomous does not mean that regions themselves can act or have agency, but that regions can serve as a focal point for balance of power behavior separately from the systemic level. To claim that regions are a “unit of analysis” is significant and must be examined. For the purposes of my study, this chapter utilizes the Regional Security Complex Theory (RSCT) developed by Barry Buzan and Ole Wæver to establish Central Asia as a distinct regional security complex (RSC).

Regarding Central Asia as a RSC is important for three reasons. First, it allows for the study of Central Asia as an autonomous unit separate from the individual states that constitute it; in other words, Central Asia as a whole can be viewed as analytically distinct from its parts. Second, regional security complexes are sites of contestation between great powers and serve as an intermediary between domestic and international levels. From this standpoint, Buzan and Wæver’s conceptual framework parallels that of neoclassical realism, which also focuses on the dynamic between domestic, regional and systemic levels. Third, “the regional level is where the extremes of national and global

security interplay, and where most of the action occurs.”<sup>202</sup> Theorists must go “where most of the action occurs” to test their assumptions and propositions.

The first part of this chapter will review Buzan and Wæver’s RSCT and fit it within the overall soft balancing framework. The second section provides a brief historical overview of Central Asia and its evolution over time. The third section outlines the geopolitical objectives China, Russia and the United States have in the region as well as areas of convergence and divergence among the three great powers. That is followed by an analysis of the internal and external factors that have established Central Asia as its own distinct RSC.<sup>203</sup> It concludes with an assessment of the causal mechanisms driving regionalization and the role external pressures have played in forging a “strategic partnership” between Russia and China.

### **Regional Security Complex Theory**

Regional security complex theory (RSCT) is a useful complement to soft balancing theory and parallels neoclassical realism in many of its theoretical assumptions. In regards to soft balancing, RSC is also complementary because it demonstrates how regions are affected by, and affect, systemic outcomes. “What links the overarching pattern of distribution of power among the global powers to the regional dynamics of RSCs is the mechanism of penetration. Penetration occurs when outside powers make

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<sup>202</sup> Buzan and Wæver, *Regions as Powers*, 43.

<sup>203</sup> Buzan and Wæver consider Central Asia to be a weak subcomplex of a larger Russian RSC that includes Ukraine and the Caucasus states of the former Soviet Union in *Regions and Powers*, 423. They open the possibility of CA becoming its own distinct RSC with greater intervention of other actors such as the U.S. and China. It should be noted that *Regions and Powers* was written in 2003, and much has occurred in Central Asia since then to solidify CA as a distinct regional security complex, as argued in this chapter.

security alignments with states within an RSC.”<sup>204</sup> As a theoretical concept, RSCT draws on an eclectic array of thought, which is similar to the approach taken in this study. As Buzan and Wæver write, “RSCT uses a blend of materialist and constructivist approaches. On the materialist side it uses ideas of bounded territoriality and distribution of power that are close to those in neorealism. ... On the constructivist side ... RSCT focus[es] on the political processes by which security issues get constituted.”<sup>205</sup>

Regional complexes are playing an increasingly important role in contemporary international affairs and have become much more commonplace since the end of the Cold War; they include such diverse groupings as the Baltic Council of Ministers, the Visegrad Group, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization and Mercosur. During the Cold War, “local security systems existed, but they were overshadowed by the ability of external powers to move directly into the local [security] complex with the effect of suppressing the indigenous security dynamic.”<sup>206</sup> The reemergence of regional complexes as a major factor in global politics is largely the outcome of changes at the systemic level, although each individual RSC has evolved individually to address local peculiarities. “This trend is, in part, a response to the fragmentation of great-power blocs, especially in Eastern Europe and Central Asia, but it also reflects the need to react to the pressures created by economic globalization through local means.”<sup>207</sup>

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<sup>204</sup> *Ibid.* 46.

<sup>205</sup> *Ibid.* 4.

<sup>206</sup> Raimo Väyrynen, “Regionalism: Old and New,” *International Studies Review* 5, no. 1, (March 2003), 28.

<sup>207</sup> *Ibid.* 26.

Buzan and Wæver define a regional security complex as “a set of units whose major processes of securitization, desecuritization, or both are so interlinked that their security problems cannot reasonably be analyzed or resolved apart from one another.”<sup>208</sup>

Territoriality is an important part of this definition because threats travel more rapidly over shorter distances than others. Although RSCs do not have to be contiguous, “simple physical adjacency tends to generate more security interaction among neighbors than among states located in different areas. ... The impact of geographical proximity on security interaction is strongest and most obvious in the military, political, societal, and environmental sectors.”<sup>209</sup> Nevertheless, “regions do not just exist as material objects in the world. Geography is not destiny. Instead, regions are social and cognitive constructs that can strike actors as more or less plausible.”<sup>210</sup> To be sure, RSCT recognizes the roles identity plays in regional formation. Polarity, for instance, might affect, but it does not determine, the character of security relations between states. The processes of “securitization” are essentially open, and subject to influence by a host of factors.<sup>211</sup>

These factors include the domestic politics of the states within the region; the state-to-state relations within the region; the region’s interaction with other regions; and the region’s interaction with global powers. Conceptualizing regions along these analytical lines provides a two-way examination of regional formations; RSC creation can be top-down or bottom-up or a combination of both. For example, the motives behind the

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<sup>208</sup> *Ibid.*, 44.

<sup>209</sup> *Ibid.*, 45.

<sup>210</sup> Christopher Hemmer and Peter J. Katzenstein, “Why Is There No NATO in Asia? Collective Identity, Regionalism, and the Origins of Multilateralism,” *International Organization* 56, no. 3 (Summer, 2002), 578.

<sup>211</sup> Buzan and Wæver, *Regions as Powers*.

formation of a RSC could be to combat regional security threats or counter the threat of intervention by a hostile external power. Nevertheless, once established, the RSC could be used to contain either or both threats, even if that was not its initial purpose. Normally, the pattern of regionalism stems from endogenous factors “and outside powers cannot usually define, desecuritize, or reorganize the region. Unipolarity might in its extreme form be an exception to this rule.”<sup>212</sup> Yet, “other things being equal, the expectation is that outside powers will be drawn into a region along the lines of rivalry existing within it. In this way regional patterns of rivalry may line up with, and be reinforced by, global power ones, *even though the global power patterns may have had little or nothing to do with the formation of the regional pattern* [emphasis mine].”<sup>213</sup>

Structural realism’s emphasis on systemic variables can help to explain why external great powers intervene into regions outside their sphere of influence. The rise of a peer competitor is a strong cause for regional intervention. As Mearsheimer argues, a hegemonic power in one region will likely intervene to check the rise of a potential hegemon in another region.<sup>214</sup> “Regional hegemons attempt to check aspiring hegemons in other regions because they fear that a rival great power will be an especially powerful foe that is essentially free to cause trouble in the fearful great power’s backyard. Regional hegemons prefer that there be at least two great powers located together in other regions because their proximity will force them to concentrate their attention on each other rather

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<sup>212</sup> *Ibid.* 47.

<sup>213</sup> *Ibid.* 52.

<sup>214</sup> Mearsheimer, *Tragedy*.

than on the distant hegemon.”<sup>215</sup> Such a policy of pitting two nearby powers against one another could be doomed to failure, however. The presence of an offshore hegemonic power could lead to the formation of regional alignment if the external hegemon’s intentions are perceived to be aggressive or threatening by regional actors.<sup>216</sup>

Constraints and incentives are two other important variables that drive external great power intervention into regions outside their geographical sphere. When constraints are low and incentives are high, great powers are likely to intervene; if constraints are high and incentives low, intervention is unlikely; if constraints are low and incentives are low, intervention is generally unnecessary; and if constraints are high and incentives high, non-intervention or limited intervention is more likely with the exception of occasional limited use of airpower.<sup>217</sup> For example, the existence of the Soviet Union was a barrier to U.S. entry into Central Asia, which was not high on America’s strategic radar in the first place. The collapse of the Soviet Union removed the structural obstacle of another superpower. Furthermore, American interest in the region was heightened after the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks because Central Asia served as a nexus for transnational terrorist groups operating from the Middle East to Afghanistan.<sup>218</sup>

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<sup>215</sup> *Ibid*, 41-42.

<sup>216</sup> Walt, *Origin of Alliances*.

<sup>217</sup> Miller, “Integrated Realism and Hegemonic Military Intervention in Unipolarity.”

<sup>218</sup> The level of constraints and inducements do not necessarily covary. In the case of the Balkan wars, the dissolution of the Soviet Union paved the way for American intervention into Central Europe. One inducement for the United States and NATO was to keep the Balkan crisis from spilling over into Western Europe and sparking a wider war. On the other hand, there were no systemic constraints but little inducement for the United States to intervene in the Rwandan genocide. Unfortunately, the country provided little strategic rationale for U.S. military intervention. Miller, “Integrated Realism and Hegemonic Military Intervention in Unipolarity.”

## **Historical Evolution of Central Asian Security Complex**

Central Asia continues to be shaped by its ancient, imperial and colonial histories. The region is a complex mixture of Persian, Turkic, Mongolian, Slavic and Chinese ethnicities, religion, art, language and culture. The introduction of Islam organized the fragmented and nomadic tribes of the Eurasian steppe into a semblance of a regional unit, although this was contingent on the vagaries of empire. For example, the region could be treated more or less as a unit under the imperial rule of Genghis Khan or Nineteenth Century Muscovy, but was much more inchoate and fractious under the numerous petty khanates that ruled intermittently in the absence of empire. Islam remains central in forming the identity of Central Asian peoples and the rise of “radical” Islam continues to be a threat to China and Russia (and more recently, the United States). In fact, Islam could be considered a centripetal force that organizes Central Asia into a locus of engagement for external and internal actors, both state and non-state (e.g., as an organizing identity for the peoples of the region and as a source of threat for the great powers within and without).<sup>219</sup>

China and Russia have ties to Central Asia that date back millennia. China had intermittent suzerainty in the eastern regions of Central Asia for more than 2,000 years, beginning with the Han dynasty, as caravan traffic carrying Chinese silk to the Roman Empire carved out what eventually became known as the “Silk Road.”<sup>220</sup> China’s grip on the Eastern reaches of Central Asia ended when the Tang dynasty lost control over

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<sup>219</sup> Mesbahi, “Eurasia between Russia, Turkey and Iran.”

<sup>220</sup> Bates Gill and Matthew Oresman, “China’s New Journey to the West: China’s Emergence in Central Asia and Implications for U.S. Interests,” CSIS Freeman Chair in China Studies report, Aug., 2003.

Sinkiang to the Abbasids, but was restored in modern-day Xinjiang under the Manchus and incorporated into the PRC shortly after World War II.

Central Asia long had been an integral part of Russian strategic calculations from the tsars to the Bolsheviks, although Muscovy's entrance postdated Han incursions.<sup>221</sup> The region was a chessboard of the Nineteenth Century imperial rivalry between Great Britain and tsarist Russia in what was called the Great Game. During the Game, Britain feared St. Petersburg had designs, via Afghanistan, on the British crown jewel of India.<sup>222</sup> As a prelude to the Twenty First Century rivalry between the SCO and the United States in Central Asia, the Great Game similarly contributed to the formation of a regional security complex through the policies of extra-regional actors, which generally ignored the internal makeup of the region or the conception its inhabitants had of themselves. "The grand eighteenth- and nineteenth-century concept of Central Asia envisioned the region as a distinct geopolitical whole: Iran, Afghanistan, inner [or western] China, and the territory of the present-day Soviet Central Asian republics, all divided into local tribal domains and khanates."<sup>223</sup>

For analytical purposes, the region can be examined over five historic epochs: pre-Islamic, Islamic, post-Islamic, Soviet and post-Soviet.<sup>224</sup> Through most of these

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<sup>221</sup> Dmitri Trenin, "Russia and Central Asia: Interests, Politics, and Prospects," in *Central Asia: Views from Washington, Moscow and Beijing*, Boris Rumer, ed., (Armonk, N.Y.: ME Sharpe, 2007).

<sup>222</sup> See Edward Ingram, "Preview of the Great Game in Asia: The British Occupation of Perim and Aden in 1799," *Middle Eastern Studies* 9, no. 1 (Jan., 1973): 3-18; Robert A. Huttenback, "The 'Great Game' in the Pamirs and the Hindu-Kush: The British Conquest of Hunza and Nagar," *Modern Asian Studies* 9, no. 1 (1975): 1-29; T. G. Otte, "Great Britain, Germany, and the Far-Eastern Crisis of 1897-8," *The English Historical Review* 110, no. 439 (Nov., 1995): 1157-1179.

<sup>223</sup> Graham E. Fuller, "The Emergence of Central Asia," *Foreign Policy*, no. 78 (Spring, 1990), 49.

<sup>224</sup> These "epochs" are simply used for heuristic purposes.

major historical periods, Central Asia served as nexus between steppe and pastoral peoples, and the main east-west trade route, the Silk Road, intersected the northern and southern routes connecting the Middle East to India and to the northern forest-steppe region. “In this way Central Asia became heir to both Perso-Islamic tradition of the Middle East and Mongol heritage of the steppe, and was open to the influence from major cultural regions of the pre-modern world – China, India, and the Islamic world.”<sup>225</sup>

Although the region was divided throughout history by culture, language, religion, nationality, empire and statehood, Hooman Peimani argues that the history of modern Central Asia is that of a region, not of five separate political entities (or states):

Over time Central Asia has been ruled either by foreign empires, which incorporated the region into their territories as a single political unit, or by a few regional multiethnic states. Rulers of these states never identified themselves with specific ethnic groups. As a result, for most of their history, the indigenous ethnic groups of this region have seen themselves as members of a regional community sharing the same fate, rather than as citizens of different states. Despite their recent independence, there are indications that Central Asians will share more or less the same fate, which will be that of the region.<sup>226</sup>

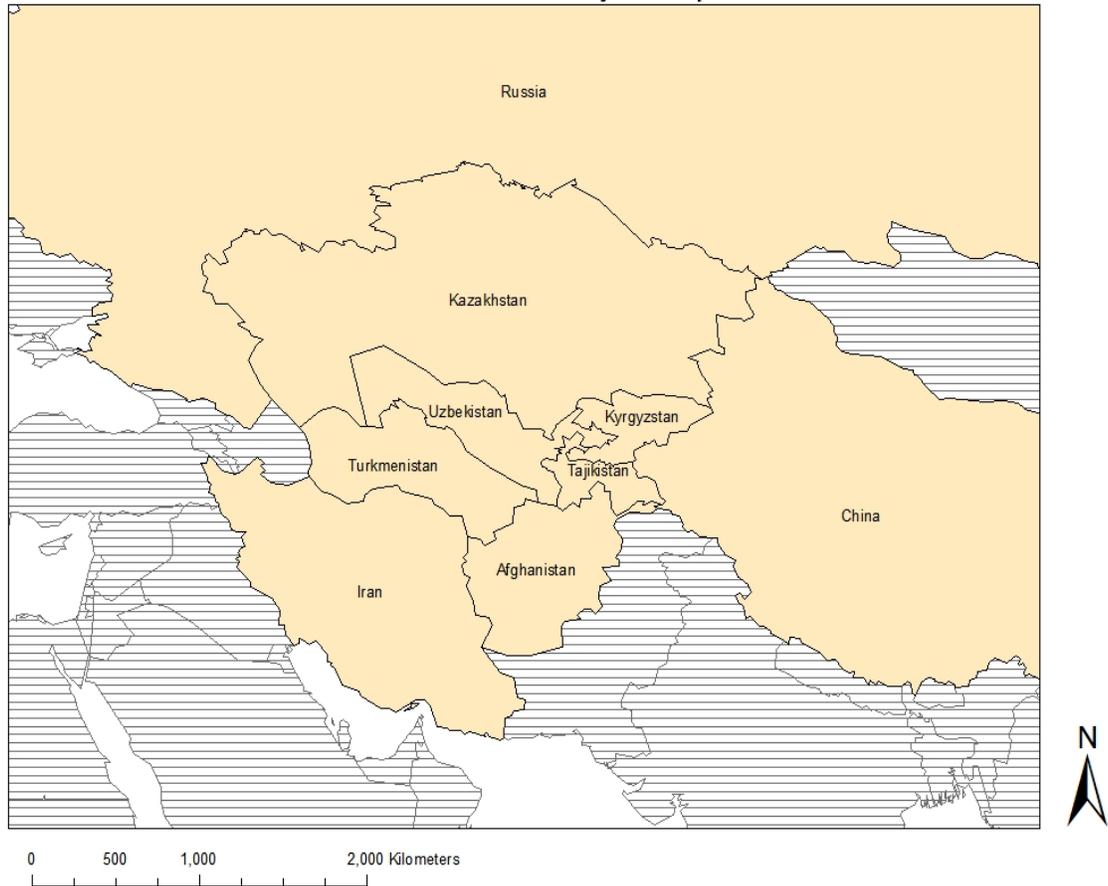
If past is prelude, then the people of Central Asian will continue to share the same fate, at least for the present. As in the past, the region continues to be shaped by extra-regional actors, which include both familiar and new faces. Since its beginnings as a region, complexity has marked the evolution of Central Asia, but external forces have continued to bind it into a complex.

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<sup>225</sup> Beatrice F. Manz, *Central Asia in Historical Perspective*, (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1994), 4.

<sup>226</sup> Hooman Peimani, *Regional Security and the Future of Central Asia: the Competition of Iran, Turkey and Russia*, (Westport, Conn.: Praegar, 1998), 23.

## Central Asian Security Complex



*Photo courtesy of Diana Ter-Ghazaryan, GIS Coordinator, Florida International University*

### *Pre-Islamic Period*

The settled areas of Central Asia have been civilized for more than 4,000 years. The Persian Achaemenid Empire (330-59 BCE.) was the first recorded political unit to rule the region in the pre-Islamic era.<sup>227</sup> The region played a significant role in the political affairs of Persia, including its ancient rivalry with Macedonia, under Alexander the Great, for control of trade routes linking India and China to the classical

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<sup>227</sup> *Ibid.*

Mediterranean. After the invasion of the Huns in the Sixth Century C.E., the areas that make up modern Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan were the only remaining part of the Persian Empire under the Sassanid dynasty.<sup>228</sup> The arrival of Turkic-speaking peoples from Inner Mongolia in the Sixth Century “Turkified” the region and brought nearly the entire Eurasian steppe under Turkic rule for three centuries.<sup>229</sup> Under the Seljuk Khanate, the Turkic tribes established control over the major cultural centers along the Silk Road until the khanate’s downfall at the hands of the Mongol Golden Horde in 1141.<sup>230</sup> As an ancestor to the Turks, the Seljuks established an ethnic link between Central Asia and modern-day Turkey.<sup>231</sup> Finally, from the Fifteenth to Sixteenth Century, the ethnolinguistic trend in Central Asia transformed the predominantly Persian-speaking region into a Turkic-speaking one. “The last great nomadic wave from the Kipchak Steppe introduced a critical mass of Turkic and Turkicized Mongolian nomads into Central Asia, a portion of whom eventually settled in the oasis towns and merged with the sedentary population.”<sup>232</sup>

### *Islamic Period*

The Arabs entered Central Asia after their rapid conquest of the Sassanid Empire in 651 CE and until the arrival of the Golden Horde in the Twelfth Century. After nearly a century of dominance, the Arab conquerors brought the region firmly into the Islamic

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<sup>228</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>229</sup> Manz, *Central Asia in Historical Perspective*, 6.

<sup>230</sup> Peter L. Roudik, *The History of the Central Asian Republics*, (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 2007), 35

<sup>231</sup> Peinmani, *Regional Security and the History of Central Asia*, 25.

<sup>232</sup> Maria Eva Subtelny, “The Symbiosis of Turk and Tajik,” in *Central Asia in Historical Perspective*, 50.

fold and the institutionalization of Sufi Islam became an integral part of the political, social and cultural life of Central Asia.<sup>233</sup> With Central Asia in its grasp, the Abbasid Caliphate expanded Islamic rule to the borders of modern Mongolia and Sinkiang, converting the Turkic-speaking peoples in the region and bringing Islam to the doorstep of Tang China.<sup>234</sup> The continued expansion of Islam to the East erupted into battle in 751 CE between the Tang dynasty and Arab forces under Ziyad ibn Salih, the governor of Samarkand. The resulting Arab victory changed the regional dynamics for centuries, and established the region's Islamic identity among the Turko-Mongolian peoples, which outlasted Soviet communism. "The Arabs' victory had more lasting and far-reaching consequences than this relatively obscure battle [in 751] seemed to promise, for China never again ventured to claim mastery of territories beyond Sinkiang – with the minor exceptions of the Ching (Manchus)."<sup>235</sup>

The Arabs Islamicized the Turkic, Mongol and Persian ethnic groups of the steppe, but the Abbasid Empire was eventually overrun in the Twelfth Century by the nomadic tribes of the Golden Horde, led by Genghis Khan. Unlike the Arab invasion five centuries earlier, "the Mongols did not impose their culture, religion, language or government on the people of Central Asia. Soon after the Mongol invasion, the initial destruction and shock of conquest were substituted by unprecedented rise in cultural

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<sup>233</sup> Svat Soucek, *A History of Inner Asia*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 56 and Alexander Bennigson and W.S. Enders, *Muslims of the Soviet Empire*, (London: Hurst and Co., 1985).

<sup>234</sup> *Ibid.* 67. Also see Lillian Craig Harris, "Xinjiang, Central Asia and the Implications for China's Policy in the Islamic World," *The China Quarterly* 133, (March 1993): 111-129.

<sup>235</sup> Soucek, *A History of Inner Asia*, 68.

communication, expanded trade, and improved civilization.”<sup>236</sup> Tamerlane, a descendant of the Genghissid dynasty, reinforced the Turco-Mongolian tradition of the steppe, with Samarkand as its seat. Bound to the East by Sinkiang (Xinjiang) on the Chinese frontier and to the West by Arab and Persian lands of the Middle East, the region became a center of civilization in the ancient Islamic world. Islam also served as an organizing force for the conquerors of the region. Although the Turco-Mongolian tribes shared common cultural, linguistic and religious histories separate from the Arabs, the heirs of the Great Khan continued their conversion to Islam that began under the Abbasids in an effort to unify a diverse group of people. Nevertheless, the nomadic lifestyle of the steppe made unification extremely difficult.

#### *Post-Islamic Period*

Although organized under the rule of the descendants of the Great Khan, the nomadic lifestyle of the steppe did not lend itself to unity and the khanates failed to join together, leaving them vulnerable to colonization by Russia and Manchu China in the Nineteenth Century. By the late Eighteenth Century, Russia had occupied the khanates of Khiva, Bukhara, and Kokand and began to incorporate them into the Russian empire while China completed its annexation of the Uighur-inhabited territories of Xinjiang.<sup>237</sup> The rapid colonization of Central Asia by the two great powers, particularly Russia, touched off the mad imperial scramble historians later termed the Great Game.

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<sup>236</sup> Roudik, *The History of the Central Asian Republics*, 39.

<sup>237</sup> Vadim Medish, “Sino-Soviet Central Asia: National Unification Versus Political Division,” *Russian Review* 22, no. 1, (Jan. 1963): 56-67.

During the Great Game, Mackinder's logic of the Heartland as the "geographical pivot of history" governed the region's dynamics.<sup>238</sup> Russia's expansion into Central Asia ultimately placed the Russian Tsar in conflict with the British Crown, sparking a rivalry that endured for decades. During the scramble for Central Asian supremacy, the region was shaped largely by outside forces jockeying for position within the larger geopolitical balance of power. "British India was by the mid-nineteenth century stretching ever northward towards the great barrier ranges. On the other side of the mountains, another power, Imperial Russia, was advancing inexorably towards the same lofty peaks, and fear of foreign invasion was another prime cause for territorial aggrandizement. It can be said with considerable assurance that anxiety, first over French and then over Russian invasion, was the chief influence on British Indian foreign policy throughout the nineteenth century."<sup>239</sup> In fact, many of the same concerns the Russian foreign policy and military establishment has about the United States today – military, economic and normative – applied to Britain of the Nineteenth Century.

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<sup>238</sup> Halford J. Mackinder, *Democratic Ideals and Reality*, (Washington, D.C.: National Defense University Press, 1942). Also see Pascal Venier, "The Geographical Pivot of History and Early Twentieth Century Geopolitical Culture," *The Geographical Journal* 170, no. 4, (Dec. 2004): 330-336.

<sup>239</sup> Huttenback, "The 'Great Game' in the Pamirs and the Hindu-Kush", 1.

The Great Game in Asia was played by the British for two reasons, one strategic, the other cultural. By 1829, Lord Ellenborough and the Duke of Wellington, the two men who began the game, were alarmed by the expansion of the Russian empire in Asia; fearing that whenever Britain's interests were opposed to Russia's in Europe, the Russians would threaten to invade India. They wanted both to contain this expansion, and to counter any threat of invasion, as far from India as possible. The means they chose were commercial, to open the Indus to navigation in order to flood central Asia with British goods. In the heady atmosphere of the early Nineteenth Century they assumed that Britain's goods would be followed by her values; what interested Ellenborough was the political not the commercial gain. Khiva and Bokhara would prefer to associate with progressive Britain rather than backward Russia. They would appreciate that Britain, unlike Russia, wished to preserve and not to threaten their independence.<sup>240</sup>

Although nowhere near as acute as the Great Game, the current regional balance of power shares many of that period's characteristics. The region was a site of contestation between the major powers of that day, including extra-regional actors such as Britain, Persia and Germany, and the outcome of the regional balance had an effect on the larger systemic balance of power. Geopolitics, economics, norms and the military balance played a role in externally forging a regional security complex.

As Bruce R. Kuniholm maintains, the scramble of the Great Game period offers lessons about contemporary dynamics in Central Asia. The history of the region's geopolitics, he argues, could provide a "sea change in perspective and offer some instructive cautionary observations to U.S. officials."<sup>241</sup> For example, in the Nineteenth Century, Kuniholm writes that "the expansion of British sea power in the Indian Ocean and Persian Gulf and the expansion of Russian troops into the Transcaucasus and Central

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<sup>240</sup> Ingram, "Preview of the Great Game in Asia," 3-4.

<sup>241</sup> Bruce R. Kuniholm, "9/11, the Great Game, and the Vision Thing: The Need for (And Elements of) a More Comprehensive Bush Doctrine," *The Journal of American History* 89, no. 2, History and September 11: A Special Issue (Sep. 2002), 427.

Asia eventuated in a struggle for power across a region that stretched from the Balkans to Afghanistan. Each great power – driven by the dictates of empire, motivated by fears of dangers both imagined and real, or trying to ‘contain’ a rival by defensive action – sought to serve its perceived interests and clashed with the other.”<sup>242</sup> Indeed, similar fears resonate today.<sup>243</sup>

### *The Soviet Period*

During the period of Soviet rule, the Central Asian republics were basically an appendage of the Russian state. Although technically independent, and like the other republics, constitutionally allowed to secede from the Union, the five republics of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan were thoroughly under the iron fist of Stalin by the time of the Second World War. The Communist Party monopolized all aspects of social and political life in Central Asia, while culture and economic development were subjected to communist ideology from Moscow.<sup>244</sup>

Attempts by the indigenous people of the region to maintain their historical roots or national identities were declared signs of backwardness by the Bolsheviks. Russification was the primary policy used by the Soviet Union to suppress religion and bring European family patterns, particularly emancipation of women, to the region. The imposition of the Cyrillic alphabet and Russian language “helped to establish cultural ties between Russia and Central Asia and performed an ideological function of making all previously

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<sup>242</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>243</sup> Mesbahi, “*Russian Foreign Policy and Security in Central Asia and the Caucasus.*”

<sup>244</sup> Alexandre Bennigson and Marie Broxup, *The Islamic Threat to the Soviet State* (New York: St Martin's, 1983).

published books, mostly of religious and anti-Soviet content, obsolete and not available to the mosques.”<sup>245</sup>

Soviet leadership also sought to reinforce its rule in the region through cultural hegemony, a theme that echoes to the present. Michael Rywkin, for example, called Stalin’s nationality policy in the region the “teacher-pupil relationship,” because, in 1929, one of the Soviet leaders explained the aims of Soviet policy in Central Asia as “teaching the people of the Kyrgyz Steppe, the small Uzbek cotton grower, and the Turkmen gardener the ideals of the Russian worker.”<sup>246</sup> The paternalistic relationship continues today, with Moscow still the major political, economic and military influence in the region and the Central Asian republics still subordinate to a neo-colonialist Russia.

#### *The Post-Soviet Period*

The dissolution of the Soviet state is a unique phenomenon in history given that the center was not pulled apart from the periphery, but rather imploded on itself.<sup>247</sup> This historical peculiarity left the small Central Asian republics responsible to govern themselves, a role they had little experience in carrying out. The confusion in the aftermath of dissolution unleashed a number of crosscurrents in Central Asia. Submerged nationalistic aspirations, including pan-Turkic and pan-Islamic movements, had been growing throughout the post-Cold War period. The transformation from Soviet identities to nationalists ones, however, crosscut the former Republics’ reliance on Russia in the

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<sup>245</sup> Roudik, *The History of the Central Asian Republics*, 135.

<sup>246</sup> *Ibid.* 133-34.

<sup>247</sup> Adeed Dawisha and Karen Dawisha, eds., *The Making of Foreign Policy in Russia and the New States of Eurasia*, (New York: M.E. Sharpe, 1995). Also see Richard Pipes, “Human Nature and the Fall of Communism,” *Bulletin of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences* 49, no. 4 (Jan. 1996): 39.

military, security and economic sectors. “The initial euphoria of independence was coupled with a sense of bitterness and distaste at being treated by Russia in the early stages of forming the Commonwealth of Independent States as secondary partners of lesser importance than its Slav European neighbors. In a bid to stand on its own, the Central Asian leaderships preferred to not follow the Russian ‘jump into economic uncertainty,’ and endeavored to preserve in a slightly modified form the old Soviet-type economy.”<sup>248</sup>

The ethnic and national fallout from the breakup of the USSR were of severe concern for the Kremlin, which feared for the safety of Russian ethnics living in the former republics. An advisor to then-President Boris Yeltsin lamented that one Republic with a sizeable Russian population, Kazakhstan, “could soon degenerate ‘into one thousand Yugoslavs.’”<sup>249</sup> Ethnic and civil flareups did erupt in the post-Soviet period, most noticeably the Tajik civil war from 1992-1997 and deadly Osh riots of June 1990 in Kyrgyzstan between irredentist Uzbek factions and Kyrgyz nationals. Despite independence, the smaller states remained reliant upon Moscow. The Soviet Union created the Central Asian republics in part to destroy the old identities that followed the trade routes and waterways, a practice continued by modern-day Russia. The objective was partly a failure because the old identities are still crucial in defining a Central Asian identity, but also a success because the new states help determine the discussion about

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<sup>248</sup> Vyacheslav Belokrenitsky, “Russia and Greater Central Asia,” *Asian Survey* 34, no. 12, (Dec. 1994), 1096

<sup>249</sup> Anthony Hyman, “Moving out of Moscow’s Orbit: The Outlook for Central Asia,” *International Affairs* 69, no. 2, (April 1993), 289.

regional entities today.<sup>250</sup> “The combination of these factors has proven to be problematic as the Central Asian states are too weak to consolidate all the ethnic groups within their borders and the ethnic borders are so diffuse that they can not provide a base for a strong nation-state.”<sup>251</sup>

Although ethnic tensions at times have been high, and national and religious ideals among the smaller republics endure, they should not be exaggerated. Centrifugal forces are unlikely to break up the security complex as long as its affairs are tightly interwoven with those of its larger neighbors. Furthermore, Russia remains a major pole of power in the region and main guarantor of security in post-Soviet space.<sup>252</sup> The next section explores the role Russia, and increasingly China and the United States, play in organizing the Central Asian security complex.

### **Central Asia as a Regional Complex**

If a regional security complex is defined as a set of units whose security interests are so interlinked that they cannot reasonably be analyzed or resolved apart from one another, then Central Asia clearly meets the criteria. Initially, as Buzan and Wæver point out, Central Asia was a subcomplex of the Russian super-RSC, which included most of the former Soviet republics under the auspices of the Commonwealth of Independent

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<sup>250</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>251</sup> Niklas Swanström, “The Prospects for Multilateral Conflict Prevention and Regional Cooperation in Central Asia,” *Central Asian Survey* 23, no. 1, (March 2004), 42.

<sup>252</sup> Roy Allison, “Regionalism, Regional Structures and Security Management in Central Asia,” *International Affairs* 80, no. 3, (May 2004): 463-483; and Roy Allison, “Strategic Reassertion in Russia’s Central Asian Policy,” *International Affairs* 80, no. 2, (March 2004): 277-293.

States (CIS).<sup>253</sup> However, the CIS regime was ineffective in maintaining regional order and quickly became obsolete. As one observer put it: “one problem with the CIS was that European, Caucasian, and Central Asian sections had virtually no common interests. Plans for economic integration could never be realized; some states like Belarus and Kazakhstan sought closer economic integration with Russia, while others looked to Europe or the U.S.”<sup>254</sup>

The creation of the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO), which became effective on 28 April 2003, delinked Central Asian security from the overarching Russian RSC, and established the region’s autonomy separate from its predecessor, the Collective Security Treaty (CST). The CSTO’s “mission was to combat terrorism, drugs trafficking, and Taliban influences from Afghanistan. Moreover, it was a response to what was perceived as American intrusion into Russia's security zone in Central Asia.”<sup>255</sup> With the disintegration of the CIS apparatus, which was mainly the result of Russian weakness in the 1990s, the CSTO became the major vehicle for Russian influence in Central Asia and the umbrella for which a regional concert was developed.<sup>256</sup> Unlike the SCO, however, the CSTO is a formal military alliance.

Whereas the CSTO is a vehicle for Moscow to protect its periphery, it is also considered another buffer to U.S. penetration of the former Soviet sphere. Furthermore, the organization has bound Central Asian military elites closer to their Russian

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<sup>253</sup> Leszek Buszynski, “Russia and the CIS in 2003: Regional Reconstruction,” *Asian Survey* 44, no. 1, (Jan.- Feb., 2004): 158-167

<sup>254</sup> *Ibid.*, 161.

<sup>255</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>256</sup> Gregory Gleason, “Inter-State Cooperation in Central Asia from the CIS to the Shanghai Forum,” *Europe-Asia Studies* 53, no. 7 (Nov., 2001): 1077-1095.

counterparts and given Moscow greater control over the members' military establishments. "The CSTO since its formation in 2002 has served not only to train Central Asian officers in Russian military academies and the Central Asian militaries in anti-insurgent tactics at its *Rubezh* (frontier) military exercises but is also a framework for delivery of both Soviet-era and more modern military equipment to the Central Asian militaries at Russian internal prices."<sup>257</sup>

Some critics of the Sino-Russo axis argue that Russia uses the CSTO not only to counter American influence in Central Asia, but to limit Chinese advances in the region via the SCO as well. However, the CSTO has been much less effective than the SCO at excluding American influence from Central Asia. Moscow's weakness in this regard has pushed it to rely more on the SCO.<sup>258</sup> "Russia's failure to maximize the CSTO's role in removing American influence from the region has been offset by its success in creating a multilateral opposition to America's presence in the region inside the SCO."<sup>259</sup>

The specter of terrorism and Islamic radicalism also has been a main organizing principle for the Central Asian security complex since the end of the USSR. The five smaller republics, China, India, Iran, Pakistan, Russia, Turkey and the United States all view the region as wellspring of instability and extremism.<sup>260</sup> The attacks of September 11, 2001 changed the power relations within the region and "made Central Asia the

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<sup>257</sup> Alexander Frost, "The Collective Security Treaty Organization, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization and Russia's Strategic Goals in Central Asia," *China and Eurasia Forum Quarterly* 7, no. 3 (2009), 84.

<sup>258</sup> Frost, "The Collective Security Treaty Organization," and Buszynski, "Russia and the CIS in 2003."

<sup>259</sup> Frost, "The Collective Security Treaty Organization," 97.

<sup>260</sup> Brahma Chellaney, "Fighting Terrorism in Southern Asia: The Lessons of History," *International Security* 26, no. 3, (Winter 2001-2002): 94-116.

epicenter of geopolitical shocks on a global scale and redefined the political situation surrounding Central Asia.”<sup>261</sup>

However, regional formation in Central Asia is not limited to the threat of terrorism and radicalism alone; energy security, pipeline politics, trade and economic development also factor heavily into the equation.<sup>262</sup> Geopolitical rivalry also centered on the normative agenda that would define Central Asian ideology and political identity. For much of the first decade of Central Asian independence, Western policies have been driven largely by energy. This focus was also defined in a zero-sum, geopolitical context, with an emphasis on securing export routes along a “carefully constructed strategic map aimed at bypassing Russia and isolating Iran.”<sup>263</sup> “Through the 1990s, the promotion of Turkey as a key U.S. proxy force in the region was also designed to bolster broader geopolitical objectives of countering Russia and Iran and campaigning for pro-western, secular democratization.”<sup>264</sup>

The remainder of this chapter examines the interplay between the domestic, regional and international dynamics that have forged the Central Asian RSC. First, it investigates the domestic interests of China, Russia and the United States in the region. That is followed by a review of the external factors that have reinforced the Central Asian complex into one of the world’s most complex and contested regions. Lastly, it demonstrates that, despite divergent interests among China and Russia, the presence of

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<sup>261</sup> Boris Rumer, “The Powers in Central Asia,” *Survival* 44, no. 3, (Autumn 2002), 67.

<sup>262</sup> Ramakant Dwivedi, “China’s Central Asian Policy in Recent Times,” *China and Eurasia Forum Quarterly* 4, no. 4, (2006): 139-159 and Tianshu Chu, Fereidun Fesharaki and Kang Wut, “China’s Energy in Transition: Regional and Global Implications,” *Asian Economic Policy Review* 1, no. 1, (2006): 134-152.

<sup>263</sup> Giragosian, “The Strategic Central Asian Arena,” 140.

<sup>264</sup> *Ibid.*

even a small American footprint in Central Asia has pushed Beijing and Moscow to soft balance the United States.

## **Domestic Interests**

### *China*

China's broad goals in Central Asia are to strengthen security cooperation, fight terrorism, promote regional stability, extend economic and trade relations, broaden cooperation with Russia, create a new diplomatic image of China and promote multipolarity.<sup>265</sup> Increasingly, water security is becoming a strategic concern for the PRC as well, and Central Asia will be looked to as source for dehydrated regions of inner China.<sup>266</sup> Central Asia also is viewed as an important future source of energy for China's rapidly growing economy. "China's rising imports of oil at present and natural gas in the future have made energy security one of the top concerns for the government."<sup>267</sup> For some analysts, the formation of the SCO can be interpreted as an effort by Beijing to secure energy security in Central Asia.<sup>268</sup>

Equally important for China is the rise of separatism in its restless Xinjiang province, which makes up one-sixth of China's territory and holds natural resources critical to the PRC's development. In fact, pacifying the region is a necessary component of China's geopolitical interests in Central Asia. Any pipeline infrastructure from Central

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<sup>265</sup> Ren Dongfeng, "The Central Asia Policies of China, Russia, and the USA, and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization process: A View from China," paper published by the Stockholm International Research Institute (SIPRI): Oct.-Dec. 2003. Also see, Huasheng Zhao, "Central Asia in China's Diplomacy," in *Central Asia: Views from Washington, Moscow and Beijing*..

<sup>266</sup> Li Lifan, "Competition for Water Resources in Central Asia and its Impact on China," *China and Eurasian Forum Quarterly* 7, no. 4 (2009): 23-31.

<sup>267</sup> Chu *et al* "China's Energy in Transition," 134.

<sup>268</sup> For example, see Tanaka, "Global and Regional Geo-strategic Implications of China's Emergence."

Asia would have to pass through Xinjiang, and thus is susceptible to sabotage from Uighur separatists.<sup>269</sup> Uighur secessionists also are linked to transnational terrorist organizations such as al Qaida and frequently find sanctuary with their co-ethnics in border zones along Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan. “The region has historically shielded China from invasion from the Central Asian steppes and today provides areas of low population where military maneuvers and nuclear testing can be conducted.”<sup>270</sup>

Furthermore, China’s “strategic rear” is crucial to its overall state security. “China’s strategic focus will remain in the southeast in the foreseeable future, with western China continuing to be the ‘rear’ in China’s master strategy for many years to come.

*Nevertheless, only if the rear is secured will the strategic frontline be free from worry ...*

As the squeeze on China’s strategic space intensifies, a stable western region takes on additional importance as a strategic support for the country. *The strategic significance of western China is self-evident* [emphasis mine].<sup>271</sup>

Finally, identity plays a role in reinforcing Central Asia as a strategic locale in Beijing’s strategic vision, which demonstrates the significance norms play in the national interest of states.

For over 2,000 years, control over the region has been perceived by the ruling powers of China as their “right,” an assertion of sovereignty which is today every bit as emotion-ridden as the PRC’s claim to Taiwan. This position illustrates Chinese self-identity, another important ingredient in Xinjiang’s importance to China. Secondly, Central Asia has historically been a stage upon which the heirs of Confucian civilization have played

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<sup>269</sup> Herold J. Wiens, “The Historical and Geographical Role of Urumchi, Capital of Chinese Central Asia,” *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 53, no. 4 (Dec., 1963): 441-464.

<sup>270</sup> Harris, “Xinjiang, Central Asia and the Implications for China’s Policy in the Islamic World,” 115.

<sup>271</sup> Michael Clarke, “Making the Crooked Straight: China’s Strategy of ‘Peaceful Rise’ and its Central Asian Dimension,” *Asian Security* 4, no. 2, (2008), 130.

out their image of themselves, an image of cultural superiority, benevolent rule and civilizing mission. ... Suppression of ethnic languages and history in Xinjiang is not related to political expediency alone.<sup>272</sup>

### *Russia*

Similar to Beijing, Moscow has sought to combat Islamic terrorism and radicalism and foster stability along its southern flank.<sup>273</sup> Viewing Islam as a threat is not a new phenomenon, however; since the tsarist period, Russia has been concerned with pan-Turkic and/or pan-Islamic movements in the region.<sup>274</sup> Russia also wants to reassert its influence in the region and maintain control over Central Asian pipeline routes for transportation of oil and gas from the Caspian Sea basin.<sup>275</sup> Furthermore, the region remains central to Russian military strategy. Under the CSTO, for example, Moscow continues to train, arm and station troops in the region.<sup>276</sup> Indeed, the CSTO has allowed Russia to increase its control over Central Asian military elites through its joint staff and command structure. On a planning level, all CSTO military exercises are proposed and planned by the Anti-Terrorism Center (ATC) in Bishkek, which is officially supervised

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<sup>272</sup> Harris, "Xinjiang, Central Asia and the Implications for China's Policy in the Islamic World," 115. Peter Hays Gries makes a similar point about Chinese identity in "Forecasting U.S.-China Relations, 2015," 73. "Chinese identity today involves an ethnocultural nationalism that highlights a pure Han ethnicity and pride in China's '5,000 years of Civilization.' But it is also a wounded nationalism that is currently confronting the long suppressed trauma that China experienced at the hands of Western and especially Japanese imperialism during the 'Century of Humiliation' from the mid-nineteenth to the mid-twentieth centuries."

<sup>273</sup> Mohiaddin Mesbahi, "Russia and the Geopolitics of the Muslim South" in Mesbahi, ed., *Central Asia and the Caucasus after the Soviet Union*, (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1994), Chapter 14.

<sup>274</sup> Allen S. Whiting, "Sinkiang and Sino-Soviet Relations," *The China Quarterly* 3, no. 1, (July-Sept. 1960): 32-41.

<sup>275</sup> Ren Dongfeng, "The Central Asia Policies of China, Russia, and the USA." On Russian desire to control Central Asian energy resources, see Martha Brill Olcott, "The Great Powers in Central Asia," *Current History* 104, (Oct. 2005): 331-335.

<sup>276</sup> Frost, "The Collective Security Organization, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, and Russia's Strategic Goals in Central Asia."

by the Russian Federal Security Service (FSB) director. “Given the role of former security officials in Russia and their personal sense of loyalty to Russian Prime Minister Vladimir Putin, clear formal and informal links exist between the ATC and the highest members of the Russian government.”<sup>277</sup>

Regional concerns go beyond the military and security sectors. Russia is re-establishing strong economic and political links to the region that frayed after the implosion of the Soviet Union by defining Central Asian interests and priorities and concentrating the region’s resources in Moscow’s favor. To do this, Moscow has sought to develop pro-Russian integration projects and to overcome the inefficient forms of cooperation within the CIS framework.<sup>278</sup> However, the CIS arrangements did not fully realize the objectives of promoting regional Eurasian cooperation. Since 2000, the Central Asian states had made efforts to improve the CIS in an effort to create a more stable regime for post-independence inter-state cooperation. Irrespective of these efforts, “outbreaks of insurgency and terrorism have created a region-wide sense of alarm that has, in turn, contributed to a renewed sense of urgency to find formulas to enhance cooperation in the region.”<sup>279</sup>

Geopolitically, Central Asia could link Russia in a “triangle” consisting of China and India that could form a competing bloc with the United States and EU. Such a strategic alliance would buoy the Russian arms industry – China and India purchase

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<sup>277</sup> *Ibid.* 86.

<sup>278</sup> Andrei Kazanstevev, “Russian Policy in Central Asia and the Caspian Sea Region,” *Europe-Asia Studies* 60, no. 6, (Aug. 2008): 1073-1088.

<sup>279</sup> Gleason, “Inter-State Cooperation in Central Asia from the CIS to the Shanghai Forum,” 1077.

approximately 70 percent, or \$3 billion annually, of total Russian arms exports.<sup>280</sup>

Although such prognostications might be premature, India could play a pivotal swing role in the Central Asian balance of power by becoming a rival or a partner of China and/or Russia or shifting to the West. “This is why Indian commentators consider that ‘India can be an important swing player’ in the evolving international system; able to cooperate with Russia and to an extent China in their strategic trilateral arrangement; yet also courted by the United States and Japan in their particular alignments.”<sup>281</sup>

Finally, similar to China, the civilizing mission plays a strong role in Russian policy in Central Asia. Moscow views itself as a uniquely Eurasian actor, which can be a dynamic agent of ideational change in the region. Mesbahi makes this case when he describes how Modern Russia seeks to transform the ‘Asian wing’ of the Eurasian entity into a pan-Euro-Atlantic one. “The ‘immature’ states of the former Soviet Union (i.e. Central Asia) ... which ‘belong to another world,’ will by the persistence and dynamism of an ‘enlightened Russian big brother’ become part of the Euro-Atlantic family. The ‘continuer state,’ now ‘civilized’ and ‘normal,’ will shed not only her Asiatic baggage but will become the bridge that transforms the Central Asian part of the Union.”<sup>282</sup>

#### *United States*

For much of American history, Central Asia has not registered on the strategic radar of U.S. officials. Remote and inscrutable, the region was too distant to matter much for

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<sup>280</sup> Martin Malek, “Russia Policy Toward South Asia,” *Asian Survey* 44, no. 3, (May-June 2004): 384-400.

<sup>281</sup> David Scott, “Sino-Indian Predicaments for the Twenty-First Century,” *Asian Security* 4, no. 3, (2008), 263.

<sup>282</sup> Mesbahi, “Russian Foreign Policy and Security in Central Asia and the Caucasus,” 183.

American security and too impenetrable during the time of the Soviet empire to be of interest.<sup>283</sup> Yet, after the demise of the Soviet bloc, the region slowly began to open to American capital and, much later, political and military objectives.<sup>284</sup> American strategic interest in Central Asia underwent a radical transformation after the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks. “Some in the United States, as elsewhere, see Central Asia as a pivotal point in global politics, a bridge between east and west and between north and south, as well as, in the terms of Mackinder, the heartland of the heartland. Some have seen it, in contrast, as a backwater lying between essentially marginal regions—the periphery of the periphery. Perspectives on the centrality of the region shift over time. For the United States, the attacks of September 11 shifted Central Asia from the marginalia of foreign policy to its centre.”<sup>285</sup>

As suggested by Miller, constraints and incentives factor into the calculus of American strategic interests in Central Asia. During the Cold War, the cost of intervening in the region was prohibitive. The collapse of the Soviet Union significantly lowered the costs of intervention, and the strategic necessity to base troops in the region to fight the war in Afghanistan greatly raised incentives.<sup>286</sup> Currently, U.S. objectives in the region are to fight terrorism, open the energy-rich Caspian basin to American capital and

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<sup>283</sup> Rumer, “The United States and Central Asia: In Search of a Strategy,” in *Central Asia: Views from Washington, Moscow and Beijing*.

<sup>284</sup> Sharam Akbarzadeh, “Keeping Central Asia Stable,” *Third World Quarterly* 25, no. 4, (2004): 689-705.

<sup>285</sup> S. Neil MacFarlane. “The United States and Regionalism in Central Asia,” *International Affairs* 80, no. 3, (May 2004), 450.

<sup>286</sup> Miller argues that initially, the United States decided against intervention into Central Asia shortly after the collapse of the Soviet Union because it did not want to antagonize Russia. However, this viewpoint changed after the September 11, 2001 attacks on the United States. See Miller, “Integrated Realism and Hegemonic Intervention” in *Perspectives on Structural Realism*, 48-49.

development, support human rights and foster democratization.<sup>287</sup> Key to this strategy has been the stationing of American troops in Kyrgyzstan, which has been an important command post for antiterrorist operations in Afghanistan. American security concerns, too, are tightly interwoven into its normative agenda, although some might question the sincerity to which the United States values human rights and civil liberties when juxtaposed against its core national interests.

The primary strategic goal of the United States is to see the development of independent democratic and stable states, committed to the kind of political and economic reform that is essential to modern societies and on the path to integration and to the world economy. The United States follows a strategy in Central Asia (and elsewhere) that is based on simultaneous pursuit of two related goals. The first of these goals is security. The United States cooperates with the Central Asian republics to provide them with an alternative to their Russian security umbrella. U.S. policymakers believe that American models of democratization could bring stability to the smaller states, and thus open them to Western norms and investment, particularly in the energy sector. Second, the development of Central Asia's economic potential, including its extensive natural resources, requires free market economy reforms and foreign direct investment. Such a normative agenda would integrate Central Asia into the world economy.<sup>288</sup>

More disturbing for Moscow and Beijing, however, is the potential for the American presence in Central Asia to function as an offshore balancer against Chinese hegemony

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<sup>287</sup> All of these goals are cited throughout the 2006 and 2010 National Security Strategies of the United States. See 2006 NSS <http://www.whitehouse.gov/nsc/nss/2006/sectionII.html> and 2010 NSS [http://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/rss\\_viewer/national\\_security\\_strategy.pdf](http://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/rss_viewer/national_security_strategy.pdf)

<sup>288</sup> Blank, "U.S. Interests in Central Asia and their Challenges," 313.

and a revanchist Russia. Ren Dongfeng asserts this point when he writes: “The USA appears to have at least a potential objective of containing both China and Russia in geostrategic terms by its military presence (especially its long-term presence) in Central Asia, even if the primary purpose of its deployment was to combat terrorism.”<sup>289</sup> Many observers view coordination between Russia and China via the Shanghai Cooperation Organization as a counterforce to this trend. The SCO was created in part as a “politico-security bulwark” against NATO expansion into Central Asia and U.S. military aid to regional governments, “which China and Russia feared would have worked against their geo-political interests as great powers bordering the region.”<sup>290</sup>

### **External Pressures and Regional Formation**

A number of scholars have argued that endogenous factors are the main causes behind the formation of the Central Asian RSC in general, and the SCO and CSTO in particular. More specifically, they argue that the regional groupings such as the SCO and CSTO were mainly to address the internal security concerns faced by China and Russia, respectively (see Chapter Six).<sup>291</sup> That view is indeed true. However, regional security complex theory suggests that RSCs can evolve over time and change focus. Neoliberal institutional theory also has demonstrated that evolutionary nature of international institutions, including security organizations such as NATO.<sup>292</sup>

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<sup>289</sup> Dongfeng, *The Central Asia Policies of China, Russia, and the USA*,” 16.

<sup>290</sup> Chien-peng Chung, “The Shanghai Co-operation Organization: China's Changing Influence in Central Asia,” *The China Quarterly* 180 (Dec. 2004), 1001.

<sup>291</sup> See especially Alexander Cooley, “Cooperation Gets Shanghaied,” *Foreign Affairs*, Dec. 14, 2009, accessed from <http://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/65724/alexander-cooley/cooperation-gets-shanghaied>. Soft balancing critics have made similar arguments. See Brooks and Wohlforth, “Hard Times for Soft Balancing,” and Lieber and Alexander, “Waiting for Balancing.”

The intervention of an external power can greatly alter the dynamics of a RSC, even if there is a great deal of underlying tension among regional members. In the case of Central Asia, the stationing of American forces in the region has intensified and amplified the Russia-China “strategic partnership.” Indeed, regional cooperation can be affected – positively or negatively – by actors outside the region. A history of intervention by an external power might generate a shared sense of threat that produces efforts to create and sustain a collective defense. In some cases, “the absence of threat emanating from outside powers removes an often potent incentive to cooperate. Moreover, outside powers may seek to structure cooperation within a particular region in a manner consonant with their perceived interests, either to deny influence in the region to an adversary or to establish control over the region's affairs.”<sup>293</sup>

In fact, many scholars argue that the U.S. presence in Central Asia is a main causal mechanism solidifying their partnership, despite the latent conflict between Beijing and Moscow – at least for the present. This was made clear during a joint appearance between Chinese premier Hu Jintao and Russian President Dmitry Medvedev in May 2008. “China welcomed the fact that the newly elected Russian president chose China for his first foreign visit outside the CIS. The significance of Medvedev’s visit to China, held on 23–24 May 2008, was highlighted by the signing of a Joint Declaration outlining their agreement on major international issues. The joint declaration reaffirmed the commitment of both countries to civilizational and cultural diversity within the world

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<sup>292</sup> Celeste A. Wallander and Robert Keohane, “Risk, Threat and Security Institutions,” in Robert Keohane, ed., *Power and Governance in a Partially Globalized World*, (Routledge, New York, 2002).

<sup>293</sup> MacFarlane. “The United States and Regionalism in Central Asia,” 447. Also see Väyrynen, “Regionalism: Old and New,” 32.

community and to the formation of a multipolar world.”<sup>294</sup> In fact, as Vladimir Portyakov points out, “relations with Washington will most likely have a greater impact on Russian-Chinese cooperation in the future than it has played before.”<sup>295</sup>

The SCO has reinforced the Central Asian security complex. Initially, the Shanghai Forum (or Shanghai Five), as it was originally known until 2001, was designed to delineate borders among the former Soviet republics and China following the collapse of the Soviet Union. The forum also urged cooperation to combat the “three evils” of terrorism, separatism and extremism that engulfed the region after the collapse of the USSR. Each individual state had its own self-interest in strengthening regional cooperation. Russia, as explained above, wanted to secure its southern flank and China wanted to discourage separatism among the Uighur Turkic ethnic group in its restless Xianjiang province.<sup>296</sup> With little experience in self-governance, the smaller states of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan also viewed regionalization as crucial to their regime survival and economic and energy security because threats such as “terrorism, extremism and separatism” crossed their porous borders with relative ease, given the common linguistic, ethnic and religious bonds among the region’s peoples.

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<sup>294</sup> Vladimir Portyakov, “Russian-Chinese Relations: Current Trends and Future Prospects,” *Russian Analytical Digest* 73, no. 10, (Feb. 2010), 2.

<sup>295</sup> *Ibid.* 4.

<sup>296</sup> In fact, transnational Islam could be viewed as another external factor organizing the Central Asian security complex, although the broader topic of transnational Islam is beyond the scope of this study. Nevertheless, “the Islamic threat, exaggerated or not, has shaped geopolitics of international and regional actors since the early 1980s, and now, in the absence of Communism, will be the major factor in future developments. From China’s Xinjiang Muslim region to India’s Kashmir and to Algeria in North Africa, the Islamic factor has occupied a key place in geopolitical calculations” in Mesbahi, “Russia and the Geopolitics of the Muslim South,” 308.

For the major actors, regionalization goes beyond shared threats of the “three evils” or concerns of external influence. Economic development and energy security also have played a major role in the development of the Central Asian RSC and is another source, for now, of cooperation between Beijing and Moscow in the region. In fact, soft balancing theory suggests that these sectors are more likely to be used to offset or counterbalance American encroachment in the region.

Irrespective of the global economic crisis of 2009-10, economic ties between China and Russia have made progress. Indeed, economic cooperation between the two countries continues to be significant, with cooperation on energy improving from 2009 to 2010. According to some analysts, future developments look promising as well. For instance, in 2009 China and Russia signed formal agreements exchanging loans for oil. “China will provide long-term loans of \$25 billion to Russia, with \$15 billion going to the Russian oil company Rosneft and \$10 billion to the Russian oil transportation company Transneft. In return, Russia will repay the loans by providing China with 300 million tons of oil, at an average annual volume of 15 million tons, from 2011 to 2030.”<sup>297</sup> Notwithstanding the worldwide financial recession that impacted the economies of many world capitals, such cooperation between the two regional powers is expected to continue in the absence of transformational change at the systemic level.

### **Regionalization and the Military Balance**

The regional politics of Central Asia has had an impact on the long-term strategic military calculus of each major power (See Chapter Six). Consistent with offensive

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<sup>297</sup> Zhao Huasheng, “Sino-Russian Relations 2009 to 2010: A Perspective from China,” *Russian Analytical Digest* 73, no. 10, (Feb. 2010), 6.

realism, the United States has begun to slowly encircle the PRC with military bases and installations in East Asia (Japan and Korea), South Asia (ASEAN members Singapore and the Philippines and commitment to Taiwan), and now in Central Asia (Kyrgyzstan and until recently, Uzbekistan). Offensive realists have argued for the past decade that Beijing views American foreign policy in the Pacific and Northeast Asia as a long-term threat to China's national security, national unification and modernization.<sup>298</sup>

Whether or not Washington consciously seeks to constrain the rise of a hegemonic China in Asia, the growing American military presence on the Eurasian landmass is viewed by China as a long-term threat. For one, Beijing fears that the U.S. military's presence in Central Asia could inhibit its access to energy resources in the region in the event of a confrontation, for example over Taiwan. To counter this threat, China would like to diversify its energy imports from the Middle East and establish energy independence in the region.<sup>299</sup> Militarily, the PRC has purchased naval ships, including a refurbished Soviet Kuznetsov-class carrier, from Russia specifically because of its concerns that the United States could strategically deny China access to energy, for example, via a naval blockade of the Straits of Malacca.<sup>300</sup> China also has an active aircraft carrier research and development program and the PRC's shipbuilding industry could start construction of an indigenous platform by the end of [2010] with the goal of

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<sup>298</sup> Mearsheimer, *Tragedy*, 375.

<sup>299</sup> Tanaka, "Global and Regional Geo-strategic Implications of China's Emergence," 194. For news accounts, see "SCO Seeks Deeper Energy Ties," Nabi Abdullaev, *Moscow Times*, 16 August, 2007, accessed from LexisNexis.

<sup>300</sup> Evelyn Goh and Sheldon W. Simon, *China, The United States and Southeast Asia: Contending Perspectives on Politics, Security and Economics*, (New York: Routledge, 2008).

having multiple operational aircraft carriers with support ships in the next decade.<sup>301</sup> As Evelyn Goh points out, China has created an “inside-out” model of Asian regional politics in which an indigenous state – rather than an outsider [i.e. the United States] – has become the primary security focus.<sup>302</sup> Additionally, Chinese strategy of sea and air denial is designed with an armed conflict against the United States in mind.<sup>303</sup> “One theme that continues to underlie many of the relationships China has established has been the perceived need to act as a counterbalance to the U.S. In China’s eyes, the U.S. is not only a global hegemon that needs restraining, but may also pose a threat to the stability and status of China itself.”<sup>304</sup> In order for China to assert its dominance in the region, it must first remove the U.S. presence.<sup>305</sup>

Russia shares with China the fear of U.S. encroachment on its borders. NATO expansion to the east and the U.S. establishment of bases in Central Asia has placed the American military directly in Russia’s strategic backyard. In its weakened state, Russia no longer possesses the military capabilities to internally balance against the United States through an arms buildup. Its current strategy, therefore, is to rely on China, a

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<sup>301</sup> In addition to the renovated Kuznetsov carrier, China plans to build a fleet of its own carriers by 2020. See U.S. Defense Department, “Annual Report to Congress: Military and Security Developments Involving the People’s Republic of China 2010,” 2.

<sup>302</sup> Goh and Simon, *The United States and Southeast Asia*, 7.

<sup>303</sup> *Ibid*, 188.

<sup>304</sup> Philip Andrew Speed and Sergei Vinogradov, “China’s Involvement in Central Asian Petroleum: Convergent or Divergent Interests?” *Asian Survey* 40, no. 2, (March-April 2000), 378.

<sup>305</sup> For example, Richard Hu notes: “The United States war in Afghanistan has helped to build a stronghold right on China’s very doorstep whereas China supports the fight against terrorism ... it is also wary of an American presence near its border. Indeed, China had spent considerable energy creating the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, and one of its principal aims is to minimize Western influence in Central Asia” in “China’s Central Asia Policy: Making Sense of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization,” *Central Asia at the end of the Transition*, 147.

policy that Dmitri Trenin describes as “leaning on the east to raise its stakes in the west.”<sup>306</sup> Although a number of scholars and policy analysts have argued that the Sino-Russian tensions outweigh their respective fears of U.S. hegemony, such concerns were for the time muted by American unilateralism, particularly the previous Bush administration proposal to install a theater missile defense system based in Poland and Czech Republic, a plan that the Obama administration has adopted with a few changes.<sup>307</sup> Russia considers the growing American influence in Eurasia as more threatening to its interest than a rapidly growing China. Thus, China and Russia are eager to foster a stronger relationship to block American ability to extend its global dominance in the region.<sup>308</sup> Such thinking is made clear in Russian military strategy. The National Security Concept of February 2000, for example, “reflected Russian reaction to the changing strategic scene. With the new keywords of ‘multipolarity’ and ‘unipolarity,’ these documents provided a conceptual basis for criticism of US policy and in favour of tactical alliances in order to counter a growing US and Western influence in the Caucasus and Central Asia.”<sup>309</sup>

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<sup>306</sup> Trenin, “Russia and Central Asia,” 83

<sup>307</sup> The current administration of U.S. President Barack Obama scrapped the original plans for basing long-range interceptors in Poland and a radar system in the Czech Republic. The new system would focus on short- and medium-range interceptors in a reconfigured missile defense plan. Romania and Bulgaria also have offered basing for interceptor missiles and radar equipment for missile defense. See Karel Janicek, “U.S. Wants Missile Defense Center in Czech Republic,” *Associated Press*, 30 July 2010. Accessed from [http://news.yahoo.com/s/ap/20100730/ap\\_on\\_re\\_eu/eu\\_czech\\_us\\_missile\\_defense\\_2](http://news.yahoo.com/s/ap/20100730/ap_on_re_eu/eu_czech_us_missile_defense_2)

<sup>308</sup> Subodh Atal, “The New Great Game,” *The National Interest* 81, (Fall 2005),103. Also see Buszynski, “Russia and the CIS in 2003,” 163.

<sup>309</sup> Lena Johnson, “Russia and Central Asia,” in *Central Asian Security: The New International Context*, (London: Royal Institute of International Affairs, 2001), 99.

## Conclusion

Viewing Central Asia as a regional security complex provides a strong reference point for discussing the contemporary mechanics of balancing behavior. Even if a Central Asian security complex organized around the SCO or CSTO is the result of endogenous factors, as skeptics of soft balancing often point out, external pressures have hardened it. Indeed, as RSCT and neoliberal institutional theory have shown, states can use regional organizations for tasks beyond those for which they were envisioned.

In fact, the history of Central Asia, in specific, demonstrates the role external powers play in heightening regional tensions. During the multipolar European system of the early Twentieth Century, Mackinder feared a continental alliance between Russia and Germany because “the oversetting of the balance of power in favour of the pivot state, resulting in its expansion over the marginal lands of Euro-Asia, would permit the use of vast continental resources for fleet-building, and the empire of the world would then be in sight. This might happen if Germany were to ally herself with Russia.”<sup>310</sup> Fate, ironically, has turned Mackinder’s logic on its head. In the past, the people of the Eastern and Western rimlands trembled at the thought of the Horde storming like a bolt of lightning from the steppe. Those ancient fears have subsided and the threat now is penetration of the Heartland by a great maritime power from the Rimland.

Regional coordination, i.e., soft balancing, between China and Russia is predicated on their anxieties of American penetration into their sphere of influence and encroachment on their borders. Although endogenous factors have contributed to the formation of the Central Asian security complex, it is structural considerations that play

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<sup>310</sup> Venier, “The Geographical Pivot of History and Early Twentieth Century Geopolitical Culture,” 332.

the greatest role in the “strategic partnership” between Chinese and Russia. Analytically and theoretically, it would be difficult to explain why two powers with so many divergent interests would coordinate their expectations to frustrate the United States in the absence of structural considerations. Soft balancing offers much insight. There is a convergence of interests between Russia and China due to their shared suspicion of the American military presence in the region, their common concern about Islamic radicalism in Central Asia, and ‘the strategic partnership’ formed in response to a U.S.-dominated unipolar world. “But this could change, and probably will. In time, the U.S. military presence is bound to be scaled back, perhaps even eliminated; Central Asia is quite unlikely to become a region of abiding strategic centrality in Washington’s eyes; indeed, absent 9/11 it would have not. An American disengagement and the continuing shift in the balance of power between Russia and China in the latter’s favor in the decades ahead could alter the calculations in Beijing and Moscow.”<sup>311</sup>

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<sup>311</sup> Rajan Menon, “Introduction: Central Asia in the Twenty First Century,” in *Central Asia: Views from Washington, Moscow and Beijing*, (ME Sharpe, Armonk, N.Y., 2007), 12.

## CHAPTER V

### THE NORMATIVE VISION OF CHINESE AND RUSSIAN FOREIGN POLICY

#### Regional Institutionalism, Multilateralism and Democratic Pluralism

If the Western vision of global norms is developed from the concept of solidarism grounded in the universality of liberal values, Russian and Chinese views rest on the idea of pluralism, or the view that the good life can be achieved through a diversity of political and cultural traditions. The former has framed the global discourse since Bretton Woods; the latter, though maybe much older, has resurfaced as a challenger to the established normative order. In the contemporary international system, the pluralistic tradition has reemerged as a rival to the dominant liberal order championed by the United States. Unlike the Western concept of institutions, with their formal procedures, binding rights, rules and obligations, the new pluralist model avoids legalistic rules, is informal and decides by consensus rather than majority vote.<sup>312</sup> In contrast to the Western concept of democracy, which focuses on the right of citizens, either directly or through representation, to determine their fate, the pluralistic view of asserts the right of states to pursue governance models that they believe best help them best position themselves within the system.

For the past century, the liberal model advocated by Western powers has largely been responsible for shaping the contemporary global landscape. Although these policies – in recent years termed neoliberalism or the “Washington Consensus” – have served some developing nations, the promulgators of liberalism have been the main

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<sup>312</sup> David Arase, “Non-Traditional Security in China-ASEAN Cooperation: The Institutionalization of Regional Security Cooperation and the Evolution of East Asian Regionalism,” *Asian Survey* 50, no. 3, (July/August 2010): 808-833.

beneficiaries, despite the economic downturn that hit world financial markets in 2009. Emerging powers recognize that their interests are not always in harmony with the norms of the hegemonic system. The recourse for emerging powers, therefore, is to develop new norms that can help them achieve their own preferences.

This chapter analyzes how China and Russia view Western norms in general, and American ones in particular, while exploring their own unique perception and utilization of soft power. Attempts to develop normative capabilities are essential for a soft balancing strategy because they could attract allies alienated by the hegemonic bloc. In the Twenty-first Century, the power of persuasion will be as critical, if not more so, than military power or economic prowess. States that effectively harness their soft power will have substantial opportunities to alter the normative structure of the international system. Building new alliances, opening up new areas for capital investment and resource extraction, and creating new institutions without Western input, might not only increase Chinese and Russian prestige, but substantially improve their hard power, putting them in a better position to hard balance the United States.

It is necessary to understand the strategic vision of Chinese and Russian foreign policy to grasp the indirect role soft power plays in their partnership. The Russian and Chinese regional institutional model, for example through the SCO, is viewed as inefficient by many critics because it lacks formal protocols and transparency. However, what Western observers view as informal and opaque, China and Russia consider flexible and adaptable.<sup>313</sup> The Chinese and Russian norm of “non-interference,” slammed by many liberals as irresponsible, is nevertheless considered a strategic advantage by the

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<sup>313</sup> *Ibid.*

thinkers in Beijing and Moscow. As argued in Chapter Two, such tactics are part of an overall soft balancing strategy because they allow China and Russia to challenge the United States indirectly and without recourse to military measures.

The rival Eurasian normative model rests on three main precepts: the promotion of Chinese and Russian soft power (e.g., through culture and language); the creation of regional institutions to limit American influence (both hard and soft) in their “spheres of influence;” and support for alternative concepts of democracy and the rule of non-interference. Each of the three is an indirect challenge to the American grand strategy of primacy (unipolarity), globalization of universal liberal norms, and intervention in cases of gross human rights violations.

By attempting to reshape the normative order, China and Russia are setting what Arnold Wolfers referred to as “milieu goals,” which can create an environment that is more conducive for states to pursue their social or economic progress.<sup>314</sup> The rivalry over these goals can be intense because they help set conditions for states to achieve their preferences. Additionally, identifying the “milieu goals” of great powers can lead to a greater understanding of soft balancing. Milieu goals are the underlying – or latent – source of a state’s normative capabilities; they link the domestic characteristic of a state to its foreign policy and, thusly, to the international level. The greater a state’s material capabilities, the greater opportunities to project its soft power abroad. However, a state’s soft power is a reflection of its own internal makeup.

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<sup>314</sup> Arnold Wolfers, *Discord and Collaboration: Essays in International Politics*, (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1962): 67-80.

Although late to the game in recent times, China and Russia are rapidly trying to advance their global vision in Latin America, Africa, the Middle East and Southeast Asia.<sup>315</sup> To be clear, however, this study does not make the case that China and Russia are functioning democracies, regardless of the definition, or are spreading a truly democratic doctrine. Rather, it maintains that both countries use the language of democracy to present their own global outlook in accord with extant global norms. The discourse about democracy is a form of “strategic language politics” in which actors compete over the meaning of words and their functional usage.<sup>316</sup> “Strategic language politics” is not a simple debate over words, but an important struggle to frame the global agenda. The remainder of this chapter assesses how thinkers in Beijing and Moscow conceive of norms as a strategic asset to balance the United States and restore the system to multipolarity. That assessment, however, is preceded by a brief discussion of the role soft power played in Soviet and Maoist China foreign policy.

### **The historical use of soft power in China and Russia**

Historians have pointed to the successful use of culture in diplomatic relations over time, from ancient Persia to the British Empire.<sup>317</sup> Like their predecessors, modern Russia and China are rediscovering the utility of culture, ideas and norms as an instrument of power. To be sure, soft power was an integral part of Soviet and pre-Communist Chinese foreign policy. For example, in addition to offering military and

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<sup>315</sup> Russia lost much of its soft power after the collapse of the Soviet Union, which promoted a socialist vision to the world in its heyday.

<sup>316</sup> The term “strategic language politics” is adopted from William A. Callahan ‘Future imperfect: The European Union's encounter with China (and the United States),’ *Journal of Strategic Studies* 30, no. 4, (2007): 777-807.

<sup>317</sup> Breslin, *Beyond Pain*.

economic aid to allies, the Soviet Union promoted socialist norms, Russian language and culture to developing nations during the Cold War. Before “sovereign democracy” was invented, Soviet ideologists developed the concept of "national democracy" in an effort “to promote political and socioeconomic conditions conducive to the strengthening of local Communist parties and [as] a means of obtaining neutralist support for Soviet foreign-policy objectives.”<sup>318</sup>

Like their Western counterparts, Soviet officials wanted to spread their socialist-inspired economic models. Nikolai Fedorenko, the Soviet ambassador to the United Nations in 1964, described Moscow’s socialist agenda in Africa as advocating nationalization of the properties of foreign monopolies, development of local industry, creation and strengthening of a state-owned sector of the economy, and radical agricultural reforms.<sup>319</sup> To help implement these reforms, the Soviet Union would provide credits, low-interest loans and guaranteed market access to African states.<sup>320</sup>

From the time of Lenin to Khrushchev, Soviet policy was to support various anti-colonialist movements as a bulwark against expanding Western influence. This policy was carried out through the financial and political support of local socialist and communist organizations. “The building of communism-socialism in Communist states, the national-liberation revolution, and the struggle of the working class in capitalist states

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<sup>318</sup> John S. Reshetar, Jr., “The Soviet Union and the Neutralist World,” *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 362, “Nonalignment in Foreign Affairs,” (November 1965), 7.

<sup>319</sup> Nikolai Fedorenko, “The Soviet Union and African Countries,” *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*. 354, Africa in Motion (July 1964): 1-8

<sup>320</sup> *Ibid.*

were seen as comprising this process.”<sup>321</sup> However, with the collapse of the Soviet Union, Marxism-Leninism, the mythical *raison d'être* of the Soviet state<sup>322</sup> no longer provided a viable normative alternative at the systemic level. To redress this deficit, Russia under Putin increased funding a number of soft power initiatives to repair its image.<sup>323</sup>

China has used cultural influence in its dealings with foreigners throughout its long history. For instance, the Manchu dynasty absorbed tribes into their rule through spreading language and culture.<sup>324</sup> The Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence adopted during the Mao era are another example of Chinese attempts to spread international norms to better position members of the non-Aligned Movement.<sup>325</sup> In recent years, much of China's soft power outreach has been in developing nations, particularly in Africa. Over the past decade, China has developed the so-called “Beijing Consensus” model as a competing framework to the neoliberal “Washington Consensus.” The term describes PRC investments, aid, and trade agreements with developing nations outside the purview of Western international institutions and without the “strings attached” to Western norms, rules and regulations.<sup>326</sup>

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<sup>321</sup> Fritz Ermarth, “The Soviet Union in the Third World: Purpose in Search of Power,” *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 386, “Protagonists, Power, and the Third World: Essays on the Changing International System,” (November 1969), 33.

<sup>322</sup> Carol Barner-Barry and Cynthia Hody, “Soviet Marxism-Leninism as Mythology,” *Political Psychology* 15, no. 4 (December 1994): 609-630.

<sup>323</sup> Andrei P. Tsygankov, “If Not by Tanks, Then by Banks? The Role of Soft Power in Putin's Foreign Policy,” *Europe-Asia Studies* 58, no. 7 (Nov., 2006): 1079-1099.

<sup>324</sup> Breslin, *Beyond Pain*, 163.

<sup>325</sup> Young Nam Cho and Jong Ho Jeong, “China's Soft Power *Discussions, Resources, and Prospects*,” *Asian Survey* 48, no. 3, (May-June, 2008): 456-57.

<sup>326</sup> Barry Sautman, and Yan Hairong, “Friends and Interests: China's Distinctive Links with Africa,” *African Studies Review* 50, no. 3, (Dec. 2007): 75-114.

Although China and Russia have long histories of using soft power (although the term is of rather recent coinage), their capacity to project it badly trails that of Western powers.<sup>327</sup> Nevertheless, both states are keen to increase their capabilities across this strategic dimension. After a period of insularity during the Cultural Revolution and hostile relations with other powers, China has embraced a softer approach to foreign affairs since its Open Door policy.<sup>328</sup> Russia's relative soft power, too, has increased considerably. "Although Russia is hardly in a position to compete with Western nations on a world scale for instance, it might take a long time before the above noted channel can move closer to such heavyweights as the BBC and CNN Russia's soft power capital in the former Soviet region is undoubtedly special."<sup>329</sup>

The remainder of the chapter details how Russia and China have increased their soft power to project a more positive image abroad, in general, and as method to balance American influence, in particular. Indeed, their development of soft power capabilities in many cases is in direct response to the influence of American norms in their spheres of influence. "Demonstrating a heightened awareness of soft power's potential for wielding influence abroad, rising global players are mobilizing resources accordingly. China's soft power advances reflect this wider trend and the shifting diplomatic balance."<sup>330</sup>

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<sup>327</sup> Jonathan McClory, "The New Persuaders: An International Ranking of Soft Power," report by the Institute of Government, December 2010.

<sup>328</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>329</sup> Tsygankov, "If Not by Tanks, Then by Banks?" 1080.

<sup>330</sup> McClory, "The New Persuaders: An International Ranking of Soft Power," 2.

## **The Culture of Chinese and Russian National Security**

### *Chinese Charm Offensive: Confucianism meets Socialism*

As part of its new “charm offensive,”<sup>331</sup> China has begun to draw upon its ancient Confucian heritage to provide an alternative cultural program to the Classical Western tradition. This theme was expressed during the 17th National Congress of the Communist Party of China in October 2007, when President Hu called for enhancing the “soft power” of Chinese culture. In a keynote speech, Hu said, “Culture has become a factor of growing significance in the competition in overall national strength.”<sup>332</sup>

To complement its “peaceful rise” strategy, the PRC has followed in the footsteps of the British Council, the French *Alliance Francaise* and the German *Goethe-Institut* by opening Confucian Institutes to promote Chinese language and culture abroad.<sup>333</sup> China has set up 320 such institutes around the world, including 10 in Africa, and plans to open more than 500 by 2011. Beijing has spent more than US\$26 million to build new institutes,<sup>334</sup> paltry by Western standards but a substantial sum for what until recently was considered a developing nation. “The Chinese plan of launching Confucius Institutes worldwide is less an attempt to use Confucius as a Father Christmas-like symbol of

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<sup>331</sup> Joshua Kurlantzick, *Charm Offensive: How China's Soft Power is Transforming the World*, (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2007).

<sup>332</sup> Sunny Lee, “China Embraces Soft Power for Image,” *Korea Times*, Sept. 11, 2009. Accessed from LexisNexis, Jan. 28, 2011.

<sup>333</sup> Shiping Hua, “The Chinese One World View and Foreign Policy,” in Dennis Hickey and Baogang Guo, *Dancing With the Dragon: China's Emergence in the Developing World*, (New York: Rowan and Littlefield, 2010).

<sup>334</sup> Lowell Ditmer and George T. Yu, eds., *China, the Developing World and the New Global Dynamic*, (Boulder, Colo.: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2010), 144.

avuncular Chineseness than a pitch in forging a soft power platform modeled on the UK's British Council.”<sup>335</sup>

For the Chinese, soft power means anything outside of the military and security realm, including not only popular culture and public diplomacy, but also more coercive economic and diplomatic levers such as aid and investment and participation multilateral organizations.<sup>336</sup> The advancement of soft power has not been limited to just the political or cultural sphere in China. Fan Yinhua, deputy political commissar of the PLA Navy, also called for increased spread of Chinese socialist ideology to combat the spread of what he termed a strategy of “cultural subversion and infiltration” and “smokeless” ideological and cultural warfare used by Western capitalism to undermine China. “We must take the building of the socialist core values system as an important strategic project,” Fan wrote in an essay on Chinese soft power.<sup>337</sup>

Because China is concerned that its policies will be misrepresented in Western media, the dean of Tsinghua University’s journalism school proposed building a set of soft power-promoting institutions, including home-grown media outlets with global reach, NGOs, and think tanks to compete with similar Western institutions.<sup>338</sup> In 2010,

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<sup>335</sup> China Post, “Soft Power for the PRC Only Comes After Hard Decisions,” Jan. 23, 2011, accessed from LexisNexis, Jan. 28, 2011.

<sup>336</sup> Kurlantzick, *Charm Offensive*:

<sup>337</sup> Article by Fan Yinhua, deputy political commissar of the PLA Navy: “Enhance the Soft Power of the Socialist Ideology and Culture - Draw a Clear Line of Demarcation Between the Socialist Ideology, Culture and the Decadent Feudalist, Capitalist Ideology, Culture,” July 13, 2010. Last accessed from LexisNexis, Jan. 28, 2011. The topic of soft power as part of Chinese and Russian military doctrine is addressed in greater detail in Chapter Six..

<sup>338</sup> Sunny Lee, “China Embraces Soft Power for Image,” *Korea Times*, Sept. 11, 2009. Accessed from LexisNexis, Jan. 28, 2011.

the Chinese Communist Party called for increasing the nation's soft power when it released its 12<sup>th</sup> year plan on National Economic and Social Development. According to the plan, the PRC would increase the use of news media outlets, including the Internet, to enhance the nation's communication capabilities; increase support for non-profit cultural undertakings and cultural heritage protection, and enhance international competitiveness and influence of Chinese culture.<sup>339</sup>

The 2008 Beijing Olympics were an opportunity for China to showcase its soft and hard power. During the Games, officials touted the "Chinese Dream." Unlike the "American Dream," which focuses on individual achievements and success, the "Chinese Dream" applies to nations as a whole and provides an attractive development model for emerging nations.<sup>340</sup> In fact, it was China's close relations with African states that helped Beijing secure the Olympics in the first place.<sup>341</sup> According to news reports, "Beijing appeared to receive broad international support beyond the developing nations where it has gained favor by building sports stadiums over the years."<sup>342</sup> Continuing to follow in the path of the United States, China has started its own version of a Peace Corps-style organization to send skilled volunteers abroad and is increasing the number of international students who attend Chinese universities, particularly those from Africa and

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<sup>339</sup> BBC Monitoring Asia Pacific, "China to Enhance 'Cultural Soft Power' in Next Five Years," Oct. 27, 2010, Accessed from LexisNexis, Jan. 28, 2011.

<sup>340</sup> Dilip Hiro, *After Empire: The Birth of a Multipolar Order*, (New York: Nation Books, 2010), 246.

<sup>341</sup> Riordan Roett and Guadalupe Paz, *China's Expansion into the Western Hemisphere: Implications for Latin America and the United States*, (Washington, D.C.: The Brookings Institute, 2008).

<sup>342</sup> Jere Longman, "Beijing wins bid for 2008 Olympics," *New York Times*, July 13, 2001, from New York Times website archive <http://www.nytimes.com/2001/07/14/sports/olympics-beijing-wins-bid-for-2008-olympic-games.html> last assessed Feb. 8, 2011

Asia.<sup>343</sup> While the Voice of America was cutting its Chinese broadcasts to 14 from 19 hours a day, China Radio International was increasing its broadcasts in English to 24 hours a day. As Joseph Nye argued in a 2005 essay on China's soft power, "In a global information age, soft sources of power such as culture, political values, and diplomacy are part of what makes a great power. Success depends not only on whose army wins, but also on whose story wins."<sup>344</sup>

*Russian Soft Power: Sovereign Democracy as a New Global Norm*

Similar to China, Russia has been developing its own normative vision and is attempting to promote it abroad. The two powers' strategies share much in common and often complement one another. They consistently promote their mutual visions in forums such as United Nations and in regional organizations such as the SCO. In Central Asia, for example, Russian authorities are aware of the possibilities of new media and have established a state-funded international television network to broadcast in English. Prime Minister Putin's has called for the creation of a special department for Interregional and Cultural Relations with Foreign Countries at the Kremlin to utilize Russia's soft power dimension more seriously.<sup>345</sup> In response to the "Color Revolutions" in Eurasia and Central Asia, Putin endorsed "continuing the civilizational" role for the Russian nation in post-Soviet space.<sup>346</sup>

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<sup>343</sup> Hiro, *After Empire*, 241.

<sup>344</sup> Joseph Nye, "The Rise of China's Soft Power," *Wall Street Journal Asia*, Dec. 29, 2005. Accessed from [http://belfercenter.ksg.harvard.edu/publication/1499/rise\\_of\\_chinas\\_soft\\_power.html](http://belfercenter.ksg.harvard.edu/publication/1499/rise_of_chinas_soft_power.html) Jan. 28, 2011.

<sup>345</sup> Tsygankov, "If Not by Tanks, Then by Banks?"

<sup>346</sup> *Ibid.*

Moscow has taken a more assertive foreign policy since the U.S. entry into Central Asia after the 9-11 attacks and the resulting influence of Western NGOs. In response to increased Western exposure in the region, Russian has trained its own youth organizations, restricted the activities of western NGOs in Russia and warned the United States against interference with Russia's domestic developments.<sup>347</sup> Russia's soft power strategy was articulated in a Foreign Ministry report called "A Review of the Russian Federation's Foreign Policy." Commissioned by the Kremlin and released 27 March, 2007, the report advocated for a "more equitable distribution of resources for influence and economic growth" and defended the notion of collective leadership and multilateral diplomacy as an alternative to unilateralism and hegemony in international relations.<sup>348</sup>

Russia has taken a greater role in developing its own version of democracy as well. The Kremlin's leading ideologist, Vladislav Surkov, defined sovereign democracy as "the need to defend an intellectually determined path to political development and to protect economic prosperity, individual freedom, and social justice from potential threats ... [such as] 'international terrorism, military conflict, lack of economic competitiveness, and soft takeovers by 'orange technologies' in a time of decreased national immunity to foreign influence."<sup>349</sup> Surkov's notion of democracy shares much in common with his Chinese counterparts.

The renewed focus on soft power is not simply a passing fancy for the Kremlin. Increasing Russian soft power is deemed a vital national security interest and one that is

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<sup>347</sup> Stephen K. Wegren and Dale R. Herspring, *After Putin's Russia: Past Imperfect, Future Uncertain*, (New York: Rowan and Littlefield, 2010).

<sup>348</sup> Andrei Tsygankov, "Russia's Foreign Policy" in Wegren and Herspring, *After Putin's Russia*, 227.

<sup>349</sup> *Ibid*, 225.

necessary to offset the United States' hegemonic ambitions. "We view the appearance of a powerful military bloc on our borders ... as a direct threat to the security of our country," Putin said of the Western promotion of "Color Revolutions" after a 2008 NATO summit. "National security is not based on promises."<sup>350</sup>

### **Non-interference as a new global norm**

#### *The role of strategic language politics*

China has made great strides in transforming its international image. Indeed, China's increasing engagement in Africa and Asia is part and parcel of a wider policy that manifests itself equally in China's relations towards other regions of the world such as Latin America and the Middle East<sup>351</sup> The charm offensive strategy is particularly shown in China's (and Russia's) tendency to reach out to countries that have strained bilateral tensions with Washington, Venezuela, Iran and Sudan being the most prominent examples.<sup>352</sup> Many of these countries have an affinity for China's development model, which expresses the right of sovereign states to choose their own path of development. Rooted in Confucianism, China's democratic model is "founded, not upon homogenizing universalisms that inevitably lead to hegemonism, but on a simultaneous recognition of commonality and difference."<sup>353</sup> Such a development route is appealing for countries that feel straightjacketed by the one-size fit all policies of structural adjustment mandated by the International Monetary Fund and World Bank.

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<sup>350</sup> *Ibid.* The role of the "Color Revolutions" is dealt with in greater detail in Chapter 6.

<sup>351</sup> Denis M. Tull, "China's Engagement in Africa: Scope, Significance and Consequences," *Journal of Modern African Studies* 44, no. 2, (2006): 459-479.

<sup>352</sup> Roett and Paz, *China's Expansion into the Western Hemisphere*.

<sup>353</sup> Sautman and Hairong, "Friends and Interests: China's Distinctive Links with Africa."

This development model is founded upon the Chinese philosophy of non-intervention as a fundamental premise of democratization. In contrast to the liberal notion of democracy as a bottom up process, China views democracy as top down. In other words, democratization for China resides at the systemic level and applies to the self-determination of states, not necessarily of citizens within those states. Beijing's vision of democracy corresponds with the realist notion of the "state" as an autonomous actor. For China and many other non-Western nations, including Russia, the state is viewed as a singular unit and development and prosperity is measured by national power. Human security under this concept of sovereign or managed democracy emphasizes economic well-being and stability over political or individual rights, what Fareed Zakaria calls a form of "illiberal democracy."<sup>354</sup>

The illiberal paradigm of democracy is attracting smaller powers to the Beijing-Moscow axis. For example, "the Central Asian states, finding the American liberal democracy a price too high, followed the Russian model ... in which states, through the vote of their people, can choose the social system they feel best for them. Unlike liberal democracies, with institutions committed to upholding liberties through a system of checks and balances, the Russian model is conceived of a strong elected executive who coordinates institutions of national power."<sup>355</sup> This magnetic appeal is not limited to the Central Asian members of the SCO, but also is gaining traction in other regions of the

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<sup>354</sup> Fareed Zakaria, *The Future of Freedom: Illiberal Democracy at Home and Abroad*, (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2003).

<sup>355</sup> Hiro, *After Empire*, 220.

world, where democracy is a tertiary concern to social justice, economic security and stability.

These language games go beyond mere rhetoric; they point to states' broader strategic concerns about balance of power and national interest. From this standpoint, norms become a crucial capability that allows weaker states to engage with the predominant rules of the system while simultaneously seeking to transform them. In this way, China and Russia reflect the language of democracy used in the West while refracting its usage to correspond with their own interests. Such a strategy shifts the narrative in their favor because, although they adopt the language of the norm, they encode it with their own meaning.<sup>356</sup>

To illuminate this point, William A. Callahan found that the meaning of “democracy” was substantially different when he compared policy papers drafted by the European Union and China concerning bilateral relations between Brussels and Beijing.<sup>357</sup> “While the EC underlines its stake in China emerging as a power that *‘fully embraces democracy, free market principles and the rule of law’*, the PRC paper repeats ‘democracy’, but in a way that shifts the meaning from domestic political reform to safeguarding national sovereignty in international space: *‘China will, as always, respect diversity in the world and promote democracy in international relations in the interest of world peace and common development’* [emphasis added].”<sup>358</sup> These “strategic language

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<sup>356</sup> Callahan, ‘Future imperfect.’

<sup>357</sup> Callahan reviewed the 2003 European Commission policy paper “A Maturing Partnership – Shared Interests and Challenges in EU-China Relations” and the 2003 Chinese response, “China’s EU Policy Paper.”

<sup>358</sup> *Ibid*, 788

politics” are indicative of soft balancing because they can organize a new normative framework into an alternative pole of power without directly challenging the hegemonic order. They also reveal the underlying tension between great powers at the systemic level that many analysts often neglect because of their narrow focus on material capabilities.

### **Regional organizations: A Multivector approach**

To increase their power, emerging states can turn to international institutions to bind the reigning hegemon through bureaucratic inertia or denial of access. Russia and China have sought such a strategy by increasing their leverage against the United States in arenas such as the UN Security Council and at G-8 summits. Additionally, the two powers have worked through regional institutions in an attempt to limit or deny American access to geographical areas deemed sensitive by Beijing and Moscow. Working through such institutional arrangements allows Russia and China to “play the whole field” rather than be limited by their inability to project power globally.<sup>359</sup> This strategy has not always been successful – the unsuccessful attempt by the UN Security Council to deter the 2003 invasion of Iraq and the SCO’s inability to completely dislodge U.S. forces from Central Asia are glaring examples – but they do raise the cost of doing business for the United States by forcing it to go alone or shoulder the burden through unilateral action. Nevertheless, unsuccessful balancing should not be considered an absence of balancing.

The changing configuration of the international system has forced great powers to adapt their behavior as well. Russia has followed a similar path in Central Asia, where it

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<sup>359</sup> For Russian strategy in international institutions, see Ingmar Oldberg, “Russian Great Power Ambitions and Policy Under Putin” in Roger E. Kanet, ed., *Russia: Re-emerging Great Power*, (New York: Palgrave-Macmillan, 2007). For Chinese strategy, see , Arase, “Non-Traditional Security in China-ASEAN Cooperation.”

prefers to act in the context of multilateral regional organizations such as the SCO when balancing U.S. power. In the past, Russia acted independently in its foreign relations with the Central Asian republics. Today, however, Moscow's relations with the republics are mediated through regional organizations and treaties, such as the CSTO and CIS.<sup>360</sup> Under Putin and his predecessor, Medvedev, Moscow considers regional institutions a central element in the security architecture of Central Asia. Leadership positions in regional and international institutions do more than protect Russian influence; they also increase Russian prestige. "Another important factor that effects the Russian perception of security was her rotating presidency of the G-8 in 2006. It gave Russia a chance to promote her own vision of leadership in the modern world."<sup>361</sup>

The Chinese share a similar multivector view in regards to regional institutions. In Central Asia, Beijing recognizes that it must work through institutions to achieve its interest, which include balancing against the United States. China also operates within these institutional confines to alleviate fears Russia might have of Beijing's rapid growth. "Throughout its vast history, Chinese strategy towards its Central Asian frontier was cognizant of the fact that the power of the center was linked to its ability to project its influence into the distant periphery."<sup>362</sup> One way to connect to the "periphery" is through the SCO, which has allowed China to deepen its ties in the region without alienating Russia.

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<sup>360</sup> Hassan H. Karrar, *The New Silk Road Diplomacy: China's Central Asian Foreign Policy Since the Cold War*, (Vancouver, Canada: University of British Columbia Press, 2009), 246.

<sup>361</sup> Nikita A. Lomagin, "Forming a New Security Identity Under Putin," in Kanet, *Russia: Re-emerging Great Power*, 44

<sup>362</sup> Karrar, *The New Silk Road Diplomacy*, 1.

At the global level, China continues to raise its profile in the UNSC and broaden its role in regional organizations such as ASEAN. The Chinese conception of regional organizations, however, differs markedly from that of the Western viewpoint. Whereas the Western notion of institutions is based on liberal precepts of rule of law, transparency, formality and efficiency, the Chinese model is guided by general governing principles that recognize collective interests and allows actors to maneuver in concert toward a shared goal while maintaining the freedom to pursue their agendas at different speeds.<sup>363</sup> “This kind of flexibility permits multilateral cooperation to take root and maintains a shared identity within a disparate group.”<sup>364</sup> Russia also emphasizes institutional frameworks that “create mutual respect, equality, and mutual benefit.” Such language is usually code for obtaining a veto over American unilateralism “to ensure that any major changes in the international system require consensus” – something that would be unnecessary if power was more evenly distributed globally.<sup>365</sup>

## **Conclusion**

As Zakaria notes, Russia and China’s search for political and economic systems that work for them will have enormous ramifications for the global balance of power.<sup>366</sup> Whether China and Russia are truly democracies – illiberal or not – is beyond the scope of this study. From the standpoint of soft balancing, however, Moscow and Beijing’s strategic use of the “democracy” norm is extremely relevant. An assessment of their

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<sup>363</sup> Arase, “Non-Traditional Security in China-ASEAN Cooperation,” 814.

<sup>364</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>365</sup> Stephen Blank, “Pax Americana in the Persian Gulf and the Contradictions of Russian Foreign Policy,” in Kaim, *Great Powers and Regional Orders*, 224.

<sup>366</sup> Zakaria, *The Future of Freedom*, 91.

thinking demonstrates that developing norms is a major component of their concept of national power. The analytic used in my study does not ignore the consequences of raw material power. Indeed, as neoclassical realists argue, soft power is an extension of hard power and a reflection of domestic characteristics. However, as a separate strategic asset, soft power can be applied as a balancing mechanism when states cannot match the hard power of a hegemon.

American unilateralism is disturbing middle and great powers and at times even chafes U.S. allies.<sup>367</sup> Outright violation of the hegemonic order, however, can draw the focused enmity of the United States, something Russia and China can ill afford because of their lack of military capabilities relative to the United States. Co-opting the language of democracy and utilizing institutions, however, presents China and Russia as responsible powers and potential allies for emerging powers. In the absence of vast material or military incentives to offer allies, China and Russia provide ideological cover for states that seek to evade the normative structure of the system, which can be as binding as its material structure. Beijing and Moscow's continued opposition to stricter American-backed sanctions against Iran is a case in point. For example, Moscow's consistent objection to tougher sanctions against Tehran – which the West accuses of clandestinely seeking a nuclear weapons program – could be viewed as a “declaration of independence from the United States ... [because] Russian foreign policy elites have finally abandoned any beliefs that Moscow should work with the United States to define

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<sup>367</sup> See Pape, “Soft Balancing Against the United States.”

paradigms of world order in general and to influence Iranian behavior in particular.”<sup>368</sup>

Chinese support for Iran is based on similar concerns about American hegemony.

For smaller states ostracized by the hegemonic system, this new axis is a strategic alternative to complete isolation. Nevertheless, it would be misguided to dismiss the alignment between Moscow and Beijing as one of simple convenience. Great powers are not “great” only because they are strong, but because they want to be leaders; and leadership requires vision. A state’s vision is rooted in its milieu goals, which in turn is based on its unique nature. Material capabilities remain the central concern at the strategic level of balance of power, however, if that structure cannot readily be altered, then the competition can shift to the normative dimension. Military strategy requires an understanding of an opponent’s force structure, weapons systems and doctrine. A similar approach is necessary for the study of normative strategy.

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<sup>368</sup> Kaim, *Great Powers and Regional Orders*, 267.

## CHAPTER VI

### SOFT BALANCING AS A GRAND STRATEGY: THE SCO CASE

Proponents of soft balancing argue that the strategy uses indirect measures to check hegemonic power. These tactics are unlikely to involve formal military alliances or arms buildups because such measures are ineffective against a hegemon whose capabilities far outstrip those of its nearest competitors. According to Robert Pape, the logic of balancing against a sole superpower is about coordinating expectations of collective action among a number of second-ranked states. “In the short term, this encourages states to pursue balancing strategies that are more effective at developing a convergence of expectations than in opposing the military power of the leading state. Building cooperation with nonmilitary tools is an effective means for this end.”<sup>369</sup>

This chapter focuses primarily on the balancing methods outlined in Chapter Three, particularly the use of “normative capabilities” to offset hegemonic encroachment or influence in a regional security complex. Generally unable to compete with the United States in the military and economic spheres, great powers have turned to the normative dimension to balance U.S. hegemony. The normative dimension of capabilities should be taken as seriously as military and economic threats, given the fear U.S. normative power has stoked in Beijing, Moscow and other world capitals.

Soft balancing methods also include attempts at territorial denial (especially basing rights), entangling diplomacy, economic strengthening (regional trading blocs, e.g.) and signals of resolve to balance. These methods are most likely to occur at the regional level, which as explained in Chapter Four, offer a ready-made buffer zone for

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<sup>369</sup> Pape, “Striking the Balance,” 17-18.

great powers attempting to check American unilateralism and U.S. penetration into their spheres' of influence. While these low-level efforts are designed to balance against the United States, they do so in a manner that will not harm economic ties or draw the focused enmity of the hegemonic power.<sup>370</sup> However, "if the unipolar leader's aggressive policies do not abate, increasingly intense balancing efforts could evolve into hard balancing."<sup>371</sup>

This chapter explores how China and Russia have "coordinated expectations" via the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, their bilateral relations with one another, and their multilateral relations with the smaller Central Asian republics. It looks for consistent behavior by the two powers to undermine the United States using primarily normative means, both independently and through the SCO. The main focus of this chapter is how the Beijing-Moscow axis has countered American normative power projection, including its promotion of Western conceptions of democracy and human rights, and its support for the varied Color Revolutions in the region. It begins with a brief overview of the SCO and its evolution over the past two decades. Next is an analysis of Chinese and Russian attempts, both through the SCO and in tandem with other regional actors, to soft balance against U.S. influence in the region. The chapter proceeds with a response to the criticism of the SCO as a balancing mechanism in Central Asia and concludes with an assessment of the successes and failures of the soft balancing alignment and the likely causes for those outcomes. It finds, in this case, that the intensity of soft balancing correlates with increasing American intervention in Central Asia.

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<sup>370</sup> Paul, "Soft Balancing in the Age of U.S. Primacy," 46-71 and Walt, *Taming American Power*.

<sup>371</sup> Pape, "Striking the Balance," 18.

At the outset of this discussion, a word of caution is necessary. Soft balancing proponents, including the author of the current study, do not argue that such alignments are deeply integrated or derived from shared principles other than those involving measures to counteract a hegemonic power. In other words, it does not make the case that China and Russia have formally cooperated at the official level to balance the United States. Theoretically, as has been demonstrated in Chapter Three, the partnership is an alignment rather than alliance, a key distinction. According to Snyder, “alignments, whether or not they have been formalized as alliances, are essentially expectations in the minds of statesmen about future interactions. These expectations will, of course, be held with varying degrees of confidence. Their principal sources are conflicts and common interests among states, differences in capability, observation of each other’s past behavior, and formal alliances.”<sup>372</sup> From this standpoint, a pattern of behavior that demonstrates coordinated expectations could be considered soft balancing, particularly when such actions are repeated over time by the same actors and in the face of the same systemic constraints. As He and Feng ask (rhetorically), if not soft balancing, then what?<sup>373</sup>

## **Evolution of the SCO**

### *From Shanghai Spirit to Shanghai Cooperation Organization*

During the Cold War, Moscow and Beijing had frequent skirmishes over borderlines. However, with the waning of the Soviet Union, China and Russia moved toward rapprochement with Soviet Premier Mikhail Gorbachev and Chinese President

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<sup>372</sup> Snyder, *Alliance Politics*, 23.

<sup>373</sup> He and Feng, “If Not Soft Balancing, Then What?”

Jiang Zemin signing a joint communiqué in 1989 to resolve their border disputes. The entente between Beijing and Moscow led to the formation of the Shanghai Five (also called the Shanghai Forum) in 1996, which later evolved into the SCO. After the demise of the Soviet Union, the Shanghai Forum demilitarized the border between China and the former Soviet republics of Russia, Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan and Tajikistan.<sup>374</sup> “Following the collapse of the Soviet Union, the relationship evolved even more quickly, and during the April 1996 summit between Boris Yeltsin and Jiang Zemin, the two sides formally declared they would ‘develop an equal and trustworthy strategic partnership aimed at the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.’”<sup>375</sup> The “strategic partnership” continued to solidify, with former Russian president Vladimir Putin and Chinese premier Hu Jintao calling for a return to a multipolar world order. The two leaders worked together to turn the Shanghai Forum into a more effective institution.

The partnership was expressed publicly once more in a Joint Declaration of the Russian Federation and the People’s Republic of China on 26 March 2007. The declaration mentioned the intention of both sides to contribute in every way possible to the expansion of the SCO’s ties with the Eurasian Economic Community and the Collective Security Treaty Organization, institutions in which Russia plays a major role.<sup>376</sup> Vladimir Portyakov argues that his joint announcement demonstrated Chinese respect for Russia’s interests and strategic roles in the region. The expansion of the SCO,

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<sup>374</sup> See Russell Ong, “China’s Security Interests in Central Asia,” *Central Asian Survey* 24, no. 4, (Dec. 2005): 425-39. For a broad overview of the role of great power rivalry in Central Asia, see Amineh and Houweling, *Central Eurasia in Global Politics: Conflict, Security and Development*, (Boston: Brill NV, 2004).

<sup>375</sup> Bates and Oresman, “China’s New Journey to the West,” 5.

<sup>376</sup> Vladimir Portyakov, “The Shanghai Cooperation Organization: Achievements, Problems, Prospects,” *Far Eastern Affairs* 35, no. 4, (2007): 1-9.

Portyakov writes, showed that “the consistent implementation of [a] course aimed at cooperation, but not rivalry, between Russia and China in the SCO could serve the progress and greater efficiency of the organization.”<sup>377</sup>

Indeed, such “strategic partnerships” can be adopted “in lieu of formal alliances. It is a preferred option because it provides security cooperation without cementing security commitments,” which appears to be the case of contemporary Chinese-Russian relations.<sup>378</sup> For example, current Russian President Dmitry Medvedev continued to endorse the partnership during his May 2008 trip to Beijing, saying it was necessary for maintaining global, not regional, balance. “Some don't like such strategic cooperation between our countries, but we understand that this cooperation serves the interests of our people, and we will strengthen it, regardless of whether others like it or not,” he said. “Russian-Chinese relations are one of the most important factors of maintaining stability in modern conditions.”<sup>379</sup>

His counterpart, Chinese President Hu Jintao, also said the SCO was necessary to combat both regional threats *and* unilateralism: “Unilateralism and power politics still exist, traditional and non-traditional threat is still severe, and economic globalization failed to bring benefits to the majority of developing countries,” Hu said at the 2007 SCO summit.<sup>380</sup> Hu and Medvedev continued this theme at the 2009 SCO summit in Yekaterinburg. “The China-Russia strategic partnership of cooperation has become a

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<sup>377</sup> *Ibid.* 7-8.

<sup>378</sup> Ko, “Strategic Partnership in a Unipolar System,” 209.

<sup>379</sup> Vladimir Isachenkov, “Russian leader Medvedev defends Russia-China ties,” Associated Press, accessed 24 May 2008, [http://news.yahoo.com/s/ap/20080524/ap\\_on\\_re\\_as/china\\_russia\\_13](http://news.yahoo.com/s/ap/20080524/ap_on_re_as/china_russia_13)

<sup>380</sup> “Chinese president says new SCO treaty ‘important milestone,’ Xinhua news agency, 16 August 2007, accessed from LexisNexis.

model for relationships between big countries and neighbors,” Hu said.<sup>381</sup>

### **Establishment of the SCO**

The Shanghai Cooperation Organization was officially established 15 June 2001 with the addition of Uzbekistan as a sixth member for the purpose of “strengthening mutual trust and good-neighborly friendship among the member states; encouraging effective cooperation among the member states in political, economic and trade, scientific and technological, cultural, educational, energy, communications, environment and other fields; devoting themselves jointly to preserving and safeguarding regional peace, security and stability; and establishing a democratic, fair and rational new international political and economic order.”<sup>382</sup> The basic principles of the SCO include adherence to the purposes and principles of the UN Charter; respect for each other's independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity, non-interference in each other's internal affairs, mutual non-use or threat of use of force; equality among all member states; settlement of all questions through consultations, non-alignment and not targeting at any other country or organization; openness and willingness to carry out all forms of dialogues.<sup>383</sup>

The SCO's founding charter states that it “adheres to the principle of nonalignment, does not target any other country or region, and is open to the outside,” yet Section 10 of the declaration makes clear the organization seeks to alter the strategic balance at the global level: “In the current international situation, it is of particular

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<sup>381</sup> Hu: China, Russia should further promote strategic partnership of co-op, *Inner Mongolia News*, 18 June 2009, <http://eng.nmgnews.com.cn/system/2009/06/18/010237911.shtml> last accessed March 17, 2010.

<sup>382</sup> SCO founding declaration, <http://www.sectSCO.org/html/00088.html>

<sup>383</sup> Marcel de Haas, Frans-Paul van der Putten, *The Shanghai Cooperation Organization: Towards a Full-Grown Security Alliance*, Netherlands Institute of International Relations, 2007.

significance to preserve global strategic balance and stability.” Implicit in this statement is a concern about American unipolarity, although conforming to soft-balancing the target of the alignment remains unnamed.<sup>384</sup> Indeed, “the tone of the founding documents of the organization repeatedly censured U.S. hegemony and favored instead the establishment of a multipolar world order.”<sup>385</sup>

### *Structure and Organization of the SCO*

The SCO institutions consist of two parts: the meeting mechanisms and the permanent organs. The two permanent organs are the Secretariat and the Regional Counter-Terrorism Structure (RCTS) in Tashkent, which was formerly called the Regional Anti-Terrorism Structure (RATS). The highest SCO organ is the Council of Heads of State (HSC), which appoints the Secretary-General and the RCTS Executive Committee Director for three-year terms. In 2004, the SCO created an observer status for other regional states. Mongolia joined as an observer in June and Pakistan, Iran and India were granted that status in July 2005. Sri Lanka and Belarus were granted “dialogue partner” status at the 2009 SCO summit in Yekaterinburg.

The main duties of the Secretariat include overseeing over the SCO’s bureaucracy; executing resolutions passed by the HSC; and performing as a liaison between the SCO and other regional and international institutions and states.

Responsibilities of the RCTS include coordinating counterterrorist maneuvers among the member states’ law enforcement and security apparati, including coordinating security

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<sup>384</sup> Clearly no other state but the U.S. could plausibly be the target of the “global strategic balance” the SCO seeks to preserve, or more accurately, return to.

<sup>385</sup> Selbi Hanova, “Perspectives on the SCO: Images and Discourses,” *China and Eurasia Forum Quarterly* 7, no. 3 (2009), 64.

for the 2008 Beijing Olympics; and directing exercises to quell separatist and extremist movements. describes the functions of its mechanisms (councils) as the following: The HSC is the highest decision-making body in the SCO and consists of the presidents of the member states. It meets once every year to take decisions and give instructions on important decisions regarding the SCO. The Heads of Government Council (HGC) meets once every year to discuss strategy and priorities, including economic and trade issues, and to adopt the organization's annual budget. There are also mechanisms (councils) for the respective members' national Speakers of Parliament; Secretaries of Security Councils; Foreign Ministers; ministers of Defense, Emergency Relief, Economy, Transportation, Culture, Education, Healthcare; Heads of Law Enforcement Agencies; Supreme Courts and Courts of Arbitration; and Prosecutors General. The Council of National Coordinators of SCO Member States (CNC) is in charge of coordinating interaction within the SCO framework.

### **From Regional Institution to Global Actor**

Gradually, the SCO evolved from a purely regional outlook to an organization seeking international recognition. In 2004 the SCO received an observer status at the UN and in the following year, the SCO Secretary-General Bolat Nurgaliev was allowed to make a speech to the UN General Assembly. Additionally, the SCO has broadened its involvement in Asia by signing Memoranda of Understanding (MoU) with the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and with the Collective Security Treaty Organization.<sup>386</sup> Nurgaliev and his counterpart, CSTO Secretary-General Nikolai Bordyuzha, signed the memorandum in Dushanbe on 5 October 2007. The document

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<sup>386</sup> *Ibid.*

envisages joint efforts for the establishment and development of equal and constructive interaction between the SCO and CSTO on issues covering regional and international security and stability; counterterrorism; drug and weapons interdiction; transnational organized crime; and other areas of mutual concern.<sup>387</sup> During a 19 November 2008 meeting, Nurgaliev and ASEAN Deputy Secretary-General Soeung Rathchavy agreed to deeper integration in the areas of economic and trade relations; transportation and communications; energy, environmental protection and sustainable development; and information technologies.<sup>388</sup>

The sheer size of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization makes it an important actor in regional politics. The territory of the SCO member states constitutes 60 percent of the Eurasian landmass (30 million square kilometers) and has a population of about 1.5 billion. Together, with the four SCO observers – India, Pakistan, Mongolia and Iran – the organization possesses huge energy resources and a significant number of the world’s nuclear weapons (See table 6-1).<sup>389</sup>

Over the past several years, the SCO increasingly has become the focus of scholarly inquiry and interest of foreign policy and military analysts because of its rapid growth and potential influence as a regional security regime. The organization has largely evolved beyond its initial mission of resolving outstanding border disputes. It now focuses on improving trade, energy and economic development in the region as well as

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<sup>387</sup> Official statement from SCO website <http://www.sectSCO.org/EN/show.asp?id=97>

<sup>388</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>389</sup> Maksutov, “The Shanghai Cooperation Organization: A Central Asian Perspective.”

combating terrorism and separatism. This growing influence has translated into increased economic integration.<sup>390</sup>

Moreover, the organization has matured into what some describe as “an institutionalized multilateral body” that has adopted a more confrontational tone with the West.<sup>391</sup> In addition to the official declarations concerning Central Asia, the SCO has joined Russia and China in denouncing the U.S. withdrawal from the Anti-Ballistic Missile (ABM) Treaty in 2001 during the administration of President Bush II; opposed the U.S. National Missile Defense (NMD) program; and supported China’s position on the status of Taiwan as lawful territory of the PRC.<sup>392</sup> In fact, a detailed analysis of SCO statements, declarations, pronouncements and proclamations validates the conception of the organization as a countervailing coalition to Western and American interests in Central Asia. Although the SCO cannot be considered a formidable military bloc yet, “its rhetoric and actions have included elements of deliberate ‘counterbalancing’ and ‘blocking’ of Western nations and organizations that also have legitimate interests and partnership goals in the regions concerned.”<sup>393</sup>

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<sup>390</sup> In 2005, for example, bilateral trade between China and the five other SCO members reached almost US\$38 billion, up 212 percent from the launch of the organization. Russia’s trade with the other SCO members increased from US\$26 billion in 2001 to more than US\$41 billion in 2005. See Nicklas Norling and Niklas Swanström, “The Shanghai Cooperation Organization, trade, and the roles of Iran, India and Pakistan,” *Central Asian Survey* 26, no. 3 (2006): 429-444.

<sup>391</sup> Giragosian, “The Strategic Central Asian Arena,” 134.

<sup>392</sup> Dwivedi, “China’s Central Asian Policy in Recent Times,” 151.

<sup>393</sup> Bailes, “The Shanghai Cooperation Organization and Europe,” 16-17.

Table 6-1 – Capabilities of SCO Members and Observers

| Member           | Area in square km | Population    | GDP in \$US trillions | Military spending in US Billions* | Nuclear weapons |
|------------------|-------------------|---------------|-----------------------|-----------------------------------|-----------------|
| China            | 9,596,961         | 1,338,612,968 | \$4.758               | \$98.800                          | Yes             |
| Russia           | 17,098,242        | 140,041,247   | \$1.232               | \$61.000                          | Yes             |
| Kazakhstan       | 2,724,900         | 15,399,437    | \$0.175               | \$1.500                           | No              |
| Kyrgyzstan       | 199,951           | 5,431,747     | \$0.011               | \$0.185                           | No              |
| Tajikistan       | 143,100           | 7,349,145     | \$0.013               | \$0.063                           | No              |
| Uzbekistan       | 447,400           | 27,606,007    | \$0.075               | \$0.053                           | No              |
| <b>Observers</b> |                   |               |                       |                                   |                 |
| India            | 3,287,263         | 1,156,897,766 | \$3.561               | \$36.600                          | Yes             |
| Iran             | 1,648,195         | 66,429,284    | \$0.876               | \$9.174                           | No              |
| Mongolia         | 1,564,116         | 3,041,142     | \$0.009               | \$0.071                           | No              |
| Pakistan         | 796,095           | 174,578,558   | \$0.449               | \$4.823                           | Yes             |

Source: CIA World Factbook <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/index.html>

\*Military spending from Stockholm International Peace Research Institute for FY 2009; Numbers for Kyrgyzstan are from 2008; Numbers for Tajikistan from 2004; Numbers from Uzbekistan from 2003; Mongolia for 2007.

## **Reducing U.S. normative influence**

Because second-tier powers lack the military and economic capabilities to do so in a unipolar system, they are likely to adopt indirect balancing strategies that are less provocative to a hegemonic power. One way to do this is to remove the political influence of a hegemonic power that has penetrated into the region of lesser powers. Russia and China, through the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, have attempted to undermine the American normative (and strategic) interests in this manner. In this area, there have been three highly visible exploits the SCO has undertaken to counter American influence in Central Asia: rejecting a request by American observers to attend the 2005 summit; creating its own cadre of elections observers to respond to criticisms from their counterparts in the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) and American officials and NGOs; and promoting the concept of “sovereign democracy” as an alternative to Western concepts of democratization and human rights.

### *SCO Attempts at Strategic Denial*

Strategic denial is a prominent goal in any balancing context, let alone soft balancing. In the case of Central Asia, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization clearly has attempted to reduce America influence in the region, although with mixed results. There have been several prominent moves by the SCO in an effort to reduce U.S. influence in the region. First, the SCO has rejected requests by the United States to observe its official functions and meetings,<sup>394</sup> although U.S. diplomats were invited to the SCO special

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<sup>394</sup> Maksutov, “The Shanghai Cooperation Organization”; Oldberg, “The Shanghai Cooperation Organization: Powerhouse or Paper Tiger”; Rumer, “China, Russia and the Balance of Power in Central Asia,” *Strategic Forum*, no. 223, (Nov. 2006): 1-8.

conference on Afghanistan held in Moscow on 27 March 2009.<sup>395</sup> Second was the 2005 Astana declaration, which called for a timetable for the removal of the military contingents of the “antiterrorist coalition” from the territories of the member states, a clear signal to the United States and its allies.<sup>396</sup> Finally, Beijing and Moscow, through the SCO, supported Uzbekistan’s eviction of the U.S. military from its territory. Outside of the SCO framework, Moscow also pushed for the removal of American troops at the Manas base in Kyrgyzstan with tacit support from Beijing, although the outcome still remains to be seen. Finally, the Peace Missions conducted by member state militaries have been cited as a signal to the United States that balancing between China and Russia could harden if American unilateralism continued unabated. (The role of soft balancing across the military dimension is dealt with in Chapter Seven).

The most demonstrable evidence of strategic denial came at the July 2005 summit in Astana, where at the behest of Russia and China, the SCO called for a timetable for the removal of the military contingents of the “antiterrorist coalition” from the territories of member states. Many Western commentators have viewed the bold declaration as part of “concerted efforts to attack U.S. regional sway.”<sup>397</sup> Just five days before the declaration, “the Chinese and Russian presidents had issued a bilateral statement castigating unnamed

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<sup>395</sup> “US, Iran Attend Afghan Conference in Moscow,” accessed from Voice of America website, March 25, 2010, <http://www1.voanews.com/english/news/a-13-2009-03-27-voa54-68678047.html>

<sup>396</sup> The declaration reads in part: “Considering the completion of the active military stage of antiterrorist operation in Afghanistan, the member states of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (sic) consider it necessary, that respective members of the antiterrorist coalition set a final timeline for their temporary use of the above-mentioned objects of infrastructure and stay of their military contingents on the territories of the SCO member states.” Declaration of Heads of Member States of Shanghai Cooperation Organization, 5 July 2005, <http://www.sectsc.org/html/00500.html> Also, for a U.S. response, see the 2005 Report to Congress of the U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission.

<sup>397</sup> Tim Murphy, “East of the Middle East: The Shanghai Cooperation Organization and U.S. Security Implications,” Center for Defense Information, (2006), 2.

states that ‘pursue the right to monopolize or dominate world affairs’ by seeking to ‘divide countries into a leading camp and a subordinate camp’ and ‘impose models of social development.’ While the Astana summit declaration reaffirms ‘the supremacy of principles and standards of international law, before all, the UN Charter’, it provides a characteristic twist by stressing above all the principle of non-interference and arguing that ‘it is necessary to respect strictly and consecutively historical traditions and national features of every people’ and the ‘sovereign equality of all states.’<sup>398</sup>

The Astana declaration was preceded by the May 2005 Andijan incident, when Uzbekistan President Islam Karimov’s forces conducted a bloody crackdown that killed hundreds of “democratic” protestors in the city of Andijan. Karimov officially characterized the protest as “terrorist acts.”<sup>399</sup> The incident was denounced by the United Nations, United States and European Union, but Karimov’ pointedly received the strong backing of SCO members China and Russia. Although the Uzbeks used the SCO as a cover to eject the Americans, there were greater underlying concerns. “To be sure, the Russians and Chinese also welcomed the exit of the Americans from the region, but the SCO provides sufficient weight so that all the countries in the region could speak in concert.”<sup>400</sup>

The U.S. rebuke of the Karimov regime over the Andijan incident resulted in a rift that led to the eviction of U.S. forces from the Karshi-Khanabad (K2) base in Uzbekistan.

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<sup>398</sup> Alyson J. K. Bailes and Pál Dunay, “The Shanghai Cooperation Organization,” *SIPRI Policy Paper no. 17*, (Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, 2007), 7.

<sup>399</sup> “Uzbekistan: Saving its Secrets, Government Repression in Andijan,” report by Human Rights Watch, published May 2008.

<sup>400</sup> Mihalka, “Counterterrorism, Counterinsurgency,” 147-148.

Although the removal of U.S. forces from the K2 base was the result of bilateral tensions between the United States and Karimov over human rights concerns and the lack of democratization, the incident nonetheless pushed Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan (which also had come under pressure from Washington to democratize) firmly back into the orbit of the SCO.<sup>401</sup> “For Russia and China, the temptation to use Karimov’s fury to throw the US out of the region proved irresistible.”<sup>402</sup>

Another method of strategic denial, Robert Pape argues, is entanglement, particularly through regional and international institutions such as the United Nations. The SCO has held true to this logic as well; it routinely calls for international disputes to be resolved through the United Nations Security Council and repeatedly rejects unilateral undertakings, which are thinly disguised criticisms against the United States. At the most recent the 2009 SCO summit in Yekaterinburg, the organization declared:

Serious changes are taking place in the contemporary international environment. Aspiration to peace and sustainable development, promotion of equal cooperation became the spirit of the times. The tendency towards true multipolarity is irreversible. There is a growing significance of the regional aspect in settling global problems.... Settlement of international and regional conflicts must be conducted by political diplomatic means on the basis of the principles of equality and mutual respect, non-interference in internal affairs of sovereign states. The attempts to achieve unilateral advantages in defense field are counterproductive as they undermine the strategic balance and stability in the world, do not benefit confidence building reduction of arms and disarmament.<sup>403</sup>

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<sup>401</sup> Peter Ferdinand, “Sunset, Sunrise: China and Russia Construct a new Relationship,” *International Affairs* 83, no. 5, (2007): 841-867 and Akbarzadeh, “Uzbekistan and the United States: Friends of Foes”; Michael Mihalka, “Counterinsurgency, Counterterrorism, State-Building and Security Cooperation in Central Asia,” *China and Eurasia Forum Quarterly* 4, no. 2 (2006): 131-151.

<sup>402</sup> Rothacher, “Allying with an Axis of Evil?” 70.

<sup>403</sup> Yekaterinburg Declaration of the Heads of the Member States of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, June 15-16 2009, accessed from SCO website <http://www.sectSCO.org/EN/show.asp?id=182>

The month after the Astana declaration, the SCO also held its first-ever joint military exercise through the Regional Antiterrorist Structure (RATS), which was created at the July 2002 summit in St. Petersburg. Dubbed “Peace Mission 2005,” the war games were ostensibly an anti-terrorism exercise. Another “peace mission” was held in August 2007 and included 10,000 troops from land, sea and air units. Some commentators viewed the exercises as sending a strong message to Washington: “The fact that the exercise took place so soon after the SCO’s Astana summit, at which the organization made its clearest ever protest against US involvement in Central Asian affairs, indicates that the signals it conveyed about Chinese–Russian capacity and resolve were not aimed exclusively at potential non-state adversaries.”<sup>404</sup>

Moscow’s strategy to remove the U.S. presence from Central Asia appeared to pay off when, on 3 February 2009, Bakiyev announced, in Moscow, that Kyrgyzstan would close the Manas base shortly after the Russian government reportedly agreed to lend Kyrgyzstan US\$2 billion, write off US\$180 million in debt and add another US\$150 million in aid. “The Manas installation is viewed as ‘the premier air-mobility hub’ for U.S. and allied operations in Afghanistan, with about 1,000 military personnel from America, Spain and France stationed there, according to a U.S. Air Force website.”<sup>405</sup> Negotiations between the United States and Kyrgyz governments continued, however, and the U.S. lease for the base was extended to July 2010 after the Pentagon agreed to triple the rent it had paid to lease the base.<sup>406</sup> The status of the base remained unclear

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<sup>404</sup> Bailes, “The Shanghai Cooperation Organization,” 23.

<sup>405</sup> Tom Lasseter, “Kyrgyzstan to Close U.S. Base Used to Supply Afghanistan,” *McClatchy Newspapers*, 3 February 2009, accessed from [http://news.yahoo.com/s/mcclatchy/20090203/wl\\_mcclatchy/3159738](http://news.yahoo.com/s/mcclatchy/20090203/wl_mcclatchy/3159738)

after April 2010 uprising in Kyrgyzstan, which overthrew the Bakiyev government.

According to news reports:

The opposition has declared that it wants to permanently close the base, although it is unclear whether this was at the behest of Moscow or the result of domestic unrest. According to news reports, Russian President Medvedev urged the opposition to close the base, while the administration of U.S. President Barack Obama pushed for its continuance.<sup>407</sup> Reports stated that Russian Prime Minister Vladimir Putin recognized the interim government formed by opposition leader Roza Otunbayeva because Bakiyev had failed to fulfill a promise to close the U.S. base. However, U.S. officials said it was unclear who was running Kyrgyzstan, although he added Washington did not see the upheaval as a Russian-sponsored or anti-American coup.<sup>408</sup>

### *Promotion of Sovereign Democracy*

The proliferation of Western NGOs promoting democratic reform in the region clearly has disturbed its autocratic rulers, who despite initially benefiting from American aid because of the “war on terror,” view democratization as a threat to their rule. Because of the SCO’s strong support of sovereignty in regards to domestic affairs, it is not “burdened” with democratization and human rights issues that hamstring Western interests.<sup>409</sup> To counter the normative agenda of the West, the organization has adopted the alternative Russian doctrine of “sovereign democracy,” which treats foreign support

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<sup>406</sup> On 23 June 2009, reports indicated that Kyrgyzstan had reached a tentative deal to allow the United States to continue operations at the base. Under the deal, the U.S. would triple its \$17.4 million annual lease on the base. “Analysts, meanwhile, say Russia, which grudgingly accepted the agreement, may have approved it in the hope of U.S. concessions on issues that have badly strained its relations with Washington — such as NATO’s possible expansion eastward and a planned U.S. missile defense complex in central Europe.” Leila Saralayeva, “U.S. Kyrgyzstan reach deal on air base,” Associated Press, accessed 24 June from [http://news.yahoo.com/s/ap/20090623/ap\\_on\\_re\\_as/as\\_kyrgyzstan\\_us\\_base](http://news.yahoo.com/s/ap/20090623/ap_on_re_as/as_kyrgyzstan_us_base)

<sup>407</sup> Caren Bohan and Denis Dyomkin, “Obama, Medvedev press Iran, differ on Kyrgyzstan,” *Reuters News Service*, accessed April 8, 2010, [http://news.yahoo.com/s/nm/20100408/pl\\_nm/us\\_nuclear\\_summit\\_11](http://news.yahoo.com/s/nm/20100408/pl_nm/us_nuclear_summit_11)

<sup>408</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>409</sup> Maksutov, “The Shanghai Cooperation Organization: A Central Asian Perspective,” 5.

for domestic democratic movements and nongovernmental organizations as a form of external meddling in the internal affairs of its members.<sup>410</sup>

The doctrine has been heavily promoted by Russia. Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov published a 2007 article about “sovereign democracy” that criticized NATO’s “bloc” policies.<sup>411</sup> In the final year of his presidency, Russian President Putin made a number of speeches indicating that he also saw the United States and other Western countries as seeking to infringe on the sovereignty and interests of Russia and other countries. In a February 2007 speech to the Munich Security Conference, Putin warned the United States that it should not attempt to create a world “of one boss, one sovereign,” and that the Americans should stop interfering in Russian domestic politics.<sup>412</sup> “Without mentioning the United States specifically, Putin also complained about countries that were trying to expand their power in the world much as the Nazis did before World War II. In a number of other speeches in the run-up to the 2008 Russian presidential election, Putin continued this theme, suggesting that current policies on the part of some states present threats similar to the peacetime roots of World War II.”<sup>413</sup>

The powerful role that norms play in the systemic balance of power is illustrated in Russian and Chinese responses to Western support for various “Color Revolutions” in Central Asia and Central Europe. Indeed, these “revolutions” have been as troubling as U.S. military power projection to Moscow and Beijing, which view the normative agenda

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<sup>410</sup> Rumer, “China, Russia and the Balance of Power in Central Asia,” 6.

<sup>411</sup> Olga Oliker, Keith Crane, Lowell H. Schwartz, Catherine Yusupov, *Russian Foreign Policy: Sources and Implications*, (Arlington, Va.: Rand Corporation, 2009), 86.

<sup>412</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>413</sup> *Ibid.*

as U.S. stratagems to destabilize the region. “The U.S. invasion of Iraq and the Color Revolutions that deposed pro-Moscow governments in Georgia, Ukraine, and Kyrgyzstan have (sic) led influential Russians to view the continued U.S. presence as a major source of instability. In February 2005, the Russian Foreign Ministry pressured the Kyrgyz government to reject a U.S. request to station AWACS aircraft at Ganci. Since then, Russia’s state-dominated media has repeatedly urged Central Asian governments to crack down on U.S.-supported civil liberties groups.”<sup>414</sup>

American officials are aware of the threat democratization in Central Asia poses to Moscow, Beijing and the smaller authoritarian states in the region. Speaking to the U.S. Congress in 2006, Assistant Secretary of State Richard Boucher criticized the SCO’s disinterest in human rights and democratization, saying: “I think the first thing to note is the organization doesn’t take up human rights questions itself, and that is probably our big criticism of Shanghai Cooperation in the human rights field, that there’s no effort at all to match economic agreements, border agreements, security cooperation, counterterrorism efforts with any standards of human rights or even, I suppose, what we would say is sort of understanding of the political environment in which those things have to operate. And so it’s kind of, as I said, no-questions-asked cooperation in these fields. And that in itself is not helpful to bring a balanced development in the region.”<sup>415</sup>

The U.S. continues to use normative capabilities as a fungible asset to promote its agenda in Central Asia. In the case of Kyrgyzstan, the U.S. awarded grants to civil-

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<sup>414</sup> Richard Weitz, “Averting a New Great Game in Central Asia,” *The Washington Quarterly* 29, no. 3, Summer 2006), 158. Also see Rumer, “China, Russia and the Balance of Power in Central Asia.”

<sup>415</sup> Testimony during the hearing on “The Shanghai Cooperation Organization: Is it Undermining U.S. Interests in Central Asia,” Hearing Before the Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe, One Hundred Ninth (109<sup>th</sup>) Congress, September 26, 2006.

society development, grants to independent media outlets (pro-Western), and grants to finance a Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty Service. In addition, the United States finances Kyrgyzstan’s most active democracy NGO, the Coalition for Democracy and Civil Society.<sup>416</sup>

| Table 6-2: How China and Russia soft balance through the SCO |   |   |
|--|---|---|
| Military   | Political   | Economics   |
| Astana Declaration   | Opposition to democratization in Central Asia         | Control of Central Asian pipeline routes              |
| Creation of RATS   | Opposition to U.S. plans for National Missile Defense | Potential for exclusive economic zone in Central Asia |
| Increasing troop strength in Central Asia                    | Push for alternative norm of “sovereign democracy”    | Possible “energy cartel” including Iran               |

American financial assistance also has funded peace, security and democratization efforts in the Central Asian states. In 2008, the U.S. provided US\$324 million in aid to the region, although the amount dipped in 2009 to US\$134.51 million.<sup>417</sup> Cumulative spending for the region was US\$1.5 billion, which includes Defense and Energy department spending on areas such as nonproliferation and counterterrorism.<sup>418</sup>

Such aid could be viewed as low-level measures to support potential Central Asian allies, who in turn would be more loyal, or at least amenable, to Washington than

<sup>416</sup> Erica Marat, “The Tulip Revolution: Kyrgyzstan One Year After,” published by the Jamestown Foundation, March 2006, 61.

<sup>417</sup> Jim Nichol, “Central Asia’s Security: Issues and Implications for U.S. Interests,” *CRS Report For Congress*, Congressional Research Service, March 11, 2010, 63. This amount excludes Defense and Energy department funding.

<sup>418</sup> *Ibid.*

to Beijing and Moscow. In other words, by securing the allegiance or acquiescence of the smaller republics in the region, the United States could hinder Russian and Chinese interest. “U.S. elevation of democracy promotion into an existential struggle for victory over terrorism and an essential foundation for peaceful relations among states has put it squarely at odds with China and Russia, both of whom have approached the task of combating terrorism as a matter of defeating specific organizations and strengthening regimes currently in power. They see noninterference in internal political affairs as the key to regional peace and cooperation.”<sup>419</sup>

America’s democracy promotion in the autocratic Central Asia states, ironically, has pushed their regimes closer to China and Russia.<sup>420</sup> After the infamous Andijan incident, the U.S. called for an international investigation of Karimov’s government, an action that moved Uzbekistan closer to its SCO members (all six members declared that any investigation should be the internal matter of Tashkent). More troubling for Beijing and Moscow was the American-supported “Tulip Revolution,” which led to the ouster of Kyrgyz President Askar Akiyev in March 2005. The United States immediately recognized the elected government of Kurmanbek Bakiyev, an opponent of Akyev. However, an increasingly autocratic Bakiyev – eventually recognizing his tenuous hold on power in the face of “democratic” forces – quickly returned to the orbit of Beijing and Moscow and initially endorsed Russia’s call for the removal of U.S. forces from the

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<sup>419</sup> Rumer, “China, Russia and the Balance of Power in Central Asia,” 6.

<sup>420</sup> Olcott, “The Great Powers in Central Asia.”

Manas air base in Bishkek.<sup>421</sup> Despite his vacillation between American and Russian suitors, Bakiyev had become more pro-Moscow than his predecessor until his ouster.<sup>422</sup>

It has not solely been the leaders of the major powers to speak out against what they perceive as a one-size-fits-all approach to democracy by the West. Tajik President Ismali Rahmonov aired similar concerns during a 6 November 2006 interview with the BBC. “I have been saying and reiterate now that this should be taken into account. It is not worth imposing some kinds of new ideologies on Asian countries as a chess-board model. This is not worth. As for the OSCE standards and meeting conditions or requirements of international norms, particularly of the OSCE, 100 percent, I think there is not a single country in the world which can meet demands and standards of the OSCE 100 percent,” Rahmonov said.<sup>423</sup> In a unipolar and increasingly globalized world, norms can be a serious threat to states. If norms can be used to weaken states, then they can theoretically be used to strengthen them. Like weapons and money, norms thus can be considered a fungible capability.

#### *Creation of SCO election observers*

So far, this section has demonstrated the threat the “Color Revolutions” have posed to the rule of the Central Asian autocracy and the negative externalities they have

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<sup>421</sup> Marat, *The Tulip Revolution: Kyrgyzstan One Year After*. Also see, Jim Nichol, “Kyrgyzstan’s Constitutional Crisis: Context and Implications for U.S. Interests,” CRS Report for Congress, January 2005. For news accounts, see “Kyrgyz strongman set for poll landslide,” *The Australian*, 18 December 2007, accessed from LexisNexis.

<sup>422</sup> Bakiyev’s threats to close the Manas air base “were a clear way for Bakiyev to demonstrate to his SCO cohorts that Kyrgyzstan’s recent political revolution did not represent a comprehensive Western tilt.” Jim Nichol, “Central Asia: Regional Developments and Implications for U.S. Interests,” 12.

<sup>423</sup> Tajik leader against imposing new ideologies on Asian states, BBC Monitoring Central Asia Unit Supplied by BBC Worldwide Monitoring, Nov. 6., 2006, accessed from LexisNexis.

produced in Beijing and Moscow. If norms can be projected – and have substantial *material* outcomes such as regime change – then this power theoretically can be balanced. To counter this “democratic” onslaught, the SCO “has formed its own cadre of election observers, who since their debut in Kyrgyzstan in February 2005 have endorsed every election held in a member state – in contrast to monitors from the OSCE [Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe] and Western Organizations.”<sup>424</sup>

In response to American and Western pressure on the political systems in Central Asia, the SCO established its own Observer Mission to oversee the electoral process in member states. Two recent elections stand out for review in this study: the 2009 presidential election in Kyrgyzstan and the 2007 presidential election in Uzbekistan. Neither election was deemed free or fair by the U.S. State Department or the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE). Nevertheless, The SCO and its members endorsed both elections. Determining whether the elections were “free and fair” is beyond the scope of this study, however. The examples below are provided to demonstrate the nature of balancing at the normative level (soft balancing), which can be just as intense as any military rivalry and whose outcomes can be just as transformative as warfare.

**Kyrgyzstan:** The 23 July 2009 Kyrgyz presidential elections pitted incumbent Kurmanbek Bakiyev of the *Ak Jol* party against challengers Almazbek Atambaev (independent candidate representing the United People’s Movement [UPM] and Chairperson of the SDPK party); Jenishbek Nazaraliev (independent); Temir Sariiev (*Ak Shumkar* party); Nurlan Motuev (independent, aligned with the *Joomart* movement); and

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<sup>424</sup> Oldberg, “The Shanghai Cooperation Organization: Powerhouse or Paper Tiger?” 16.

Toktaiym Umetalieva (independent). The Kyrgyz government invited the OSCE mission to observe the election, and the mission deployed 277 observers from 39 OSCE participating states.<sup>425</sup> The Observer Mission from the SCO was composed of three Secretariat officers and five representatives from SCO member states (three from the Republic of Kazakhstan and two from the Republic of Uzbekistan).<sup>426</sup>

Although observing the same election, the two missions came up with radically different conclusions. OSCE observers found the election marred by many problems and violations, including inaccuracies in the voter lists, evidence of ballot box stuffing and some evidence of multiple voting, and evidence of direct manipulation or falsification in numerous instances. The OSCE report concluded: “The 23 July 2009 presidential election in the Kyrgyz Republic failed to meet key OSCE commitments for democratic elections, in particular the commitment to guarantee equal suffrage, to ensure that votes are reported honestly and that political campaigning is conducted in a fair and free atmosphere as well as to maintain a clear separation between party and state. The field of presidential candidates offered a genuine choice to voters and the continuing engagement of civil society provided an important element of transparency and accountability. Notwithstanding these positive elements, public confidence in the electoral process remains a fundamental challenge.”<sup>427</sup>

In contrast, the SCO report found that voting at the polling stations observed by its mission was conducted in accordance with Kyrgyz election law in a free, calm,

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<sup>425</sup> From the OSCE Office of Democratic Institutions and Human Rights report on the Kyrgyz Republic presidential elections, 22 Oct. 2009.

<sup>426</sup> From the official SCO website <http://www.sectsco.org/EN/show.asp?id=182>

<sup>427</sup> OSCE/ODIHR Election Observation Mission Final Report, 1.

transparent and well-organized environment with no violations reported. “The Mission notes that the election took place in a democratic environment, which basically conformed to the requirements of the national legislation of the Kyrgyz Republic and its international obligations.”<sup>428</sup>

**Uzbekistan:** A similar pattern was found during the 23 December 2007 presidential elections in Uzbekistan. In the election, the incumbent Islam Karimov (*Liberal Democratic Party of Uzbekistan* [PDPU]) faced challenges from Asliddin Rustamov (People’s Democratic Party of Uzbekistan); Dilorom Tashmukhamedova (Social Democratic Party, *Adolat Party*); and Akmal Saidov, head of the National Centre for Human Rights, who represented NGOs organized in a government-initiated NGO umbrella. During the Uzbek presidential election, the OSCE sent only a small contingent of observers and no systematic or comprehensive observation of polling stations were conducted because of the tightly controlled political environment in the country.<sup>429</sup> The mission, nonetheless, found numerous problems. Among them were “legal and administrative obstacles that prevented political movements representing alternative views from registering as political parties or initiative groups, thereby precluding them from fielding presidential candidates.”<sup>430</sup>

The findings of the OSCE were in marked contrast to those of the SCO Observer Mission for Uzbekistan. The mission reported the election was conducted in accordance to Uzbek election law and conformed fully to international standards and provided the

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<sup>428</sup> SCO official website <http://www.sectesco.org/EN/show.asp?id=182>

<sup>429</sup> See OSCE/ODIHR Limited Election Observation Mission Final Report on Republic of Uzbekistan Presidential Election, 23 Dec. 2007. Published 23 April 2008.

<sup>430</sup> *Ibid.* 1.

necessary democratic and legal preconditions for free expression of the voters' will by secret ballot.<sup>431</sup> According to the U.S. State Department, however, "Uzbekistan has no meaningful political opposition. Four pro-government political parties hold all seats in the parliament, and independent political parties have been effectively suppressed since the early 1990s."

### *The Strategic Role of Democratization*

These two cases demonstrate the significant role normative capabilities can play in the international system and how states have developed soft balancing strategies to counter them. Indeed, such strategies cannot be easily dismissed. Given the widely divergent findings each group had of the elections in Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan, the SCO seems to have created its own election observers to provide a counterbalance to the election observers from Western states. In the current international system, democracy is a major component of state legitimacy and a site of contestation both within and without borders. The threat democratization poses to many leaders in the developing world is as serious – and in some cases more serious – than military threats. For instance, the United States has pursued "regime change" via military capabilities in Iraq, but also through the use of normative capabilities in countries such as Ukraine and a combination of economic and normative capabilities in Iran.<sup>432</sup>

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<sup>431</sup> SCO official website <http://www.sectsco.org/EN/show.asp?id=97>

<sup>432</sup> Peter Burnell notes that the instruments of democracy promotion can range from hard power (coercion via military force and/or economic sanctions) and soft power (via persuasion and the provision of democracy assistance). See Burnell, "Autocratic Opening to Democracy: Why Legitimacy Matters," *Third World Quarterly* 27, no. 4 (2006): 545-562.

Generally, the regime targeted for change is considered an “enemy,” “rogue” or “pariah” state by the hegemonic power. In the case of a liberal hegemonic power, democratization, theoretically, would remove the “hostile” regime in power and bring about a new ruling class more amenable to the liberal world order. In other cases, the targeted regime might be the ally or vassal of another great power. In this situation, regime change in a smaller power – whether via military or normative means – can reduce the power of its great power ally or patron through realignment, thus altering the balance of power.

| Table 6-3: Status of Democracy in SCO Member and Observers   |                     |
|--|---------------------|
| SCO Member   | Status of Democracy |
| China  | Not Free            |
| Kazakhstan   | Not Free            |
| Kyrgyzstan   | Partially Free      |
| Russia   | Not Free            |
| Tajikistan   | Not Free            |
|  |                     |
| SCO Observer   | Status of Democracy |
| India  | <i>Free</i>         |
| Iran   | Not Free            |
| Mongolia   | <i>Free</i>         |
| Pakistan   | Not Free            |
| Source: Freedom House World 2007 <a href="http://www.freedomhouse.org/template.cfm?page=372&amp;year=2007">http://www.freedomhouse.org/template.cfm?page=372&amp;year=2007</a> |                     |

The “Color Revolutions” are a case in point. The 2005 Orange Revolution resulted in the electoral victory of pro-Western candidate Viktor Yushchenko over pro-Russian incumbent Viktor Yanukovych in Ukraine;<sup>433</sup> and the 2005 Tulip Revolution in Kyrgyzstan led to the ouster of Moscow-supported incumbent Askar Akiyev in favor of then U.S.-favorite Kurmanbek Bakiyev. In both “revolutions,” Western- and American-

<sup>433</sup> Yanukovych was re-elected president 25 Feb. 2010, and has restored friendly ties to Moscow since.

funded NGOs and U.S. democracy assistance played a significant role in the electoral outcome. In the Ukrainian election, the United States spent more than \$18 million in election-related efforts in the two years leading up to the 2004 presidential vote.<sup>434</sup> Of the \$36.4 million in U.S. aid to Kyrgyzstan in 2005, 14.6 percent supported democratization programs, including legal and judicial programs, support for NGOs and support for independent media.<sup>435</sup>

The strategic role of democratization is a major objective of U.S. national security policy and the United States and European Union spend nearly \$1.5 billion on democracy promotion to this end.<sup>436</sup> In fact, U.S. national security strategy is infused with liberal theories of international security. Those theoretical underpinnings are imbedded in the March 2006 National Security Strategy of the United States, which states on page 3: “Because democracies are the most responsible members of the international system, promoting democracy is the most effective long-term measure for strengthening international stability; reducing regional conflicts; countering terrorism and terror-supporting extremism; and extending peace and prosperity.” Like its predecessor, the 2010 NSS states that democratization can be pursued through the formation of partnerships with nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and other civil society voices to support and reinforce their work.<sup>437</sup>

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<sup>434</sup> Michael McFaul, “Ukraine Imports Democracy: External Influences on the Orange Revolution,” *International Security* 32, no. 2 (Fall 2007): 45–83.

<sup>435</sup> Nichol, “Coup in Kyrgyzstan: Developments and Implications,” 9.

<sup>436</sup> McFaul. “Ukraine Imports Democracy,” 47.

<sup>437</sup> Democratization was a top foreign policy objective of the Bush administration and remains so under the current Obama administration. Whether such a policy is purely instrumental or normative, or a combination of both, is beyond the scope of this study.

As argued throughout this study, the role of normative capabilities has not been lost on China and Russia, either, although Moscow has taken the lead in this category. Ivan Krastev, an analyst of Russian foreign policy, argues that Moscow is seeking to increase its normative capabilities to counter U.S. advocacy of Western democratization: “The search for soft power is what characterises Russia's return to the world stage. The dynamism of the energy sector and the attractiveness of sovereign democracy are the two weapons of choice in Russia's current march on Europe. Contrary to the assertions of Putin’s critics, the concept of sovereign democracy does not mark Russia’s break with European tradition. It embodies Russia's ideological ambition to be ‘the *other* Europe’ – an alternative to the European Union [emphasis in the original].”<sup>438</sup>

Russia’s opposition to Western democratization has manifested itself in a number of ways. Moscow has criticized OSCE election-observer missions, particularly in post-Soviet states, as biased. Russian restrictions on OSCE observers led the organization to decide not to monitor either Russia’s parliamentary elections in 2007 or its presidential elections in 2008.<sup>439</sup> “The leadership group that surrounds Putin and helped put Medvedev in the president’s office has explicitly rejected a number of Western democratic norms. They see freedoms of speech, the press, and assembly—to say nothing of political opposition—as some of the major contributors to the weakness and division of Russia in the 1990s. This group of leaders views U.S. efforts to promote democratic norms as cynical, hypocritical, and motivated by the U.S. drive to remain the dominant

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<sup>438</sup> Ivan Krastev, “Sovereign Democracy: Russian Style,” *Open Democracy* website, [http://www.opendemocracy.net/globalization-institutions\\_government/sovereign\\_democracy\\_4104.jsp](http://www.opendemocracy.net/globalization-institutions_government/sovereign_democracy_4104.jsp) accessed March 28, 2010.

<sup>439</sup> Olikier *et al*, *Russian Foreign Policy: Sources and Implications*, 108.

global power. U.S. efforts to spread values of freedom and democracy in Russia and its neighboring countries are seen as nefarious efforts to reduce Russia's influence, impinge on Russian sovereignty, and weaken and destabilize Russia's own successful political system."<sup>440</sup>

Not only do Russia and China see democratization as a source of instability internationally, but as a threat to their own internal rule. In an extensive overview of Chinese elite perceptions of global norms, Daniel C. Lynch finds that the ruling Chinese Communist Party (CCP) rejects the role of democratization in international relations because it views the norm as a Western machination.<sup>441</sup> One Chinese academic Lynch cites, Xu Chongwen, argues that the West actively manipulates democratic norms for the purpose of subverting developing countries. In a 2005 article in *Leadership Reference*, Xu said the Color Revolutions in Central Asia and Eastern Europe were products of American intervention similar to the Bush Administration's invasion of Iraq. According to Xu, the Bush administration pursued a "secret and dangerously effective strategy" to overthrow authoritarian states and replace them with Western democracies. "To provoke the Color Revolutions, Bush mobilized the Agency for International Development to: first, prod NGOs into cultivating relations with opposition elements in the countries to be subverted; second, stir up dissatisfaction with domestic economic arrangements and ethnic relations; third, subsidize oppositional media outlets, and encourage journalists to

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<sup>440</sup> *Ibid.* 176.

<sup>441</sup> Daniel C. Lynch, "Envisioning China's Political Future: Elite Responses to Democracy as a Global Constitutive Norm," *International Studies Quarterly* 51, no. 3, (2007): 701-722.

publish news stories damaging to leaders' reputations; and fourth, assist in the organization of opposition parties."<sup>442</sup>

In regards to soft balancing, many Chinese elites share the view of this author that norms are a distinct capability and a fungible asset of power. As People's Liberation Army scholar Tang Guanghong writes, "the current international regimes, including the UN, World Bank, IMF, and WTO, are products of American hegemony."<sup>443</sup>

Accordingly, Lynch concludes: *material power can fuel ideational power*. To which I might add, *ideational power can delegitimize and undermine material power*.

### **Criticism of SCO as a Balancing Mechanism**

Critics and skeptics of the balancing role of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization have pointed out a number of reasons why the organization should not be considered a viable balancing mechanism: first and foremost, it is not a formal security alliance; secondly China and Russia may be pursuing their interests in the SCO for other power-seeking motives such as dominating the region's energy resources or controlling pipeline routes, irrespective of the presence of American troops; and finally, critics argue that China and Russia have a number of conflicting interests that will likely doom any Sino-Russo "strategic partnership" against the United States.<sup>444</sup>

Each of these issues can be addressed within a soft balancing framework. As Hans Morgenthau once pointed out, "Not every community of interests calling for co-operation

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<sup>442</sup> *Ibid.* 705.

<sup>443</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>444</sup> Cooley, "Cooperation Gets Shanghaied," and Wohlforth, "Defying Expectations: Russia's Missing Asian Revisionism," in G. John Ikenberry and Chung-in Moon, eds., *The United States and Northeast Asia: Debates, Issues and New Order*, (Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield, 2008).

between two or more nations, then, requires that the terms of this co-operation be specified through legal stipulations of a treaty alliance.”<sup>445</sup> Furthermore, soft balancing theories, including the one explicated in this study, maintain that indirect and non-military measures are likely the best strategies in a unipolar system. As for the second criticism, actors can pursue more than one interest within the confines of an institution. The fact that the SCO is utilized for the purposes of regional stability does not rule out its potential use for off-shore defense; both strategies can be pursued via the SCO and should be viewed as complementary rather than mutually exclusive.

The final criticism raised by skeptics – that the latent tensions between China and Russia are likely to undermine any long-term attempts to balance the United States – can be turned back against them: Given these serious underlying problems, why does the Chinese-Russian “strategic partnership” continue to persist? Despite Moscow’s concerns about China’s exploding economy, it continues to supply its energy thirsty neighbor with Russian oil; although China’s military capabilities are increasing by leaps and bounds relative to those of Russia, Moscow continues to sell its most advanced weapons systems to its larger neighbor; and notwithstanding Moscow’s concerns (real or perceived) about a Chinese “yellow peril” invading and occupying the Russian Far East, Moscow continues to align with Beijing on almost every important international issue. As Yong Deng points out, “These accelerated developments are remarkable, especially in

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<sup>445</sup> Morgenthau, *Politics Among Nations*, 183.

light of the many domestic obstacles, stemming notably from the border demarcation, Chinese immigrants in Russia, and mutual security suspicion.”<sup>446</sup>

Indeed, as pointed out in the preceding chapters, neoclassical realism offers a strong explanation for the persistence of the Russo-Sino “strategic partnership.” Domestically, the Russian oil and arms industry benefits greatly from trade with China. Culturally, Chinese and Russian nationalism provide a strong impulse against Western globalization, particularly those concerning democratization and human rights. But the overarching reason is structural. As long as the system remains unipolar, China and Russia will be forced to partner if they wish to counter American intervention, which threatens both their interests. “Such an alliance would experience real friction, but to protect their interests, states will find allies where they can, when they must.”<sup>447</sup>

Conflict frequently besets allies and partners at the international level. Serious friction among NATO members over the Second Gulf War has not led to the demise of that alliance. France and Germany vigorously opposed the United States invasion of Iraq in March 2003, but the alliance remained intact. Indeed, skeptics of soft balancing via the SCO appear to have raised the bar too high when it comes to cooperation between Russia and China.<sup>448</sup> The SCO is a relatively young organization and cannot be expected to become a major power broker within a few years, although it has made some remarkable

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<sup>446</sup> Yong Deng, “Remolding great power politics: China's strategic partnerships with Russia, the European Union, and India,” *The Journal of Strategic Studies* 30, no. 4-5, (Aug.-Oct. 2007), 868.

<sup>447</sup> Bruce Russett and John R. O’Neal, *Triangulating Peace: Democracy, Interdependence and International Organizations*, (New York: Norton, 2001), 285.

<sup>448</sup> Collins and Wohlforth, “Central Asia: Defying the ‘Great Game’ Expectations” are among the most skeptical. In 2003, Collins and Wohlforth touted the U.S. relationship with Uzbekistan, which severed ties with the United States and renewed its relationship with Moscow and the SCO just two years later after the Andijan incident. For a counterargument to Collins’ and Wohlforth’s assertion that U.S. intervention could foster stability in Central Asia, see Akbarzadeh, “Keeping Central Asia Stable.”

strides over the past decade. It took the European Union, one of the most touted examples of regional integration, nearly half a century to evolve from the European Coal and Steel Community in 1951 to the supranational organization it is today. Nevertheless, despite deep integration within the EU, there remain rifts among members over immigration, security and defense policy.<sup>449</sup> True, the potential conflict between China and Russia is greater than any policy disputes among the Atlantic alliance. Yet, as many have pointed out, “despite such concerns, Russia appears to regard the growing American influence in Eurasia as more threatening to its interest than a rapidly growing China. Thus, both China and Russia are eager to foster a strategic partnership aimed at heading off American ability to extend its global dominance in the region.”<sup>450</sup>

## **Conclusion**

This chapter demonstrates the role of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization in soft balancing the United States. It argues that China and Russia have attempted to use the SCO as a buffer to American hegemony in Central Asia. Drawing on neoclassical realism and regional security complex theory, it demonstrates the interplay between the domestic and international forces that shape Chinese and Russian foreign policy in the region and the role the organization plays in Moscow and Beijing’s calculus of strategic denial. Furthermore, it highlights the roles norms play in great power politics. China and Russia recognize that they cannot counter U.S. influence simply through denunciations of American “hegominism” alone.

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<sup>449</sup> Christopher Hill, “Renationalizing or Regrouping? EU Foreign Policy Since 11 September 2001,” *Journal of Common Market Studies* 42, no. 1, (March 2004): 143-163.

<sup>450</sup> Atal, “The New Great Game,” 104.

By offering alternative means of legitimation and strongly supporting state sovereignty, the SCO can provide another pole of power around which smaller and midsize powers might gravitate. Attracting the small, autocratic Central Asian republics and middle powers such as Iran to the Beijing-Moscow axis will not alter the strategic balance of power, but it could undermine U.S. hegemony and in some cases restrain American unilateralism. Nevertheless, it has become “a kind of center of attraction, or an object of interest for a whole number of Asian countries. Having obtained the observer status in the SCO, Mongolia, India, Pakistan and Iran have not only contributed to the broadening of the potential area of the organization, but also demonstrated the real possibility of the SCO to directly influence the institutionalized structure of the interstate units, and the international relations of Asia as a whole.”<sup>451</sup>

As for the success of the soft balancing strategy, the results have been mixed at best. The removal of U.S. forces from Uzbekistan could be counted as a success, even if it were the result of bilateral tensions between Washington and Tashkent, because it furthered the goals of Russia and China, which supported the outcome. However, despite intense Russian pressure, Moscow has not been able to push the Kyrgyz government to evict American troops from the base in Manas. The joint Peace Missions held by the SCO signal that Russia and China are willing to take steps to harmonize their military force structures, although that is still at a rudimentary stage. However, “the organization’s influence in the region is considerable, and its biggest members—China and Russia—have the ability to undercut American initiatives there. But the SCO’s power to produce

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<sup>451</sup> Portyakov, “The Shanghai Cooperation Organization,” 2.

concrete results where they matter the most to its members—security and stability—is limited at best, and all its members have a strong interest in the success of the principal U.S. mission in the region, which is to secure Afghanistan.”<sup>452</sup>

In the arena of regional security, the SCO has made some progress. It has promoted effective cooperation among member states in the economic and humanitarian spheres; reduced the armed forces in the border areas; coordinated the fight against separatist and terrorist elements, fostered economic development and promoted cooperation across the environmental, scientific and cultural spheres. Proper implementation of cooperative measures by the member states “is capable of improving the socioeconomic situation and stabilizing the domestic political situation in the Central Asian countries ... [and] lowering the destabilizing influences of radical Islam and western ideology fraught with the danger of ‘orange revolutions.’”<sup>453</sup>

Irrespective of these shortcomings, the establishment and cementing of the “strategic partnership” through the SCO should be considered a success in and of itself. The fact that Beijing and Moscow have forged a relationship to counter American hegemony has not gone unnoticed by U.S. officials. In an interview with the Russian ITAR-Tass news service on 2 February 2010, Assistant Secretary of State Robert Blake said the United States continues to closely monitor the organization. “I think the SCO can be a good engine for cooperation and for partnership in the region, but I think our interest

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<sup>452</sup> Rumer, “China, Russia and the Balance of Power in Central Asia,” 3.

<sup>453</sup> *Ibid.*

is ensuring that the SCO is not exploited by any country to try to use it as a vehicle for domination of that region. It should be, again, a vehicle for equal partnership.”<sup>454</sup>

Leszek Buszynski points out: “Both Russia and China nonetheless regard the SCO as a balancing mechanism to the American presence in Central Asia, which stimulates their cooperation.”<sup>455</sup> Because soft balancing is a non-traditional strategy and one that works best indirectly, the tentative steps taken by Moscow and Beijing to undermine U.S. policy might easily be overlooked as simple self-aggrandizement or dismissed as traditional diplomatic friction. Yet, systematic engagement in a policy to counteract U.S. interests should be viewed as part of a larger strategy, not simply the vagaries of regional powers. Eugene Rumer, an expert on Central Asia, sums this point up quite adequately:

A close look at the organization, the behavior of its members, their motivations, and the practical impact of their declarations suggest that the SCO’s challenge to U.S. interests and policies in Central Asia is less than meets the eye. But ignoring the SCO simply because of its limited capabilities for action and concrete results would be a mistake; it is more than a paper tiger. As a political organization, it is an important vehicle for Russian and Chinese diplomacy aimed to counter U.S. influence in the region. The SCO also provides a forum where Central Asian states, dwarfed by their giant neighbors, can sit at the table with them as equals, at least nominally. For all these reasons, the SCO is worth the attention of the United States. The question is what kind of attention we should pay to it.<sup>456</sup>

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<sup>454</sup> Accessed from U.S. State Department website <http://www.state.gov/p/sca/rls/press/2010/137345.htm> on March 24, 2010.

<sup>455</sup> Buszynski, “Russia and the CIS in 2003: Regional Reconstruction.”

<sup>456</sup> Rumer, “China, Russia and the Balance of Power in Central Asia,” 2.

## CHAPTER VII

### THE MILITARY DIMENSION OF SOFT BALANCING

Soft balancing is a response to the military imbalance in the international system, and therefore, a soft balancing strategy could affect the global strategic balance. From a strategic standpoint, soft balancing can set favorable diplomatic conditions that can increase the chances a state has of fending off superior military power. This chapter assesses the impact soft balancing has had on Chinese and Russian military doctrine and strategy. It argues that both states have undertaken military modernization efforts to address their shortcomings vis-à-vis the United States, though each has done so in a manner that does not jeopardize its relations with the hegemonic power.<sup>457</sup>

Counterbalancing U.S. military power requires indirect methods similar to balancing at the normative level. Detailed analysis of Chinese and Russian military and foreign policy thinking indicates that both seek to offset U.S. military superiority without engaging American power directly. Chinese defense doctrine in regards to the United States is predicated on the concept of “strategic denial” or “anti-access,” which Russia to a lesser extent shares. In the case of confrontation, the goal is not to engage the superior forces of the United States head-on, but to utilize measures that attack American vulnerabilities, such as logistics, forward basing, command and control and satellites capabilities. Regional denial, which is discussed in Chapters V and VI, plays a significant

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<sup>457</sup> The goal of soft balancing across the military dimension would be strategic denial at the regional level rather than the ability to produce offensive capabilities, which would be a long-term objective. Robert Art makes a similar point in *Striking the Balance*.

role in the calculations of Moscow and Beijing because it could foreclose the possibility of American basing rights in a third country.

The first part of this chapter covers Chinese contemporary military strategy, followed by a similar examination of Russian doctrine. The third section analyzes the bilateral relations between Russian and Chinese militaries and the role the Shanghai Cooperation Organization could play in any military confrontation between China and/or Russia and the United States. It concludes with a discussion of the role normative capabilities could play in the future use of military force.

### **Chinese Defense Posture**

Contemporary Chinese military doctrine follows Sun Tzu's ancient and timeless maxim: "in war, the way is to avoid what is strong and to strike at what is weak."<sup>458</sup> Following this logic, PLA military planners have developed weapons systems designed to exploit relative Chinese military strengths against relative military weaknesses of the United States. Parallel to its soft balancing strategy, China has adopted an "active defense" military doctrine, which is based partially on non-linear, non-contact and asymmetric operations. Under the "active defense" doctrine, China's strategic goals are viewed as defensive, including defending China's maritime periphery, although limited offensive measures "might be employed as necessary to safeguard China's core strategic interests (for instance, by using an ASBM [anti-ship ballistic missiles] to target a US carrier strike group dispatched to preclude China from coercing Taiwan). Non-linear operations involve launching attacks from multiple platforms in unpredictable fashion

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<sup>458</sup> This line was borrowed from Andrew S Erickson, "Ballistic Trajectory – China Develops New Anti-ship Missile," *Jane's Intelligence Review*, Jan. 10, 2010. Last accessed May 22, 2010, from <http://jir.janes.com/public/jir/index.shtml>

that range across an opponent's operational and strategic depth.”<sup>459</sup> Present Chinese defense strategy was heavily shaped by the post-9/11 policies of the United States. The Bush doctrine’s unilateralism and advocacy of preventive force suggested to PLA strategists that American restraint and self-restraint were weakening.<sup>460</sup>

Furthermore, China’s sharply rising dependence on imported oil and concerns with maritime access rights coupled with pro-independence sentiment on Taiwan in the early years of the decade led Beijing to be more explicit about solving the dispute with force if all else fails.<sup>461</sup> Although the Bush administration’s unilateralism played a major factor in Beijing’s military calculus, it is the unipolar nature of the international system that most concerns the PLA, a scenario that is expected to persist under the Obama administration and into the near future, despite the administration’s more nuanced and multilateral approach to international relations. China, for example, continues to assert contested sovereignty over much of the South China Sea, which is an important maritime route. To protect those sea routes from American access in times of crisis, China is developing and testing anti-ship ballistic missiles equipped with maneuverable reentry vehicles (MaRVs) capable of hitting moving ships at sea.

According to Congressional testimony in the United States, “Observers have expressed strong concern about this development, because such missiles, in combination with broad-area maritime surveillance and targeting systems, would permit China to

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<sup>459</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>460</sup> David C. Gompert, *Coping With the Dragon: Essays on PLA Transformation and the U.S. Military*, (Washington, D.C.: Center For Technology and National Security Policy at the National Defense University, Dec. 2007).

<sup>461</sup> *Ibid.* 5.

attack aircraft carriers, other U.S. Navy ships, or ships of allied or partner navies operating in the Western Pacific. The U.S. Navy has not previously faced a threat from highly accurate ballistic missiles capable of hitting moving ships at sea.”<sup>462</sup>

China’s concern about U.S. maritime supremacy in the Pacific is deep-seated, and persists despite changes in American leadership. Regardless of administration, Beijing remains troubled by American support for Taiwan. One PLA theorist, for instance, “blames America’s hegemonic impulses that have led to a ‘new buildup of American forces based in Asia’ and ‘blocked the realization of unification [of China and Taiwan].”<sup>463</sup> Indeed, unipolarity trumps many of the PLA’s concerns with potential regional rivals. David Gompert makes this point when he argues that China has tabled conflicts with other regional actors such as India and Russia to deal directly with U.S. hegemony. Although China’s calculations and motives might be complex, Gompert argues that there is coherence in Beijing’s strategy and programs. To counterbalance the U.S., “China has placed its long-standing disputes and rivalries with India, Russia, and Vietnam on the back burner and its Pacific interests, access, and defenses on the front burner, which constitutes a shift of focus from the continental west to the oceanic east of the Middle Kingdom. While being careful not to antagonize the United States—economic partner, leader in the war on Islamist terrorism, guardian of world oil supplies and routes,

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<sup>462</sup> Ronald O’Rourke, “China Naval Modernization: Implications for U.S. Navy Capabilities – Backgrounds and Issues for Congress,” Congressional Research Service, (July 26, 2010), 8

<sup>463</sup> Andrew Erickson and Lyle Goldstein, “Hoping for the Best, Preparing for the Worst: China’s Response to US Hegemony,” *The Journal of Strategic Studies* 29, no. 6, (Dec. 2006), 961.

and in any case the world's superpower—Chinese military planning now revolves around Sino-American contingencies.”<sup>464</sup>

Chinese weapons programs indicate that the PLA's focus is squarely on the United States.<sup>465</sup> In addition to rapidly modernizing its undersea warfare capabilities, the PLA Navy (PLAN) is developing conventionally armed missiles that could provide China with a potent capability against regional bases and U.S. aircraft carriers operating in the vicinity of Taiwan. Beijing also is determined to modernize its strategic nuclear forces. China is deploying road-mobile intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs) and developing nuclear-powered ballistic missile submarines (SSBNs) and submarine-launched ballistic missiles (SLBMs). China currently has about 20 silo-based, liquidpropellant DF-5 ICBMs capable of striking targets in the continental United States and some older missiles that are more limited in range and serve primarily as a regional nuclear deterrent.<sup>466</sup> In the area of space defense, China's successful testing of “ground-based, midcourse missile interception technology” on 11 January 2010 “was another example that the People's Liberation Army is looking to challenge the United States in space.”<sup>467</sup>

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<sup>464</sup> David C. Gompert, *Coping With the Dragon: Essays on PLA Transformation and the U.S. Military*, (Washington, D.C.: Center For Technology and National Security Policy at the National Defense University, December 2007), 13.

<sup>465</sup> Erickson and Goldstein, “Hoping for the Best, Preparing for the Worst: China's Response to US Hegemony.”

<sup>466</sup> Michael S. Chase, Andrew S. Erickson, Christopher Yeaw, “Chinese Theater and Strategic Missile Force Modernization and its Implications for the United States,” *The Journal of Strategic Studies* 32, no. 1, (Feb. 2009): 71-73.

<sup>467</sup> Richard D Fisher Jr., Reach for the stars - China develops its military space technology, *Jane's Intelligence Review*, Feb. 11, 2010. Last accessed May 22, 2010, <http://jir.janes.com/public/jir/index.shtml>

Anti-access themes are pronounced when Chinese strategists discuss options available to the PLA for wresting the initiative from the United States or for preventing the timely deployment of additional U.S. forces in Asia.<sup>468</sup> “The United States is the key security focus for China and the Chinese strategy of sea and air denial is designed with an armed conflict against the United States in mind. No doubt, the United States military presence in Asia-Pacific is a significant military factor.”<sup>469</sup> The bulk of weapons platforms Beijing has purchased from Russia suggest an “access denial” strategy that is wholly consistent with Beijing’s focus on the Taiwan issue, particularly its naval modernization program.<sup>470</sup> In submarines, the PLA Navy has found a weapon system that provides a cost-effective instrument for deterrence, or if necessary, to engage in combat against a superior foe. According to reports, the PLAN launched 13 submarines between 2002 and 2004 in addition to the eight “very quiet” Kilo class-diesel submarines that were delivered from Russia by end of 2006. The exchange signified a major effort by the PLAN in undersea warfare.<sup>471</sup> From a strategic standpoint, China’s anti-access denial is a combination of Mackinder (Central Asian strategic rear) and Mahan (Pacific blue water).

In classical terms, China is challenging U.S. sea control of the Western Pacific. Sea control implies an unchallengeable ability to use particular waters and routes while also being able to deny such use to others. It does not mean that others would routinely be deprived of their freedom to use the seas in question for commercial or military purposes, but, rather, that use may be denied at the sole discretion of the controlling power, e.g., in a crisis or conflict. In fact, sea powers like the United States and Great Britain have been champions of freedom of the

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<sup>468</sup> Roger Cliff, Mark Burles, Michael S. Chase; Derek Eaton; Kevin L. Pollpeter, eds., *Entering the Dragon’s Lair: Chinese Antiaccess Strategies and their Implications for the United States*, (Santa Monica, Calif.: Rand Corporation, 2007).

<sup>469</sup> Goh and W. Simon, *China, The United States and Southeast Asia*, 7.

<sup>470</sup> Erickson and Goldstein, “Hoping for the Best, Preparing for the Worst.”

<sup>471</sup> *Ibid.*

seas for one and all, *except* when they choose to curtail that freedom. Sea control, classically understood, does indeed describe fairly what the United States currently seeks in the Western Pacific. Thus, the Chinese would be right to understand this to mean that China could be denied use of these international waters in the event of trouble—e.g., Chinese military action against Taiwan—but wrong to interpret it to mean that China could be denied use of the seas and access to the world under normal peacetime conditions.<sup>472</sup>

### *Soft Power as a Military Asset in PLA Doctrine*

In addition to military anti-access strategies, Chinese security analysts also discuss a number of diplomatic and political means of denying or limiting U.S. military access to the region in the event of conflict. As outlined in Chapter Six, diplomatic and political anti-access would be part of a strategy aimed at pressuring countries in the region to deny use of forward bases and refuse to provide other critical forms of assistance to U.S. forces.<sup>473</sup> To do this, Andrew Erickson and Lyle Goldstein argue that China will rely heavily on “soft power” in any future confrontation with the United States. “Beijing intends to increase its soft and hard power in ways that could pose a challenge to U.S. hegemony, which it fears threatens its core national interests. China not only wields increasing commercial clout in all regions of the globe, but is also willing to deliberately ignore human rights issues in order to achieve diplomatic advantage with respect to the United States.”<sup>474</sup>

Beijing also uses its cozy relationship with Iran to indirectly balance U.S. interests. Backing Tehran in its confrontation with the West over Iran’s nuclear energy

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<sup>472</sup> Gompert, *Coping With the Dragon*, 15. Levy and Thompson make a similar argument in about maritime powers in “Balancing on Land and at Sea.”

<sup>473</sup> Cliff *et al*, *Entering the Dragon’s Lair*, 77-79.

<sup>474</sup> Erickson and Goldstein, “Hoping for the Best, Preparing for the Worst,” 956. Also see Goh and Simon, *China, The United States and Southeast Asia*.

program could be considered a “strategy game” that deflects attention from Chinese policies (as well as the important strategic objective of allying China with an energy-rich nation). Iran’s continued intransigence over its nuclear program, with help from China and Russia, forces the United States to focus firmly on the Middle East while neglecting the equally strategic-important Pacific theater. “With China also pursuing a foreign policy that currently overtly avoids direct conflict with other states or entities such as Taiwan, and hence fails to encourage U.S. interventions, this situation is allowing Beijing to expand its economic and diplomatic influence in Asia unhindered, creating for itself the role of a regional hegemon.”<sup>475</sup> With the American forces focused on the Middle East, China can increase its capabilities under the radar in the Pacific, and thus avert a direct challenge to the United States.<sup>476</sup>

### **Russian Defense Posture**

Russia has consistently opposed American hegemony since the early 1990s and, holding consistent with a soft balancing strategy, Moscow has sought to create a world overseen by the UN Security Council and several power centers supporting an anti-hegemonic axis.<sup>477</sup> Similar to the Chinese position, Russian opposition to U.S. intervention in Central Asia has been largely reactive and non-confrontational.<sup>478</sup> Like their counterparts in Beijing, military strategists in Moscow were particularly concerned

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<sup>475</sup> Christian LeMiere, “Tighter Bonds – China Strengthens Ties With Iran,” *Jane's Intelligence Review*, Nov. 11, 2009. Last accessed May 22, 2010 from <http://jir.janes.com/public/jir/index.shtml>

<sup>476</sup> John J. Mearsheimer, “The Gathering Storm: China’s Challenge to U.S. Power in Asia,” *The Chinese Journal of International Politics* 3, (2010): 381-396.

<sup>477</sup> Andrew Monaghan, “Calmly critical’: Evolving Russian views of US hegemony,” *The Journal of Strategic Studies* 29, no. 6, (December 2006): 987-1013.

<sup>478</sup> *Ibid.*

about aggressive American unilateralism under the Bush Doctrine and are unlikely to change their views regardless of the “reset” of Russian-American relation sought by President Obama. Unipolarity, too, is another key factor in Russia’s calculations, especially with the United States possibly on the verge of attaining nuclear primacy against Russia and other great powers irrespective of the recent signing of the new START treaty.<sup>479</sup> “Strategic stability vis-à-vis the U.S. is another element of Russia’s self-image and the cornerstone of its security policy in the global dimension. Although Moscow cannot afford to maintain numerical parity with the U.S... it is still obsessed with qualitative equilibrium.”<sup>480</sup>

In both the 2000 Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation and the 2003 Military White Paper, Moscow detailed its view of reviving multipolarity at the systemic level. “A trend is growing toward the establishment of a unipolar world structure that would be dominated by the U.S. economically and through force . . . the strategy of unilateral action can destabilize the international situation, provoke tensions and an arms race and exacerbate the contradictions between states and national and religious strife.”<sup>481</sup>

Regional denial is another element of Russian defense doctrine, although it is an objective the Russian army has been unable to fully achieve. Nevertheless, Russia’s military assets in Central Asia give it substantial hard and soft power.<sup>482</sup> Over the past

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<sup>479</sup> See Keir A. Lieber and Daryl G. Press, “The End of MAD? The Nuclear Dimension of U.S. Primacy,” *International Security* 30, no. 4 (Spring 2006): 7-44.

<sup>480</sup> Marcin Kaczmarski, “The “Post-START” Treaty: Goals and Implications,” *Russian Analytical Digest*, no. 66, 20 (Oct. 2009), 6.

<sup>481</sup> Monaghan, “Calmly critical!: Evolving Russian views of US hegemony,” 992-993.

<sup>482</sup> Richard Weitz, *Russia: A Reference Handbook*, (Santa Barbra, Calif.: Praegar Security International, 2010).

decade, Russia has been increasing its defense-related activities in Central Asia. For example, In October 2003, Russia established its first new military base since the USSR's implosion at Kant, Kyrgyzstan, which made Kyrgyzstan the only country hosting Russian and American military bases on its territory. "The approximately 20 military aircraft and 1,000 troops deployed there lie only some 30 kilometers from the U.S. base at Manas, which was also used by some U.S. allies with military contingents in Afghanistan."<sup>483</sup> Similar to China, this strategy focuses on asymmetric responses in the case of armed conflict with the United States, what Russian Gen. M.A. Gareyev calls "strategic deterrence" or "flexible strategic containment."<sup>484</sup>

Russia's initial acquiescence to the American presence in Central Asia to combat Taliban and al Qaeda forces in Afghanistan after the 9/11 terrorist attacks was partly self-serving. After 9/11, Moscow reluctantly accepted the American presence in Central Asia because the United States was the one entity that could effectively deal with Islamic extremists along Russia's borders. However, Moscow concluded that the U.S. risks associated with a continued U.S. presence in Central Asia far outweighed the benefits. The Color Revolutions deposed pro-Moscow governments and many in the Russian foreign policy elite came to see the U.S. presence as a major source of instability. In November 2005, for instance, Secretary of the Russian Security Council Igor Ivanov wrote: "What we see are practical attempts to interfere in the political life of new

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<sup>483</sup> *Ibid.* 95.

<sup>484</sup> Mahmut A. Gareyev, "Issues of Strategic Deterrence in Current Conditions," *Military Thought* 18, no. 2, (April-June 2009): 1-9.

independent states under the guise of advancing democratic values and freedoms, putting pressure on authorities via processes.”<sup>485</sup>

Andrew Monaghan argues that Moscow’s vision of a multipolar foreign and security policy thinking is marked by the attempt to construct an anti-American international axis and forge counterbalances to U.S. dominance through the development of strategic relationships.<sup>486</sup> This point is echoed by Gen. Gareyev, who lambastes what he calls “subversive activity” by the West because of its support for the varied “Color Revolutions” along Russia’s borders. Given the widespread distrust of American intentions in Moscow, the “reset” in Russian-American relations started under the Obama administration is likely no more than a patina, which simply covers the long-term structural problems lurking underneath the façade of U.S.-Russian cooperation.

One Russian expert considered the relationship to be similar to an iceberg – the top, smaller part creating the impression of good partnership and cooperation, but the larger, underwater part giving no grounds for optimism, and acting as ... deadweight to relations. For its part, the Russian political and security elite is arguing that a world dominated by the US and particularly US military might is inherently unstable and threatening to Russia’s interests. There is widespread talk of the erosion of the partnership established in 2001, the disappearance of the common agenda and a downhill slide in relations.<sup>487</sup>

Russian force posture also is tailored for intervening in its near-abroad. This is largely due to its lack of power projection capabilities outside of Russia’s immediate sphere of influence. The inability of Russia to launch long-range forces means it must focus its balancing efforts regionally. The 2008 limited war in Georgia exemplifies the

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<sup>485</sup> *Ibid.* 97.

<sup>486</sup> Monaghan, “Calmly Critical: Evolving Russian views of US hegemony.”

<sup>487</sup> Gareyev, “Issues of Strategic Deterrence in Current Conditions,” 2. Also see Col. A. Yu. Maruyev, “Military Aspects of Russia’s Geopolitical Interests And Geostrategy,” *Military Thought* 18, no. 1, (Jan-March 2009): 1-8.

type of strategies and tactics Moscow will use to insulate itself from outside influence. Such missions likely will be limited deployments in support of friendly regimes in the post-Soviet near-abroad. These hostile interventions into post-Soviet space will be “along the lines of the August 2008 Georgian campaign, to chastise a regime, protect Russian nationals or interests or otherwise assert strategic interests in what Moscow regards as its sphere of influence; the defense of Russian interests in contested regions such as the Arctic; and the assertion of Russia's global role as a major power, such as by participation in multinational peacekeeping missions or participating in exercises in theatres far beyond Russian territory.”<sup>488</sup>

### **Soft Balancing and Military Rivalry: The Case of Kyrgyzstan**

Russian intervention in Central Asia has been much more pronounced than that of China, which does not come as a surprise given the region's intimate relationship with Moscow. Recent activities in the region appear to indicate that Russia is quickly losing patience with the U.S. presence there. The overthrow of the regime of Kurmanbek Bakiyev in Kyrgyzstan is a case in point. In April 2010, nationwide protests led to the resignation of Bakiyev, who was replaced by interim President Roza Otunbayeva. Bakiyev had come to power during the 2005 Tulip Revolution, but, like his predecessor Askar Akiyev, was accused of intimidation and corruption by his opponents. Although a wave of popular discontent drove Bakiyev from power, many analysts argued that Moscow played a key role in his ouster.

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<sup>488</sup> Mark Galeotti, “Force Projections – The Future of Russia's Military Reform,” *Jane's Intelligence Review*, Dec. 23, 2009. Last accessed May 24, 2010 from <http://jir.janes.com/public/jir/index.shtml>

Stephen Blank pointed to Bakiyev's failure to close the American base at Manas as the main reason Moscow withdrew its support for him and instead backed his opposition. Blank argued that Russia prepared a concerted plan to undermine the Bakiyev government and replace it with one more openly dependent upon Moscow. "Certainly Bakiyev's successor, Roza Otunbayeva, thanked Russia for helping oust Bakiyev, for offering humanitarian aid, and for recognizing the new government before anyone else did. And members of the new government hinted at forthcoming changes in foreign policy while asking for Russian aid and hinting that they could ask as well for Russian peacekeepers. Moscow also sent 150 (if not more) paratroopers to its base at Kant."<sup>489</sup>

Bakiyev himself admitted that Russian support for Otunbayeva was largely based on his decision to not shut down the American base at Manas. Asked about speculation that Moscow may have played a role in the uprising, Bakiyev said Russian President Dmitry Medvedev and Prime Minister Vladimir Putin had been unhappy at his decision in 2009 to extend the lease on the U.S. base. "They told me: 'Why are you holding on to this Manas base, this worries us, this does not suit us,'" Bakiyev told reporters in Russian at a news conference in Minsk, where he fled after the revolt that led to his ouster. "Russia's leadership was irritated, annoyed by the presence of the base and this factor also played a certain role."<sup>490</sup> Although the coup was primarily backed by Moscow,

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<sup>489</sup> Stephen Blank, "Moscow's Fingerprints in Kyrgyzstan's Storm," *Analyst*, Central Asian-Caucasus Institute, Last accessed May 13, 2010. <http://www.cacianalyst.org/?q=node/5305> Accessed April 24, 2010.

<sup>490</sup> Andrei Makhovsky, "Bakiyev says Russian anger a factor in Kyrgyz revolt," *Reuters*, April 23, 2010. Last accessed May 12, 2010.

Beijing quickly indicated its support as well, in hopes that Russia could provide stability in the country and prevent increased influence by U.S. forces in the country.<sup>491</sup>

An article in the Nation summed up Russia's anger with Bakiyev:

Despite its seeming neutrality, it's clear that Moscow largely orchestrated the palace coup that ousted President Bakiyev last week. Last year, Russia offered Bakiyev \$2 billion in aid on the apparent condition that he close the U.S. base at Manas, but after Bakiyev collected more than \$400 million in Russian aid he decided to accept a U.S. offer to triple the Manas rent, angering Prime Minister Putin of Russia. The Russian media carried out a well-orchestrated campaign attacking Bakiyev, accurately, as a thieving kleptocrat, and they compared him to Genghis Khan. (In some countries that would be taken as a compliment, but it wasn't meant that way.) Then Moscow used its economic muscle to build momentum for popular opposition to Bakiyev.<sup>492</sup>

It is still too early to determine whether Russia's support for Otunbayeva will yield substantial dividends. After initially vowing to evict the American forces, Otunbayeva later backtracked and promised to extend the lease on the base at least another year after it expired in July 2010. However, the Kyrgyz government has sent mixed messages about the future of the base, which also faces substantial public opposition in Kyrgyzstan. Russia continues to pressure the new administration to shut down the base, and Kyrgyz officials are wary of American intentions; many felt U.S. concern about the country's future centered squarely on the status of Manas rather than true democratization and economic development that would help improve Kyrgyzstan's condition. Moscow could exploit its close relations with the Kyrgyz government to obtain

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<sup>491</sup> See Niklas Swanström, China: The Silent Giant And Kyrgyzstan's Unrest, *Analyst*, Central Asian-Caucasus Institute, April 14, 2010 <http://www.cacianalyst.org/?q=node/5304> and Blank, "Moscow's Fingerprints in Kyrgyzstan's Storm." Last accessed May 12, 2010.

<sup>492</sup> Robert Dreyfuss, "The Kyrgyz Great Game," *The Nation*, April 14, 2010, accessed May 12, 2010 from [http://news.yahoo.com/s/thenation/20100414/cm\\_thenation/1096551548\\_1](http://news.yahoo.com/s/thenation/20100414/cm_thenation/1096551548_1)

concessions from the United States by muting Russian opposition to the base. However, the situation remains in flux and the outcome is far from clear.

### **Military Dimensions of the Strategic Partnership and the SCO**

Relations between Russia and China, long complicated, have probably never been better.<sup>493</sup> China has become an important trading partner and is a major arms customer of Russia. Friendship with Beijing helps Moscow further a number of its goals and enhance its prestige. The two countries support one another in international and bilateral forums on issues such as missile defense, terrorism, sovereignty, territorial extremism, and North Korea. They have carried out joint military and police exercises, both bilaterally and in the SCO. “These exercises mark a radical change for China, which had not engaged in exercises of this sort with other states in the past.”<sup>494</sup>

The relationship consistently shows elements of soft balancing: the use of regional organizations, reliance on international institutions and non-entangling diplomacy. One of the more concrete expressions of this pattern of behavior came in July 2006 with the issuing of the joint Sino-Russian statement “Regarding the International Order of the 21st Century.” According to analyst John Hill, the statement demonstrated China’s continued objective of engaging partners bilaterally without acquiring the entanglement of formal alliances or giving the appearance of being aimed at third parties.<sup>495</sup> The gist of the statement, Hill suggests, “is concerned with changing how

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<sup>493</sup> Olikier *et al*, *Russian Foreign Policy: Sources and Implications*.

<sup>494</sup> *Ibid.* 16.

<sup>495</sup> John Hill, “China’s Strategic Diplomacy,” *Jane’s Intelligence Review*, January 01, 2006. Last accessed May 23, 2010, from <http://jir.janes.com/public/jir/index.shtml>

international security is currently arranged [and] is found in a series of observations around a single (unstated) theme of harnessing the U.S.'s freedom of international action. Three main issues drive this shared perspective: the paramount nature of each country's unique situation and sovereignty; the centrality of a (reformed) UN to the international order; and the importance of encouraging regional supra-national organizations.”<sup>496</sup>

The declaration also promotes the goal of developing regions as poles of power within the international system. Because of overwhelming U.S. hard power, China and Russia believe regional complexes can be used to offset Washington's hegemony. “Therefore, organizations such as the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and the EU are seen as the best locations for the necessary alternate poles to balance the current international system. These organizations are therefore to be encouraged to develop broader security functions.”<sup>497</sup>

Another area of cooperation is within the United Nations. In the UN, the two countries consistently vote together. In 2006, they voted together 100 percent of the time on resolutions concerning nonproliferation, Iraq, Iran, North Korea, and Sudan. China is a solid supporter of Russia when Russia questions U.S. actions and policies, and, like Russia, it views the United States as destabilizing in Central Asia and other post-Soviet states. Both countries are strongly opposed to U.S. democratization efforts abroad (and to U.S. criticism of their own domestic policies and institutions). Some Russians argue that

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<sup>496</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>497</sup> *Ibid.*

China should be Russia's most prominent partner and ties to China, including those extended through the SCO, should eclipse Russia's relationship with NATO.<sup>498</sup>

Military cooperation between the two Eurasian giants has intensified significantly since the mid-2000s.<sup>499</sup> The month after the Astana declaration, the SCO held its first-ever joint military exercise through the Regional Antiterrorist Structure (RATS), which was created at the July 2002 summit in St. Petersburg. Dubbed "Peace Mission 2005," the war games were ostensibly an anti-terrorism exercise. Another "peace mission" was held in August 2007 and included 10,000 troops from land, sea and air units; another Peace Mission was held in July 2009, which included 2,600 soldiers from. Some commentators viewed the exercises as sending a strong signal to Washington: "The fact that it involved amphibious landings, sea blockades, and other operations that were irrelevant to the geography of landlocked, desert Central Asia suggests that the SCO is primarily a vehicle for a new Moscow-Beijing condominium in Asia, and is not intended as a true multilateral security framework for Central Asia."<sup>500</sup> Coming off the heels of the Astana declaration, the Peace Mission signaled that "Chinese-Russian capacity and resolve were not aimed exclusively at potential non-state adversaries" but at Washington as well.<sup>501</sup>

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<sup>498</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>499</sup> See A.A. Migunov, "Trends of China's Strategy In Information Warfare," *Military Thought* 17, no. 4, (Oct-Dec 2008): 133-142 and A.A. Migunov, "Reorganization of Chinese Forces And Further Development of Russo-Chinese Relations," *Military Thought* 17, no. 4, (Oct-Dec 2008): 1-12

<sup>500</sup> Ariel Cohen, "The Dragon Looks West: China and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization," *Heritage Lectures*, published by the Heritage Foundation, Sept. 7, 2007, 3.

<sup>501</sup> Bailes, "The Shanghai Cooperation Organization," 23.

Other areas that demonstrate growing coordination, if not outright cooperation, include the SCO's focus on security of the seas and space. Russian Lt. General Anatoly Klimenko writes that "with granting the status of SCO observers to other three sea powers (India, Pakistan and Iran), who in due course will probably become its full members, SCO can control an overwhelming part of the Asian coastline."<sup>502</sup> In terms of securitizing space, Russia is pushing for the SCO to adopt its GLOSSNAS global navigating system as an alternative to American Global Positioning System (GPS). "Only by developing this navigating system our two countries [India and Russia] could put an end Pentagon dependence. It should be said here that other SCO participants are also interested in using this system both in peaceful purposes and in defense perspective."<sup>503</sup>

In bilateral relations, Russian weapons transfers to China are reinforcing their strategic partnership. Although the main rationale for Russia's arms sales to China is economic, it should also be examined within the context of overall Russian arms trade policy within the global environment. Paradorn Rangsimaporn argues that while Russian arms trade policy with China is primarily based on economic benefits, it is also a political-strategic tool useful in affirming the Sino-Russian relations and increasing Russia's global influence. Rangsimaporn counters those skeptics who warn that Russians fear that arms transfers to China will fuel the beast. In fact, such transfers "do not pose a threat because if China intended to attack Russia, Beijing would be buying land-force equipment and low-flying assault aircraft, hardware in which it has expressed no interest. Alexander Lukin at the Moscow State Institute for International Relations also asserted

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<sup>502</sup> A.F. Klimenko, "Military-Political Aspects of Future Cooperation Between Russia, India and China in the Bilateral Format and Within SCO," *Military Thought* 16, no. 2, (2007): 7-8.

<sup>503</sup> *Ibid.*

that the Chinese military threat is groundless because China's technological level is 'insufficiently high to present a threat to Russia in the visible future'" and points out that 'the [current] thrust of China's defense policy points southeast, toward Taiwan and the South China Sea, rather than toward Russia and Central Asia.'"<sup>504</sup>

The logic of Russian weapons transfers to China as a form of strategic balancing is supported by an examination of U.S. conventional defense doctrine. For example, the 2010 U.S. Nuclear Posture Review specifically singles out China for the lack of transparency that surrounds its nuclear program, which "raises questions about China's future strategic intentions." And although it acknowledges the urgent nature of the possibility of nuclear terrorism, the NPR still identifies Russian and Chinese arsenals as the greatest challenge to ensuring strategic stability.<sup>505</sup> Politicians and military strategists on each side of the strategic triangle appear to agree that the greatest likelihood of conflict among members of the triad is between China and the United States. "The often contrasting strategic goals of China and the U.S., alongside Beijing's extension of its power projection, will necessarily undermine to some extent U.S. preponderance in the East Asian theatre and implies that apprehension rather than acceptance will dominate Washington's reaction to continued Chinese military expansion."<sup>506</sup>

Furthermore, major U.S. defense platforms and strategic weapons appear to be directed at China, which in turn looks to the West rather than East when devising

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<sup>504</sup> Paradorn Rangsimaporn, Russia's Debate On Military-Technological Cooperation With China *From Yeltsin To Putin*," *Asian Survey* 46, no. 3, (2006), 481.

<sup>505</sup> April 2010 *Nuclear Posture Review Report*, published by U.S. Department of Defense.

<sup>506</sup> Ellen Hallams, "Diverging Paths –Obama's Policies May Affect Sino-US Relations, *Jane's Intelligence Review*, Feb. 9, 2009. Last accessed May 24, 2010 from <http://jir.janes.com>.

strategies for its long-term military defense.<sup>507</sup> Washington has built up its military forces throughout East Asia and American bases in Guam have been upgraded and are now home to several new forces. Three new U.S. nuclear attack submarines based there will be able to triple their time on patrol off the Chinese coastline. A new wing of B-52 bombers permanently based in Guam can reach throughout Asia, including penetrating the Chinese mainland. The 2006 quadrennial defense review shifts the U.S. Navy's surface fleet westward, with one aircraft carrier being redeployed from the Atlantic fleet to the Pacific (bringing to six the number stationed there, more than half the U.S. fleet). Furthermore, all of the navy's SM-3 equipped Aegis ships (the Navy's most modern system) are deployed to Asia. That number has recently doubled, from three to six, and is likely to continue to rise.<sup>508</sup> "The Pentagon is planning to enhance its conventional strike capabilities in ways that seem tailor-made to target China."<sup>509</sup>

## **Conclusion**

The examination of Chinese and Russian defense doctrine reveals that their defense postures, hard and soft power are largely aimed at warding off the United States and not each other. On the other hand, U.S. conventional defense doctrine and buildup – outside of its continued focus on the Middle East and counterterrorism efforts – is directed mainly at a potential Chinese threat in the Pacific. The dynamics of the strategic triangle can be explained by soft balancing. Unlike past balancing behavior, which

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<sup>507</sup> China is also developing conventionally armed missiles that could provide the PLA with a potent capability against regional bases and US aircraft carriers operating in the vicinity of Taiwan. Such modernization is not a concern for Russia. See Chase *et al* "Chinese Theater and Strategic Missile Force Modernization and its Implications for the United States," 71.

<sup>508</sup> The above information comes from Christopher Twomey, "Missing Strategic Opportunity in U.S.-China Policy Since 9/11: Grasping Tactical Success," *Asian Survey* 47, no. 4, (2007), 548.

<sup>509</sup> *Ibid.* 549.

consisted of formal alliances and/or arms buildups, Moscow and Beijing have focused on less direct means to challenge U.S. supremacy. These include military modernization that seeks to exploit American vulnerabilities, the use of regionalization to buffer against American forward-basing rights, and tactics that avoid direct confrontation by striking the “soft underbelly” of U.S. military power, including command and control, systems networks and logistics. The balancing efforts are not only limited to the military domain; information security and cyberwarfare are two other dimensions in which Russia and China have tried to balance the United States by using non-confrontational means.<sup>510</sup> “The PLA has established information warfare units and is also able to harness extensive civilian resources to conduct cyberwarfare operations, even during peacetime. Taiwanese authorities have said that they regard a cyberwarfare attack from China as much more likely than an actual invasion.”<sup>511</sup>

Moscow and Beijing also have added “soft” or “normative” dimensions of power to their military doctrines to counter American normative influence among leaders of various minor powers in Central Asia. The development of alternative norms would be crucial in winning over allies in the event of confrontation. Russian Col. A. Yu. Maruyev highlights the importance of soft power as an asset of military strategy when he writes “it is extremely important to formulate a national ideology that could be aimed, in the realm

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<sup>510</sup> S.M. Boyko, I.N. Dylevsky, S.A. Komov, S.V. Korotkov, S.N. Rodionov, A.V. Federov, “Potential Approaches to Implementing the Russian Federation’s Military Policies on International Information Security in the Present Situation,” *Military Thought* 18, no. 2, (2007): 10-16.

<sup>511</sup> Tai Ming Cheung, “Dragon on the Horizon: China’s Defense Industrial Renaissance,” *Journal of Strategic Studies* 32, no. 1, (February 2009), 34.

of international relations, at turning Russia into a world power capable of influencing world events from the perspective of its own national interests.”<sup>512</sup>

Leading figures in the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) also want to strengthen China’s soft power. In May 2004, for example, “the CCP Politburo held its 13th collective seminar on ‘Development and Prosperity of Chinese Philosophy and Social Science.’ The backdrop to this seminar was the introduction of the Beijing Consensus and increasing international interest in the Chinese development model.”<sup>513</sup> According to Young Nam Cho and Jong Ho Jeong, “the seminar was significant because it served as an example of Chinese leaders beginning to pursue the strengthening of China’s soft power from a strategic point of view.”<sup>514</sup>

In conclusion, this chapter has offered a systematic analysis of the Chinese and Russian military doctrine through the framework of soft balancing and its impact on strategic studies. To this point, strategists and area specialists in Chinese, Russian and Central Asian politics have been the main source of scholarly and general literature about the organization. However, their analyses have been confusing; for example, both skeptics and alarmists of the SCO generally agree that one of its goals is to reduce American influence in Central Asia, but their views diverge radically from there. A theory of soft balancing resolves this quandary. Furthermore, there has been a dearth of literature on the actual strategic deployment of soft power assets in world affairs.

Traditional strategic literature has focused on the military balance, whereas balance of

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<sup>512</sup> A. Yu. Maruyev, “Russia and the U.S.A in Confrontation: Military and Political Aspects,” *Military Thought* 18, no. 3, (July-Sept 2009), 8.

<sup>513</sup> Cho and Jeong, “China’s Soft Power *Discussions, Resources, and Prospects.*”

<sup>514</sup> *Ibid.*

power dynamics among great powers in a unipolar system are likely to play across other dimensions of power, where violent conflict can be avoided. Furthermore, the use of norms can be an effective way for states to achieve their political and military interests without resorting to violence. The 2010 National Security Strategy adopted by the Obama administration is infused with normative language and promotes a liberal agenda that by and large benefits the United States and its allies. China and Russia seek to match the West's superiority in this crucial dimension of power, especially since it is much less expensive to increase normative capabilities than military ones. The potential payoff of achieving political interests through a normative strategy also could be greater than using destructive force, something Gramscian theorists have recognized on their writings about hegemony and legitimacy.

From a military standpoint, Russian Gen. Gareyev makes a similar observation: “In order to achieve greater rationality in our actions *it is necessary to respond to emerging threats more flexibly and, whenever possible, not with direct but with asymmetric measures.* Military force must not be resorted to unless every other means has been exhausted [emphasis added].”<sup>515</sup> Avoiding military conflict and achieving strategic objectives can be achieved through political, economic, diplomatic, informational and other non-military means and methods, according to Gareyev.

China, too, is forming its own normative agenda and incorporating it into its overall grand strategy. Zheng Bijian, former vice president of the CCP Central Party School and former senior policy advisor for President Hu Jintao, has promoted extending

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<sup>515</sup> Gareyev, “Issues of Strategic Deterrence in Current Conditions,” 3.

Confucianism to diplomatic ideas.<sup>516</sup> Confucian norms, according to Bijian, include principles such as “live peacefully with neighbors, bring prosperity to them, and provide safety to them” and build a “harmonious world. ... This is clearly different not only from Marxism-Leninism but also from realism and liberalism in international politics. Through greater systemization, China plans to re-establish Confucianism as an inherently Chinese value and vision. In fact, some Chinese opinion leaders have openly revealed this agenda.”<sup>517</sup> The joint ‘Russian-Chinese Declaration on the Multipolar World and the Establishment of a New International Order’ demonstrates the mutual goals of China and Russia to create additional poles of power in the system, each with its own set of norms.

Political intrigue and machinations are not new to international politics. However, new tactics and strategies have evolved apace with technological innovations and systemic changes such as globalization. Chinese and Russian strategists have adapted their military doctrines to incorporate soft power, given the role norms play in the current international system. States cannot rely on traditional hard power alone to balance one another. Norms are increasingly becoming a source of capabilities for great powers that can be deployed just as effectively as military assets. The Sino-Russo strategic partnership is an example of how soft power can be integrated into military strategy and exploited in an overall soft balancing strategy.

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<sup>516</sup> Cho and Jeong, “China’s Soft Power *Discussions, Resources, and Prospects*,” 470.

<sup>517</sup> *Ibid.*

## CHAPTER VIII

### CONCLUSION: REASSESSING NORMS IN GRAND STRATEGY

In this study I have endeavored to achieve two objectives – one theoretical, the other empirical and analytical. In regards to the former, the goal was to develop a rigorous definition of soft balancing than found in the existing literature and integrate it more fully in the overall balance of power framework. Current formulations of soft balancing suffer from indeterminacy or drift too far from the essence of balance of power theory, which largely concerns security matters. Developing a framework that focuses on logics of balancing based on systemic configuration gives theoretical footing to soft balancing rather than ad hoc explanations based on the capriciousness of contemporary politics. Such a conceptual framework identifies the major mechanisms behind balance of power outcomes (system polarity) and the types of balancing expected under each logic: alliances, arms buildups and soft balancing (alignments). Furthermore, this study explicated the conditions under which soft balancing likely would operate and a method to identify patterns of behavior derived from the theory, for example the use of regional complexes as buffers or insulators to hegemonic interventions.

As for the latter goal, this study has sought to demonstrate the empirical evidence for initial soft balancing in Central Asia and the utility of soft balancing as an analytical framework for geopolitics. Through the SCO, Beijing and Moscow have called for a timetable for the removal of U.S. military troops from the Central Asia and have supported the smaller authoritarian members in their quest for international legitimacy. These moves include support for Uzbekistan's eviction of U.S. troops from Uzbek territory and continued pressure on the Kyrgyz government to boot NATO and U.S.

troops from the Manas airbase. Diplomatically, China and Russia have continued their efforts to reduce American political influence in the region by co-opting the leaders of the smaller republics and building regional institutions such as the SCO, which is one of the few, if not only, major regional security organizations in the world without direct U.S. participation.<sup>518</sup>

Analytically, the study has sought to develop a robust definition and methodological framework to determine whether soft balancing is occurring in a specific instance. The definition provided in this study has gone further than those found in the existing literature by rethinking norms as a capability.<sup>519</sup> Re-conceptualizing norms (or soft power) along these lines distinguishes hard balancing from soft balancing. Instead of trying to increase relative strength through internal arms buildups or alliances, states faced with overwhelming hard power can develop and increase their soft power assets to restrain a superpower. Such a strategy is much more cost effective than costly internal balancing and less perilous than risky alliances. Furthermore, soft balancing is unlikely to draw the “focused enmity” of the reigning hegemon, which reduces the potential for defections. For these reasons, soft balancing (whether acknowledged or not by the balancers) is the ideal strategy for states that are not currently worried about physical attack by a hegemonic power, but rather are looking for ways to counter the objectives and preferences of the hegemon.

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<sup>518</sup> Yu Bin, “Living with Russia in the Post-9/11 World,” in Shen and Blanchard, *Multidimensional Diplomacy of Contemporary China*.

<sup>519</sup> For some examples of norms as a strategic asset, see Mesbahi, “Iran and Central Asia: Paradigm and Policy;” Mesbahi, “Iran and the International System”; and Mesbahi, “Iran and the Caspian Basin: Diversity, Inequality, Security and Securitization.”

Making hard and soft balancing analytically distinct also will help policymakers and scholars avoid possible misperception in international politics. Because of its indirect nature, soft balancing could easily be overlooked. In fact, some scholars argue that there is little or no evidence for the concept. I argue the opposite and demonstrate the necessity of analytically distinguishing between hard and soft balancing. If soft and hard forms of balancing are not kept distinct, there is the possibility of misinterpretation of behavior. For example, actions by China and Russia to counterbalance norms might be underestimated and dismissed because they are indirect and therefore difficult to perceive or quantify. On the other hand, conflating all forms of balancing into the traditional variety could lead to an overestimation of Chinese and Russian motives and capabilities, leading to unnecessary confrontation, escalating tensions and spiraling security dilemmas.

Furthermore, it is important that scholars begin to recognize that the distribution of norms in the international system can serve as a causal mechanism for alignment formation. In fact, norms are becoming a crucial capability in geopolitics. The fear stoked in Russia and China by the spread of the Color Revolutions, for instance, demonstrates the efficacy of soft or normative power. The fallout from these movements impelled the leaders in Beijing and Moscow to counter these “revolutions” with their own alternative norms of “sovereign democracy.” The states involved in these “revolutions,” although small and minor, are strategically significant. Some, for example Georgia, are vital to Western-proposed oil and gas pipeline routes that would bypass Russia if ever constructed. Others, such as Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan, provide basing for the United States in proximity to China and Russia, both of which consider such bases forms of

encirclement regardless of American denials. The Ukraine, another strategically important state that faced a Color Revolution, had been considered for possible membership in NATO.

Intermittent opposition by Russian and Chinese to Color Revolutions could be dismissed as simple diplomatic friction, but this does not appear to be the case. There is consistent resistance by Beijing and China to the spread of Western norms, particularly within their sphere of influence, and their attempts to block such ideologies have been, in part, through normative means such as strong support for sovereignty and non-intervention. Concrete examples of alternative norms include the creation of observers in the SCO to officially sanction elections among its members, almost all of which have been disputed by Western organizations. Many of these leaders are allies of Moscow and Beijing, and their demise would increase Western leverage with the smaller states at the expense of Russia and China. The overarching concern for Beijing and Moscow, however, is that Western norms of democratization and human rights will infiltrate their own borders, setting off protests and demonstrations that could lead to political instability, or worse, the overthrow of their own regimes. The spread of norms, in this case, parallels the projection of other capabilities that can threaten regime survival.

### **Success or Failure: The Result of Soft Balancing**

From “strategic partnership” to the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, the soft balancing alignment between Moscow and Beijing has manifested itself in a number of ways. The fact that the alignment has lasted for nearly a decade despite the myriad of external and internal factors that could undermine it is testament to its endurance. However, longevity itself does not a success make. Nevertheless, there are achievements

that can be pointed to. The transformation of the SCO into a major international actor stands as one of the major accomplishments of the alignment. Coordination in venues such as the United Nations Security Council is another area of mutual benefit for Russia and China in regards to curtailing U.S. preferences. Such coordination includes their joint opposition to what they refer to as American “hegemonism” – or the intervention of the United States in the sovereign affairs of other states, for example their strong opposition to the Iraq War.

On the military front, Russia and China increasingly have focused on soft power assets in their defense modernization efforts to counterbalance U.S. superiority. Moscow continues to supply China with some of its most advanced weaponry despite latent tensions that exist between the two powers and concerns that Russia is feeding the beast on its doorstep. Both states have sought to build relations with emerging powers in the Middle East, Africa and Latin America to increase their global influence and power projection capabilities.<sup>520</sup> Institutionally, Russia has partnered with China via the SCO to undermine and perhaps reverse the U.S. military presence in Central Asia.<sup>521</sup> These strategic objectives are consistent with balance-of-power theory, although the means to achieve them are non-traditional. Such a strategy doesn’t combine military forces in an alliance, but rather combines soft power assets such as diplomacy to restrain the United States from imposing its preferences.<sup>522</sup>

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<sup>520</sup> Minton F. Goldman, *Rivalry in Eurasia: Russia, The United States and the War on Terror*, (Santa Barbara, Calif.: Praeger Security International, 2009)

<sup>521</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>522</sup> Walt, “Alliances in a Unipolar World.”

Although the formation of a soft balancing alignment could be viewed as a success in its own right, the strategy has had mixed results in regards to restraining American power. The United States still retains its military presence in Central Asia, albeit a reduced one given its eviction from Uzbekistan. China and Russia have not been able to transform the system from one of unipolarity to multipolarity primarily through soft power means, although the purpose of soft balancing is not necessarily systemic transformation but rather preference setting. Nonetheless, the evidence appears clear that China and Russia are each other's closest partners and that their partnership is directed at the United States, something recognized by U.S. defense analysts.<sup>523</sup>

The partnership itself could lay the groundwork for a future hard-balancing strategy against the United States if Washington returns to the aggressive unilateralism of the past Bush administration. It also could transform into an axis that emerging powers such as Iran and Venezuela could gravitate around.<sup>524</sup> The so-called BRIC states are widely viewed as a potential bloc to counter the United States and its Western allies, and Russia and China could serve as the nexus that binds them together.<sup>525</sup> However, soft balancing theory, as with balance of power theory overall, cannot be judged solely on whether the alignment or alliance achieves its goals. Theory predicts that given certain conditions, alignments or alliances will form. It cannot predict the efficacy of such

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<sup>523</sup> U.S. Defense Department, "Annual Report to Congress: Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China 2010," 38.

<sup>524</sup> Manochehr Dorraj and Carrie L. Currier, "Lubricated With Oil: Iran-China Relations in a Changing World," *Middle East Policy* 15, no. 2, (Summer 2008): 66-80 and Dodson and Dorraj, "Populism and Foreign Policy in Venezuela and Iran."

<sup>525</sup> The BRIC states are Brazil, Russia, India and China. Russia, for example, "find the idea of a BRIC grouping appealing as a counterweight to U.S. and NATO dominance and, perhaps more important, as a dynamic economic grouping shifting the balance of power away from the West," in Charles Ziegler, "Russia and the CIS in 2008: Axis of Authoritarianism?" *Asian Survey* 49, no. 1, (Jan.-Feb. 2009): 144.

alignments. Notwithstanding their unpredictability, unsuccessful alliances and alignments can teach scholars much about the world. “Even if soft balancing efforts fail,” writes Christopher Layne, “they are important for two reasons. First, they indicate that other major states regard U.S. geopolitical dominance as a problem that needs to be addressed. Second, soft balancing efforts to rein-in American power may help the other major states learn to cooperate in ways that will the open the door to future hard balancing against the U.S.”<sup>526</sup>

### **The SCO in Geopolitical Context**

Situating the SCO within the context of soft balancing helps clarify its role as an actor in international and regional affairs and eliminates much of the confusion about its place within the global balance of power. The SCO is neither an “axis of evil” nor simply a “paper tiger.” The organization is not a “club of dictators,” as it is sometimes ridiculed, although it does support authoritarian regimes. Rather, it has adopted the alternative doctrine of “sovereign democracy,” which treats foreign support for domestic democratic movements and nongovernmental organizations as a form of external meddling in the internal affairs of its members.<sup>527</sup> Although the SCO was largely a creation by Beijing, Moscow has been the main driver in trying to turn the organization into a pole or bloc that can counterbalance U.S. interests in Central Asia.

This arrangement is acceptable to China, which prefers to take a backseat in this regard. Russia is too weak to serve as a traditional alliance partner for China and Beijing

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<sup>526</sup> Christopher Layne, “America’s Middle East Grand Strategy After Iraq: The Moment for Offshore Balancing has Arrived,” *Review of International Studies* 35, no. 1, (2009), 9.

<sup>527</sup> Rumer, “China, Russia and the Balance of Power in Central Asia,” 6.

commands far greater strategic maneuverability than Moscow.<sup>528</sup> Nevertheless, Chinese leaders continue to see ties with Russia from the perspective of Beijing's relative position in the international system. "For China, cooperation with Russia helps to promote greater multipolarity and multilateralism, lessening U.S. influence. Russian leaders share Chinese elites' discomfort with U.S. power and relative predominance, in particular with the U.S. perceived penchant for military alliances, regime change, democracy promotion, and unilateral diplomatic and military actions."<sup>529</sup>

### **The Endurance of the Strategic Partnership**

As long as the status quo – unipolar and hegemonic – remains in place, the strategic partnership between Russia and China is likely to endure. Offensive realist theory predicts that interventions by an external hegemonic power will likely trigger countervailing coalitions, though not the traditional alliances formed in the past. And balance of threat theory argues that distribution of capabilities *and* threats play a role in alignment and alliance formation. Empirical evidence appears to back both positions. If norms are viewed as a system-wide capability, a concentrated distribution of normative power in the hands of the unipole can be as threatening as a concentration of hard power (in this case, both forms of power are concentrated in the hands of the hegemon). This is increasingly true in Central Asia, where the United States has aggressively promoted its liberal agenda, which includes support for democratization and Western norms of human rights. For states facing a hegemonic power, threats can emanate across any of the three dimensions of power – military, economic or normative. Traditional realist theory has

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<sup>528</sup> Lo, *Axis of Convenience*.

<sup>529</sup> Medeiros, *China's International Behavior*, 103.

neglected the latter category, which is an important aspect of contemporary international politics.

To be sure, traditional security concerns still play a role. Beijing and Moscow not only fear Western norms, but encroachment on their borders by the U.S. military and NATO. Each state feels hemmed in by Washington and its allies, which have systematically encircled China and Russia with forward bases, whether consciously or no. The concern of encirclement remains irrespective of changes in U.S. presidential administrations. Despite an attempt by President Obama to “reset” relations with Russia, Moscow remains conjoined with Beijing in its opposition to American hegemony, including Obama’s revamped theater missile defense program.<sup>530</sup> Pointedly, neither China nor Russia trust American motivations.

Although primarily normative in nature, soft balancing is reflected in Chinese and Russian defense doctrine, too. The major objective of Chinese defense strategy is to deny the United States military or naval access to its territories and coastlines.<sup>531</sup> Russia’s strategic objective is to retain nuclear parity with the United States while increasing its capabilities in the areas of command and control and providing an alternative set of norms to counter Western ideas. As detailed in Chapter Six, these strategies aim at American vulnerabilities rather than directly focused on balancing U.S. military supremacy. Particularly, they focus on creating or maintaining regional security complexes, where states could attain greater freedom of maneuver, and diplomatic measures, such as pressuring regional states that host U.S. forward bases.

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<sup>530</sup> Gilbert Rozman, *Chinese Strategic Thought Toward Asia*, (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2010).

<sup>531</sup> China is purportedly developing the Dong Feng “carrier-killing” missile in an attempt to deny the U.S. Navy access to the South China Sea, which Beijing claims exclusive sovereignty over.

Overall, the strategic partnership, whether through the SCO or the United Nations, provides states with a different security arrangement than in the past. In fact, narrowly conceived in their geopolitical context, strategic partnerships could be viewed as a new model of alliance and alignment formations. These alignments rely mainly on diplomatic measures to stymie the goals of the hegemonic power, but they could be strengthened in the event of changing international circumstances. Realist international relations theory has failed to keep pace with these changing developments in global politics; however, viewing the strategic partnership along the lines of alliance and alignment politics integrates new forms of balancing strategy into the realist tradition without undermining realist theory.

### **Implications for U.S. foreign policy**

For U.S. policymakers, soft balancing might be difficult to discern. However, its implications are far-reaching. Although American military power makes the United States secure from any existential threat, regional alignments could undermine U.S. interests around the globe. In this sense, hegemony suffers from its own internal contradictions. America's role as the only global superpower inevitably involves it in almost every region of the world; yet U.S. intervention is likely to result in a backlash from disaffected regional powers. To redress this, U.S. policymakers should make prudent use of America's role as an off-shore balancer. The United States should only intervene in regions of strategic interest, and only then when potential hegemons threaten to overrun the regional balance of power. Additionally, retrenchment of U.S. forces from areas of little strategic value could likely preclude any attempts at soft balancing, at least for the foreseeable future.

Furthermore, American policymakers must recognize that a normative-driven foreign policy can lead to reactionary blowback.<sup>532</sup> The Bush administration made democratization a pillar of its foreign policy, which alienated potential partners in the “war on terror.” The administration of President Barack Obama continues this liberal tradition, albeit in a more multilateral fashion. Nevertheless, U.S. policymakers must rethink the aggressive promotion of democracy without abandoning core American values in the process. Such a “realist” policy would admittedly be difficult to implement because the very nature of hegemony involves at least some management of the international system. Neoclassical realism, liberalism and Gramscians all argue that domestic political considerations in the United States factor into its normative-driven foreign policy. Overcoming such considerations might be difficult, but Obama has made it a point to project a benign face of American power abroad, which might alleviate, though not fully eliminate, soft balancing by other great powers.

Whether China and Russia can sustain their “strategic partnership” or “marriage of convenience” depends largely on U.S. foreign policy. A return to American unilateralism practiced from 2001-2008 could harden the Sino-Russian alignment into a formal alliance, no matter who is president in the United States. However, a more multilateral approach that respected Russia and China’s sphere of influence in Central Asia and along their borders would make the partnership largely unnecessary.<sup>533</sup>

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<sup>532</sup> Layne, “America’s Middle East Grand Strategy After Iraq.”

<sup>533</sup> “For now, there is an intersection of interests between Russia and China because of the shared suspicion of the American military presence in the region ... An American disengagement and the continuing shift in the balance of power between Russia and China in the latter’s favor in the decades ahead could alter the calculations in Beijing and Moscow” in Rajan Menon, “Introduction: Central Asia in the Twenty First Century,” in *Central Asia: Views from Washington, Moscow and Beijing*, 12.

For doubters of soft balancing, the Sino-Russo “strategic partnership” offers compelling evidence to the contrary. Despite a number of potential pitfalls that could afflict Chinese-Russian relations, from Han immigration into Russian Siberia to the rapid pace of Chinese military modernization, external factors have forged an axis of convenience between the two great powers. These exogenous variables don’t just include U.S. military and economic superiority, but American norms and values, too. From this author’s standpoint, it would take a significant change at the systemic level for the strategic partnership to break up. For example, if China were to emerge as a second superpower, Russia might tilt to the West rather than become Beijing’s junior partner. The status of India, Japan and Europe Union could affect the regional balance of power in Eurasia as well, pushing Russia and China closer together or pulling them apart based on differing dynamics. Despite these different scenarios, the United States remains the major factor in affecting the Sino-Russo partnership because the alignment is intrinsically tied to the structure of the international system.

### **Implications for theory**

The concept of soft balancing should go a long way in improving International Relations theory. Since the time of E.H. Carr, there has been tension between those who advocate a materialist interpretation of international politics and those who support an idealist version. This tension need not exist, at least if scholars of international politics rethink norms as capabilities. From this standpoint, norms can be used as an asset in a state’s strategic arsenal. As neoclassical realism argues, such norms are based on the unique domestic characteristics of each state. Theorists of hegemony – realists, liberals and Gramscians – argue that powerful states will attempt elevate their domestic norms to

the systemic level. Once elevated, norms can create systemic structures if they are codified and create “rules of the game” that constrain actor behavior, a position taken by many constructivist scholars. Institutions embody and legitimate the rules of the hegemonic power and can even absorb counterhegemonic ideas.<sup>534</sup>

Similar to other capabilities, norms can provoke balancing alliances or alignments based on levels of concentration and/or threat. Powerful states can commit great amounts of resources on normative expenditures, such as foreign aid, support for NGOs and media. Additionally, norms can provide an ideological substance for a state’s foreign policy. When the Cold War ended, for example, the United States adopted “human rights” to replace “anticommunism” in its ideological arsenal. Although the concept of human rights “refers to transcendental abstractions ... the fact that it is universal rather than particular is essential for it to serve as a platform for the transnational projection of foreign policy.”<sup>535</sup> In this case, the projection of ideals could be a potential threat, particularly when such ideals can challenge the legitimacy and authority of rival states. Indeed, Kenneth Waltz admonition against maximizing hard power continues to hold true for soft power: states should make prudent use of their normative capabilities to avoid provoking balancing coalitions, whether hard or soft.

### **What the Future Holds for Soft Balancing**

For the foreseeable future, traditional balance of power theory is unlikely to explain great power behavior because contemporary systemic dynamics differ from those

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<sup>534</sup> Cox and Sinclair, *Approaches to World Order*.

<sup>535</sup> Lowell Dittmer, “Chinese Human Rights and American Foreign Policy: A Realist Approach,” *The Review of Politics*. 63, no. 3, (Summer, 2001), 421.

of past. Therefore, if scholars and analysts wish to explain how states respond to concentrations of power under unipolarity, they must find alternative frameworks that correspond to differing systemic logics. The status of the United States is unique; there have been few states or empires to accumulate the power that is concentrated in its hands. International Relations theory must catch up to these changing realities by developing cutting edge theories that don't focus solely on material capabilities and that can deftly respond to the nuances of globalization.

Furthermore, scholars are beginning to recognize the importance of norms as an important variable in international politics. Realists have been behind the curve in this regard, disregarding the strategic value of normative power. My study has attempted to break ground by systematically demonstrating the importance of norms or soft power as a valuable asset. I do not argue that the use of norms is a better (or worse) strategy than using hard power. Both have their benefits and limitations and concentrations of either can provoke balancing by other states. However, recent events in international politics continually point to norms as a great source of consternation for states. The balance of military capabilities will continue to hover in the background, setting the base of the strategic balance. Norms, however, are the superstructure. In the Marxist sense, this relationship between the base and structure is reciprocal. Hard power provides the basis for a normative superstructure, which reinforces the material base. It is the superstructure, however, that major powers currently are concerned with.

In practical terms, theory will have to account for the way states respond to the superstructure of international politics when the base is essentially unassailable, as it is

under unipolarity.<sup>536</sup> In other words, when the military balance overwhelmingly favors one power, how can states not allied with the unipole create conditions favorable to their interests? How can they “change the rules” of the game without changing the power base from which the rules emanate? The case of China and Russia finds that great powers that can’t forcibly rewrite rules will try to develop alternatives. To do this, they will seek to carve out their own space within the system – their own regional spheres where they can set preferences to their liking.

The trend towards increased regionalization and norm proliferation in the international system supports this contention. In the future, states will rely on such subsystems to buffer the reach hegemonic power. These subsystems can create rules that benefit states seeking greater autonomy. In fact, as Western-led globalization continues to spread, emerging powers dissatisfied with the status quo are likely to adopt soft balancing strategies to unshackle themselves from an economic and political system they do not believe benefit their interests and consider detrimental to their culture and social systems. These strategies will require the accumulation of normative capabilities to attract minor and midlevel powers interested in forming such subsystems. Scholars no longer need to wait for evidence of balancing against the United States. Soft balancing is here, and it is likely to be the wave of the future.

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<sup>536</sup> Changing the superstructure of the international system has been a concern of critical theorists and neo-Marxists, who generally view the capitalist world economy as oppressive. Unlike these theorists, realists refrain from making value judgments about which political-economic systems are ideal for humanity as a whole. To put in other words, realists are more concerned about what strategies states might use to overturn or transform international systems rather than which system is preferable.

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