

MISSED OPPORTUNITIES AND UNANSWERED THREATS:
DOMESTIC CONSTRAINTS ON THE BALANCE OF POWER

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Balance of power and other core realist theories predict that: (1) regional hegemons will seek to prevent the rise of peer competitors, (2) all other non-hegemonic states will seek to expand when they can, taking advantage of opportunities to increase their relative power, and (3) states respond to dangerous accumulations of power and especially the emergence of a rapidly growing state by balancing against it, that is, they answer threats by forming alliances and building arms as counterweights to check superior power. Yet, most countries outside of Europe have not behaved the way realist theories lead us to expect. Since 1945, there have been few serious attempts at regional hegemony and few actual formations of balances of power. While Third World states have suffered a great deal of death and destruction from wars, they have not been waged for reasons of balance-of-power politics. The explanation for these marked deviations from realist theory is that most states are not unitary, coherent actors, as the theory assumes. Instead, the vast majority of states suffer from internal fragmentation of various kinds, which explains why they do not balance against threatening accumulations of power and why most powerful regional states have not sought local hegemony.

The idea of a “political” balance of power arose in the Renaissance as largely a metaphorical concept borrowed from other fields, such as ethics, the arts, philosophy, law, medicine, economics, and the sciences, where balancing and its relation to equipoise and counterweight had already gained broad popular acceptance. Wherever it was applied, the balance image had, and still does, broad appeal; it evokes a law of nature that underlies most things that we find desirable, whether peace, justice, fairness, moderation, symmetry, harmony, or beauty (Vagts 1948).

The actual practice of balance of power as the integrating principle for the preservation of international order emerged in the seventeenth century, when the adversarial pope-emperor power relationship (and the concomitant “two lights, two swords” theories) had lost its function as the keystone to the European political order.¹ Originally formulated by theologians and political philosophers, the balance of power was cast as a noble endeavor to establish a robust political equilibrium composed of checks and balances within and among states -- an equilibrium so sturdy that force itself would become useless, and so states and men would resign themselves to live peacefully under the reign of law. As history showed, however, the true goal of balance of power as applied to international relations was not peace but rather the preservation of the great powers. Indeed, a balance-of-power system cannot emerge or be maintained unless war is seen as a legitimate tool of statecraft. Thus, rather than a perpetual peace among states, persistent wars have been the legacy of balance-of-power politics, as its detractors have unfailingly pointed out over the years.

Realists respond that war is a constant phenomenon in international politics not because of any inherent defect in the logic of balance of power but rather because states operate in an anarchic, self-help system. Without a sovereign arbiter to whom they can turn for help if others attack them, renege on a commitment, or cheat on an agreement, great powers necessarily live in fear of each other and there is little room for trust among them. The imperatives of anarchy and suspicions about each others’ intentions relentlessly drive great powers to increase their power because powerful states invariably have some offensive military capability that they can use against each other, because they can never be sure that others do not intend to use that power against them, and because they can never be sure they have enough power, which defies precise measurement and is composed of dynamic, not static, elements. Consequently,

anarchy and uncertainty about other state's intentions create powerful incentives for states to take advantage of opportunities to gain power at the expense of rivals; and this is why states in a balance-of-power system so frequently wage war for no other reason than to preserve or improve their relative power position until they have achieved hegemony (Mearsheimer 2001).

Nicholas Spykman (1942, 21) outlined these points many years ago: "There are not many instances in history which show great and powerful states creating alliances and organizations to limit their own strength. States are always engaged in curbing the force of some other state. The truth of the matter is that states are interested only in a balance which is in their favor. Not an equilibrium, but a generous margin is their objective. There is no real security in being just as strong as a potential enemy; there is security only in being a little stronger. There is no possibility of action if one's strength is fully checked; there is a chance for a positive foreign policy only if there is a margin of force which can be freely used."

Conceding that states do not seek balanced power, realists nonetheless posit recurrently forming balances of power as an unintended consequence of the coaction of states seeking superior power. From this bird's-eye, "structural-systemic" view, the balance of power appears as a spontaneously generated and self-regulating form of political order. Though often (mis)conceptualized in static terms, balance of power is at its core a dynamic theory. Indeed, the law of uneven growth among states means that the "inherent tendency of international politics to produce an even distribution of power" must occur through a fluid process that typically requires "endless shifting and regrouping of power, the scales perpetually oscillating without coming to rest" (Wight 1966, 166).

From the policymaker's perspective, however, the balance of power hardly appears as a self-regulating system. Instead, it is the product of deliberate and coldly calculated policy decisions that aim to restrain the power of a growing state. And while prudent statesmen usually prefer diplomacy to warmaking, they must never be so averse to war that they will accept peace at any cost. Once again, Spykman (1942, 25) made the point crisply: "[A] political equilibrium is neither a gift of the gods nor an inherently stable condition. It results from the active intervention of man, from the operation of political forces. States cannot afford to wait passively for the happy time when a miraculously achieved balance of power will bring peace and security. If they wish to survive, they must be willing to go to war to preserve a balance

against the growing hegemonic power of the period.”

In summary, the basic predictions of balance of power theory are that: (1) regional hegemons will seek to prevent the rise of peer competitors,² (2) all other non-hegemonic states will seek to expand when they can, taking advantage of opportunities to increase their relative power, and (3) states respond to dangerous accumulations of power and especially the emergence of a rapidly growing state by balancing against it, that is, they answer threats by forming alliances and building arms as counterweights to check superior power.

The Puzzle

The puzzle is that great powers and small ones alike have not always or even usually adopted the behaviors predicted by balance-of-power theory. Excluding the U.S.-Soviet bipolar rivalry, a survey of state behavior over the past fifty years -- when decolonization created a truly global states system -- yields few instances of balancing behavior and no serious attempts at regional hegemony, especially in regions outside of Europe.³ This is important because, of the nearly 22 million civilian and military casualties caused by interstate and internationalized civil wars during the period 1945-1989, 99.2 percent were Third World victims. Moreover, only about 8 million of the 22 million casualties were victims of combat between the organized armies of two or more states (Holsti 1992, 37, 41). Hence, there has been no shortage of wars causing death and destruction in the world since 1945, but they were not waged for reasons of balance of power.

Consider, for instance, the behavior of Africa’s military “superpower,” South Africa. True, it engaged in military incursions into Angola, Lesotho, Mozambique, Zambia, and Zimbabwe during the 1970s and 1980s. But the purpose of these military invasions was not to take territory and achieve regional hegemony. Instead, they were punitive attacks against neighboring states allowing sanctuary to African National Congress (ANC) and South West Africa People’s Organization (SWAPO) guerrillas targeted against the Republic. It is quite clear, however that South Africa was not only menaced by these guerrilla groups but that it possessed more than enough military strength to occupy its weaker neighbors that were harboring them. Had it chosen this path, South Africa would have achieved regional hegemony and, in so

doing, solved its rather severe internal and external security problems. And, indeed, some South Africans were frustrated by the government's reluctance to pursue precisely such a hegemonic strategy. Most notably, the South African Defense Force (SADF) wrote an official account of the Angola venture entitled, "We Could Have Gone All the Way" -- a document that reflected the SADF's disgust with the Vorster government's orders to withdraw from Angola despite the military's urgings to allow an assault and occupation of Luanda, the capital of Angola (Jaster 1985, 129). South Africa's ambivalence about invading and occupying its weaker neighbors, however, is not atypical among African states. Indeed, the very first successful invasion of one African state by another was Tanzania's overthrow of Uganda's mercurial dictator, Idi Amin, in 1979; and, yet, that move did not open the floodgates of interstate war in Africa, as many observers feared at the time. The point is that in Africa, as elsewhere outside of Europe, there is very little state behavior of any kind that clearly appears to be animated by balance-of-power concerns or, for that matter, power politics.

Why has this been the case? For the balance of power to operate, there must be a history, past or present, of regional powers with hegemonic ambitions that acted on those goals. Indeed, the catalysts of balance-of-power dynamics are powerful states that (1) seek to exploit their superior relative strength to make others less secure, (2) convert their superior and growing economic capabilities into military power, and (3) take advantage of opportunities in their external environment to expand their territory and/or political influence (Schweller 1996). Yet, as K. J. Holsti (1992, 45) asks, "Where in the Third World are the analogs to these European dreams and visions? In which areas has the law of uneven economic development led to hegemonic behavior?"

Fear and insecurity, real or imagined, of actual or potential state expansion is what drives balancing behavior and the security dilemma. Because there has been little if any hegemony-seeking behavior outside the European states system, balance-of-power dynamics rarely capture what is going on in most regions of the world. Instead, as Brian Job (1992, 18) puts it, "The paradox [in the Third World] is that internal security contention, while effectively undermining the state's capacity and weakening its ability to meet external threats, does not make the state more vulnerable to the primary threat of the anarchic international system, i.e., the threat of territorial encroachment or extinction."

Job's insight, one that is commonly shared among observers of the Third World (see Ayoob 1995; Azar and Moon 1988a; David 1991; Levy and Barnett 1991, 1992), is particularly troubling for balance of power and other realist theories about hegemonic war and power preponderance. This is because weak, internally challenged states governed by shaky regimes make excellent targets of opportunity for expansionist states. The absence of this type of expansionist behavior by powerful regional states violates a basic realist proposition, namely, that international politics, like nature, abhors a power vacuum. Operating in an ideal environment for predation, "Third World" regional powers (what some analysts [see Neumann 1992] call "regional great powers") should provide an "easy test" for the realist proposition that states will move quickly and resolutely to fill local power vacuums for the purpose of protecting and enhancing their own relative power positions. It is all the more surprising, therefore, that regional powers, such as Brazil, Indonesia, Nigeria, have made no such attempts to gobble up their weak neighbors.

Just as puzzling for realism is the absence of balancing behavior in most parts of the world. I have already suggested an answer: in most regions, there are no predatory hegemony-seeking powers to spark the formation of alliances and arms buildups by local states. I believe that this "benign hegemony" explanation is largely correct. Most realists, however, especially structural neorealists such as Kenneth Waltz, John Mearsheimer, and Christopher Layne, would disagree. Instead, they claim that, since states can never be certain about others' current or future intentions, *threat inheres in superior power alone*.⁴ Given the law of uneven growth, there are and always will be significant imbalances of power among states in every region of the world. As Robert Tucker (1977, 3) eloquently observed: "The history of the international system is a history of inequality par excellence....In their physical extent, population, natural resources, and geographic position, states are, as it were, born unequal; so much so, indeed, that by comparison the natural inequalities among individuals appear almost marginal." Why, then, have so few states in regions outside of Europe formed alliances to balance against potential hegemonies, regardless of their benign intentions?

If most states outside of the Eurocentric domain from which the theory was derived and largely tested can resist the logic of balance of power, then the theory is not akin to a law of nature; at the very least, it is underspecified. The question then becomes: What are the necessary conditions for the proper

operation of the balance of power? What factors confound the logic and predictions of the theory? As the rest of the paper makes clear, the main problem, in my view, is realism's unitary actor assumption. The closer the decisionmaking process and actual state-society relations approximate the unitary actor assumption, the more accurate realism's predictions. Conversely, when states are divided, both at the elite and societal levels, the less likely they are to behave as balance of power and hegemonic realist theories predict. Of course, incoherent states are not immune from internal and external wars; indeed, they may be more warprone than coherent states, whether democratic or autocratic (Mansfield and Snyder 1995, 2002). The causes of these wars, however, are not rooted in balance-of-power politics.⁵

It is important to point out the following. First, my arguments are not limited to Third World states. They apply to all states, including great powers, that suffer from internal divisions and fragmented policy processes. Second, as suggested by the paper's title, "Missed Opportunities and Unanswered Threats," this is an essay about non-events: important things that do not happen that our theories tell us should. Finally, one of the principal theoretical backdrops to this study is Lewis Coser's hypothesis that the effect of external conflict on in-group cohesion and response are a function of (1) the pre-crisis degree of group cohesion and (2) the uniformity of threat perception across groups within society. In Coser's words:

The relation between outer conflict and inner cohesion does not hold true where internal cohesion before the outbreak of conflict is so low that the group members have ceased to regard preservation of the group as worthwhile, or actually see the outside threat to concern "them" rather than "us." In such cases disintegration of the group, rather than an increase in cohesion, will be the result of outside conflict. (1956, 93; also see Levy 1989, 272)

Following Coser's logic, we should expect that states with high levels of political integration at both the elite and societal levels will be most likely to respond efficiently and effectively to external threats and opportunities. Conversely, politically fragmented states will underreact to significant new opportunities (i.e., they will behave as reluctant regional hegemons) and threats (i.e., they will respond with inefficient balancing, bandwagoning, or buck-passing behavior), and they may even fragment further (i.e., undergo a regime change, civil war, or revolution) under external pressure.

The Balance of Internal and External Order

Confronted by the French challenge of “the nation in arms” in 1794, King Frederick William II of Prussia rejected the proposed counter-response to summon the *levée en masse*. It was “infinitely dangerous” to the internal social and political order of Prussia, he claimed, “to assemble such a mass of men” (quoted by Hammond 1967, 444). Napoleon’s rout of Prussia at Jena in 1809 revealed that the Prussian king, in weighing the external threat of France against the internal risks to the *ancien régime* of properly mobilizing against it, had struck a balance that underestimated the external danger in relation to the internal one. He was not alone. The regimes of the old order deliberately limited their capabilities to wage war for fear of disrupting a fragile internal order; and, as the massive disequilibrating force unleashed by Revolutionary and Napoleonic France so dramatically showed, the “balance of power in Europe depended, in turn, upon these strong internal checks on the military weight each power could throw into the scales of international power” (Hammond 1967, 448).

Yet, this tradeoff between internal and external stability, so intuitively understood by practitioners of foreign affairs, has been largely ignored in the study of international politics. The conventional wisdom is that the threat of war brings members of a society together in support of the state and its leaders, especially when the citizens perceive that the nation’s survival is at stake and that cooperative effort will bring ultimate victory.⁶ A related theme is that leaders of disintegrating groups (i.e., a disunited country) search for enemies and promote external conflict to increase internal group cohesion. Thus, Haas and Whiting (1956, 62) suggest, “In times of extreme domestic tension among elites, a policy of uniting a badly divided nation against some real or alleged outside threat frequently seems useful to a ruling group” (also see Levy 1989; Christensen 1996; Rosecrance 1963, 294; and Stohl 1976, 19-20, Chap. 3). This view has its roots in sociological studies of group behavior, where it is widely asserted that a primary function of external conflict is to increase social cohesion among in-group members.⁷ The key point is that groups, even badly divided ones, will unite behind the government in a common effort to combat an outside threat to their survival. Though it is a proposition that badly misreads Coser’s conclusions about external threats and in-group cohesion, it nevertheless nicely supports a core prediction of balance-of-power theory: that

citizens of threatened states will band together in support of the government and its balancing policies to protect the survival of the state. How many balance-of-power theorists have even raised the possibility that this assumption may be a problematic one in many, if not most, cases?

Yet, history shows that the emergence of a new or significantly increased external threat has served both to strengthen some states and to weaken others. Indeed, states under external pressure have often responded in precisely the opposite way that balance-of-power predicts, either by (1) making no attempt to counteract the threat, (2) under-reacting to it (i.e., passing the balancing buck to others or attempting to appease insatiable aggressors), (3) bandwagoning with the threat, or (4) collapsing from within (i.e., civil war or revolution). In practice, if not theory, the threat of war sometimes brings members of society together, while at other times it forces them further apart.

And for the same reasons that threatened states often fail to form alliances and build arms to balance against powerful neighbors, potentially powerful states that could achieve regional hegemony often pass up the opportunity to do so. This ambivalent attitude about increasing the state's relative power and influence may be consistent, under certain circumstances with structural neorealism's assumption of security-maximizing behavior; but it flatly contradicts the core prediction of its offshoot, "offensive" realism. According to John Mearsheimer (2001, 35), who has literally written the book on offensive realism, "Only a misguided state would pass up an opportunity to be the hegemon in the system because it thought it already had sufficient power to survive."

Yet, in many regional subsystems (which I define as a contiguous cluster of states that compose a security complex) in Africa, South America, and Asia, we find relatively powerful states -- ones that possess overwhelming strength in terms of GNP, population, and territory compared to their nearest local competitors -- that have not followed the "offensive realist" principle of expanding when they can until they have achieved regional hegemony. Consider, for example, the non-grabs for regional hegemony by Brazil, South Africa, Indonesia, and Nigeria. These weak-willed regional great powers have been reluctant, if not completely unwilling, to increase their power and status through expansionist policies. Moreover, in these same regions we do not see the formation of local defense alliances or workable collective security systems to balance against the relative power advantage held by these potential hegemons.

The Domestic Politics of Extraction

These puzzling behaviors that violate basic tenets of realist theory highlight, *inter alia*, a hidden auxiliary assumption of balance-of-power theory, namely, that all states have similar extractive capacity, such that aggregate national resources may be equated with actual state power and influence. In making this assumption, balance of power theory ignores the politics of extraction, treating responses to threats as if there are no significant variations across time and countries in the ability of elites to mobilize domestic resources in pursuit of foreign policy objectives. Like all assumptions, this one is patently false, and this is as it should be: assumptions are not factual statements but rather simplifications of reality that are useful to theory construction. Thus, attempts to create a parsimonious systemic theory of international politics necessarily set aside most if not all differences in unit attributes such as the extractive capacities of states.

This gain in the power and elegance of third-image theory, however, comes at the expense of its explanatory and predictive accuracy or, simply put, its empirical fit. In Klaus Knorr's words: "If analysis is content with comparing merely the capacity of nations to produce energy, steel, motor vehicles, etc., it proceeds on the implicit assumption that the utilization of those resources will show no...differences among countries. This assumption is grossly unrealistic" (1956, 198; also see Lamborn 1991, 43). And just as countries with the same manpower and economic resources may not exercise the same degree of power and influence, states confronted by similar threats and opportunities may not respond in the same way or with the same degree of effectiveness "because of such factors as the internal cohesiveness of the society in question, its ability to mobilize resources for state action...and its diplomatic capacities" (Kennedy 1987, 202).

Along these lines, Edward Azar and Chung-in Moon (1988b) offer a useful distinction between "security hardware" -- the physical (e.g., economic, military, and manpower) capabilities of a country -- and "security software," which they break down into three primary components -- regime legitimacy, national integration, and policy capacity. Essentially, security software assesses the external and internal environments and then attempts to manage and convert hardware assets to meet various threats. Azar and Moon (1988b, 77-78; also see Ayoob 1995, 11, 21) argue that the "software side of security management,

which involves the political context and policy capacity through which national values are defined, threats and vulnerabilities are perceived and assessed, resources are allocated, and policies are screened, selected and implemented,” is a vital determinant in “the conversion mechanism linking security environment and hardware to the final policy outcomes and the overall security performance” of the state. Simply put, a state’s hardware assets are only as good as the performance of its security software.

Realists, for their part, have typically payed lip service to software-related concepts such as political stability and competence, national will, cohesion, and character, and the quality of government; but they rarely, if ever, include these software items in their operationalizations of state power (see, e.g., Waltz 1979, 131; Morgenthau 1948, Chap. 9; a notable exception is Organski and Kugler 1980). Instead, standard balance-of-power theory makes predictions based solely on hardware elements of national power, which, to make matters worse, is often measured strictly in terms of military capabilities to the exclusion of economic and political ones (see the discussion in Mueller 1995, Chap. 2).

By pointing out these simplifications in the measurement and conversion of national capability, I do not mean to suggest that balance-of-power theory is in any way false, misleading, or unhelpful. It offers a useful and quite necessary first cut at how states should react to threats or would react if they were not constrained by domestic costs and risks and/or did not suffer from various “software” deficiencies. Indeed, given the simple yet compelling logic of the theory, balancing behavior has become *the* baseline expectation for states’ responses to threatening accumulations of power; this is the “balancing prevails” view articulated most forcibly by Kenneth Waltz and Stephen Walt.⁸

Nevertheless, we must not lose sight of the fact that structural theory is concerned with outcomes and not the specific actions, intentions, or foreign-policy goals of individual states at any given time; it describes only the expected consequences of states’ actions. As Waltz (1997, 915) points out, “structures shape and shove; they encourage states to do some things and to refrain from doing others. Because states coexist in a self-help system, they are free to do any fool thing they care to, but they are likely to be rewarded for behavior that is responsive to structural pressures and punished for behavior that is not.”

Here again, while I agree with the thrust of Waltz’s statement, we must be careful not to assume that all state actions that do not conform to the theory’s predictions (*viz.*, actions that appear unresponsive

to structural pressures) are therefore “foolish.” Instead, such seemingly irrational state actions when viewed solely through the lens of systemic pressures may appear quite rational when viewed through the lens of the domestic politics of strategic choice. In other words, statecraft is not simply a function of the particular geostrategic risks and opportunities presented by a given systemic environment; it is also a consequence of the domestic political risks associated with certain foreign-policy choices and the variable risk-taking preferences of national elites. As Alan Lamborn (1991, 5) points out:

To use domestic financial and human resources in pursuit of foreign policy objectives, policy makers must be able and willing to pay the domestic political price of overcoming any opposition to their efforts to extract and allocate those resources. Policy makers’ willingness to pay this *domestic price of power* will vary with their perception of the domestic and diplomatic stakes. The higher the domestic political risks of resource-dependent statecraft -- or the greater the aversion of policy makers to running political risks in pursuit of policy -- the more likely it is that policy makers will try to reduce the domestic price of power by altering their foreign policies or bargaining strategies to reduce domestic opposition. Those alterations may be made even when they reduce the probability of achieving foreign policy goals.

To be sure, there are many factors that can increase domestic political risks and raise obstacles to resource extraction. That noted, I posit four domestic-level variables as important elements that account for different levels of state extractive capacity: elite consensus, elite cohesion, regime vulnerability, and social cohesion. Elite consensus and elite cohesion primarily affect the state’s *willingness* to balance or expand; while regime vulnerability and social cohesion affect the state’s *ability* to extract resources for those tasks. I argue that these variables -- both of which go to the core of a state’s relative capabilities -- largely explain why national responses to external threats and opportunities vary so widely among states. In the next sections, each variable will be examined in turn.

(1) Elite Consensus

Elite consensus concerns the degree of shared perception about some facts in the world as being problems (versus not) of a particular nature (versus some other nature) requiring certain remedies (versus others).⁹ It is a concept that takes into account the intuitively understood but too often ignored idea (truism?) that the process of problem construction is a subjective one that is only partly determined by objective facts. Specifically, elite consensus is a measure of the similarity of elites’ preferences and their beliefs about the preferences and anticipated actions of others. It is also a function of the strategic setting,

which includes the perceived actions available to the actors and the information structure of the environment, that is, what the actors can know for certain and what they must infer from others' behavior (Lake and Powell 1999). The more ambiguous the information available to the actors about their environment, the less one would expect there to be elite consensus about policy preferences and strategies and the more one would expect pronounced policy splits to emerge within the regime (and society) that place intense political constraints on decisive and costly government actions. Conversely, the less ambiguous the strategic environment, the more likely that elite consensus will emerge and the more one would expect bold policy initiatives.

Specifically, we want to know the following: (1) Do elites agree that there is a threat or opportunity in the external environment? (2) If there are multiple threats/opportunities, do elites agree on their rankings of them from most to least dangerous/advantageous to the state's survival and vital interests? (3) Do elites agree about the nature and extent of the threat or opportunity? (4) Do elites agree about which policy remedy will be most effective and appropriate to deal with a threat? (5) Is there a consensus among elites or elite groups regarding whether the state should pursue expansionist goals or, conversely, be satisfied with the status quo? (6) Is there agreement among policy elites regarding the domestic political risks and costs associated with the range of policy options to balance a threat or to seize an opportunity?

Further, even in countries where there is elite consensus about their external environment and how to deal with it, there still may be a disjuncture between the state's policy preferences and those of its society. A good example is the Hoare-Laval debacle in response to Italy's attack on Ethiopia in 1935. The problem was that British and French elites wanted to maintain their alliance with Italy against Germany, but their more liberal societies demanded punitive League actions in response to Italy's unprovoked attack against a weak African country. In the end, the Anglo-French publics got their way, which drove Mussolini into Hitler's orbit and, in the process, dashed a key element -- an alliance with Italy -- in Britain and France's external balancing strategy against Germany.

(2) Elite Cohesion

Elite cohesion concerns the degree to which a central government's political leadership is

fragmented by persistent internal divisions in the form of competing ideological views, bureaucratic interests, factions, or competing parties or other such political groups (Hagan 1987, 344). The concept of elite cohesion is obviously not a dichotomous variable but a continuous one. At one extreme of the continuum, political elites are divided into two armed camps, with hyper-nationalists on one side and collaborators with the enemy of the state on the other. It is a situation devoid of politics, for there is no bargaining set among political factions to reach compromise settlements. At the other extreme, all political elites and groups belong to a dominant party “and they uniformly profess its ideology, religious belief, or ethnonationalist creed -- an ‘ideocratic’ configuration that is primarily coerced” (Dogan and Higley 1998, 18; also see Piekalkiewicz and Penn 1995). In practice, the structure of political elites within most states falls somewhere between these two ideal types.

The principle questions regarding elite cohesion are the following: Is there a struggle among elites for domestic political power? If so, are there opportunistic elites within the threatened state who are willing to collaborate with the enemy to advance their own personal power or to gain office? Or, conversely, is a divided elite preventing a potential regional hegemon from expanding its territory and influence when it has an opportunity to do so because elites disagree on the type of expansion (e.g., contiguous territory or overseas colonies) that would most benefit the state and/or where precisely the expansion should be targeted? With respect to balancing against external threats, elites may be categorized as either *nationalists* or *collaborators*. Nationalists are those elites or elite groups who will resist external intrusions in the interest of maintaining state autonomy and will support the state’s expansion for the purpose of increasing its relative power and influence. Collaborators place a lower value than nationalists on state autonomy for its own sake, have far less concern for the state’s power and status vis-à-vis other states, and possess a narrower conception of the national community. With respect to opportunities presented by the external environment, elites often divide into those who support continental expansion against those who favor colonial gains.

(3) *Regime Vulnerability*

Whereas the concepts of elite cohesion and consensus tap divisions among national political elites,

regime vulnerability focuses on the strength of the present rulers with respect to the broader political environment. In its most basic sense, the concept of regime vulnerability “asks what is the likelihood that the current leadership will be removed from political office” (Hagan 1987, 346). Specifically, does the regime face a serious challenge from the military, opposing political parties, or other powerful political groups in society? Are such groups threatening to prematurely remove the current regime from office? Have they done so in the recent past?

In a related but broader sense, the concept of regime vulnerability seeks to capture the relationship between rulers and ruled at a given moment in time. Hence, the following questions related to elite-mass linkages are also relevant: Is the regime’s authority based primarily on coercion or is it self-legitimizing in the eyes of the mass public? Is the regime meeting the expectations of the people? Does it enjoy broad support from the masses? How does the elite mobilize the masses to achieve its goals, and can it minimize domestic interference in its policy decisions?

These questions get at the heart of the tradeoff embodied in the choice among alternative responses to structural threats and opportunities. Leaders, especially vulnerable ones, cannot simply choose security policies based on their likelihood of neutralizing the external threat or satisfying national ambitions for greater power and influence. They must also consider the domestic costs attached to the policy options. Vulnerable regimes will typically be more constrained in their menu of choices than popular ones, and they will be less effective in mobilizing resources from society. As James Morrow (1993, 216) points out, “Leaders and domestic groups often disagree about the appropriate response to a threat. Leaders choose policies for their ability to counter a threat and to provide domestic support. Without the latter, security policies will fail to do the former.”

In other words, the strength of elite-mass linkages plays a major role in defining the menu of viable policy choices (limiting or expanding it) available to decision makers. Weak regimes have less policy capacity (viz., the state’s ability to detect and assess threats and opportunities; to control, mobilize, and allocate national resources; to articulate and choose policies, and to implement those policies) than do legitimate ones; that is, vulnerable regimes have only a limited scope and range of internal and external behaviors by which they can respond to structural changes in their environment. On this point, Azar and

Moon (1988b, 84) write:

Weak legitimacy exhausts domestic capabilities and turns the overall policy capacity rigid and ineffectual. As a regime attempts to ensure its survival through the use of force or by co-optation and appeasement of the opposition, it begins rapidly to deplete the nation's capabilities and scarce resources....Among the serious side-effects of the erosion of domestic policy capacity are: a sharp decrease in the people's loyalty and confirmity to, and compliance with, government policies and decisions; a decrease in the government's ability to mobilize material and human resources in the event of national security crisis; diminution in the accountability or the virtual termination of the steering function of the government; and a serious reduction in the co-ordination and implementation of policies.

Moreover, as the quote above from King William II illustrates, vulnerable regimes are wary of fomenting hyper-nationalism and mobilizing a mass army because they fear, quite rightly, that weapons put in the hands of a newly energized, nationalist public are just as likely, if not more so, to be fired at them as they are to be used against the external threat (see, e.g., Downs and Saunders 1998/99). Vulnerable elites will also be less able than legitimate ones to persuade the mass public of the existence of national security threats and of the need to make sacrifices to resist them.

This same logic may explain why many potentially powerful (viz., resource rich states compared to their neighbors) but internally divided states have not sought regional hegemony when it was within their grasp. There are several reason why states governed by weak regimes do not follow this basic realist proposition. The primary one is that the essential element of military power, especially in the Third World, is not the quality and quantity of arms or numbers of personnel, which provide misleading "beancount" assessments of military capabilities, but rather human resources, such as skills, leadership, and morale. Most important of these elements, especially to deploy and project military power for offensive purposes, is effective military leadership, and that is precisely what is lacking in most developing countries. As Walter Barrows (1985, 103-4) points out: "Few African regimes, whatever their ideology, feel secure enough to encourage such [effective] leaders within the military, whether or not the political incumbents themselves wear uniforms. The fear of a coup d'etat leads many political leaders to take measures designed to keep potential rivals within the armed services off balance and deprived of a power base. Competence usually takes second place to loyalty, and in some cases it is discouraged altogether."

(4) Social Cohesion

Social cohesion and its opposite, social division, describe the relative solidity of ties that bind individuals and groups to the core of a given society. Social cohesion does not mean political unanimity or the absence of deep political disagreements within society. All societies have conflicts arising from various sources and cleavages, including but not limited to divergent class interests, economic inequalities, competing political goals, ethnic animosities, and so-called normative conflicts (e.g., differences over the definition of national identity, the relationship between religion and the state, culture wars, etc.).¹⁰ The key to social cohesion is that all members of society accept the same rules of the game, that is, they support the society's institutions as legitimate and appropriate mechanisms to settle disputes among them no matter how profound their disagreements or grievances. Conversely, real political division exists when groups within society do not confer legitimacy on the institutions that structure it and, even more so, when a meaningful segment of the population intends to overthrow the institutions of the state.

In its widest sense, however, the concept of social cohesion encompasses more than mere institutional legitimacy; it is about psychological feeling of “we-ness” within a society, an admittedly difficult concept to objectively measure. When all members of society “feel interconnected and integrated into the vast series of networks that make up society, good social cohesion is likely. As soon as one group feels excluded from the society in which that group is nonetheless formally present, social division is likely” (Semelin 1993, 64-5).

It is taken for granted in the literature that the emergence of a serious external threat will result in a greater degree of social cohesion than that which existed in the pre-crisis period. This is the logic behind the so-called “rally-around-the flag-effect” that wartime leaders enjoy and the familiar theme of diversionary motivations for initiating war, often called “scapegoat” wars. These theories assume that all or most members of the society naturally share a common interest in repelling an invader, real or imagined (or, when invasion is not the issue, defeating the external threat to their core values), and so they will easily put aside their differences and unite against the common enemy.

All things being equal, the emergence of an outside threat should indeed increase social cohesion. How much of an increase in national unity depends, among other things, on the perceived strategic

objectives of the would-be invader and the likelihood that the pooled efforts of the nation will lead to victory. Specifically, the more widespread the belief among the target's population that the invader will establish a brutally repressive occupation, the more likely there will be high levels of civilian resistance and social cohesion in response to the threat. Furthermore, the higher the probability of success in war, the more likely the target's population will cohere and voluntarily mobilize to put down the threat. In summary and with certain qualifications already noted: "The conditions of external aggression...seem favorable to a civil society's expression of resistance on its own and of its ability to act as a whole against the intruder" (Semelin 1993, 65).

While the appearance of a common external threat often unites the in-group and heightens its morale, a more detailed consideration of the impact of outside threat on social cohesion raises the question whether the opposite effect might not also result. After all, history records many instances of conflict between groups or nations that has led to anomie rather than increased internal cohesion. What might account for this variation?

The sociologist, Lewis Coser has been wrongly associated with the basic proposition that conflict with out-groups increases internal cohesion.¹¹ Instead, he offered a more detailed and qualified proposition that might explain historical variation in group responses to external pressure: "*The degree of group consensus prior to the outbreak of the conflict seems to be the most important factor affecting cohesion. If a group is lacking in basic consensus, outside threat leads not to increased cohesion, but to general apathy, and the group is consequently threatened with disintegration*" (Coser 1956, 92-3, emphasis in original).¹² Coser also argues that external threats are only likely to lead to increased group cohesion when they are seen as a menace to the entire group. Thus, according to Coser, the degree of pre-crisis group cohesion and the general perception among group members regarding the scope of the threat are key intervening variables that determine whether a threatened group will unite or disintegrate. There are many intuitive reasons why this should be so.

Wars to repel determined invaders, even when successful, typically require large sacrifices in terms of blood and treasure from the population. If one defends only what one holds dear and is willing to suffer high costs and take great risks only for things that one values, then groups that perceive themselves

to be excluded from society prior to the crisis will not sense that they have much to lose by siding with the aggressor. Indeed, disenfranchised groups may even perceive that they have much to gain from collaboration with the enemy. Several propositions arise from this line of thought. First, the deeper the divisions within society prior to the threat, the more likely a part of the community will either actively collaborate with the enemy or remain passive rather than resist the aggressor. Second, the deeper the social divisions within the state, the harder it will be for that state to mobilize internal resources against the threat or for offensive purposes.

The pre-crisis degree of social cohesion within the threatened state may also explain its choice of arms or allies to deal with the threat; that is, whether the target will be more likely to respond with an internal or external balancing strategy. Internal balancing entails greater and more immediate sacrifices from the general population than the alternative of external balancing, by which the state gives up a measure of foreign-policy autonomy in order to shift a part or all of the burden of balancing the external threat on to another state. Thus, it follows that the more social divisions within a state, the more likely it will be forced to rely on external means (alliances) as opposed to internal means (the mobilization of arms and troops) to balance against the threat. Conversely, the greater the degree of social cohesion in the pre-crisis period, the more likely the state will be able to resist an attack on its own; or, at the very least, the more likely internal balancing will be a viable, if not exclusive, option for the state.

The thrust of Coser's hypothesis is correct but too general to be applied wholesale to the study of international relations; it requires qualification regarding the precise nature of the divisions, whether they are primarily ideological, ethnic, or class driven, within the fragmented state. The nature of social fragmentation yields three distinct hypotheses regarding pre-crisis fragmentation and social cohesion in the face of an external threat:

(1) multiethnic (or multinational) states, in which there are several ethnic groups within the state that aspire to nationhood, are most likely to break further apart under intense external pressure, especially if the potential invader is seen as a liberator by one or more of the rebellious ethnic groups.

(2) ideologically divided nation-states, where there is a high degree of civic nationalism and little or no problems of ethnic nationalism are likely to unite under extremely intense and unambiguous external

pressure. A shared sense of nationalism and loyalty to the state will ultimately trump ideological divisions. Yet, there is an interesting and somewhat counterintuitive corollary hypothesis: Ambiguous threats or multiple threats will further fragment ideologically divided states and paralyze their foreign policy response. This is because, the more uncertainty there is regarding the source and magnitude of the potential external dangers to the state, the easier it will be for all sides along the ideological spectrum to support their version of the external environment to suit their particular ideological views and political agendas. Belief systems die hard, so it is only when one threat emerges as clearly the most dangerous threat to the state's survival that external pressure will create social cohesion. The prediction for ideologically divided societies, therefore, is that they will be slow to balance and may respond ineffectively to external threats, but they will eventually balance against dangerous external threats.

(3) Class-divided societies will unite when the invader threatens the interests of all classes or the majority of class interests. If, however, such class-divided societies perceive that the external threat endangers only one class, even if it is the most politically powerful, but supports or is neutral toward the others, they will further fragment.¹³

Theories of Overreaction

The main contribution of this paper is that it focuses on two widespread and important state behaviors -- state "underreactions" to threats and opportunities in their external environment -- that are not only undertheorized but have been virtually ignored in the literature. In contrast, we have many useful theories that explain why states either overreact to perceived threats or overestimate the amount of security they can achieve, leading them to engage in more aggressive balancing practices (e.g., massive arms build-ups, war mobilizations, and tight alliances) than is warranted by their actual security needs. Chief among these type of "overreaction" theories is the security dilemma, which claims that the means by which a state tries to increase its security often inadvertently threatens others (Jervis 1978; also see Glaser 1997; Lynn-Jones 1995; and Davis, Jr. et al. 1998/99). The logic of the security dilemma lies at the core of neorealism (or structural realism), defensive realism, and offensive realism, which all view international politics and war as more the result of tragedy (anarchy and its consequences) than of evil (the war-like intentions of

greedy, misguided leaders).

We also have many theories about hegemony-seeking great powers. Chief among these is Jack Snyder's majestic work, Myths of Empire. Snyder offers a rich and eclectic theoretical argument to explain why so many great powers throughout history have overexpanded, by which he means expansion that either provokes the formation of an overpowering countercoalition or entails costs that exceed potential benefits (so-called "imperial overstretch").¹⁴ Essentially, Snyder (1991, 39-49) claims that overexpansion is possible because the costs of imperialistic programs are spread widely among the masses, while the benefits are concentrated in the hands of a few. States with cartelized systems are most susceptible to overexpansion and self-encircling policies because (1) there are many concentrated interest groups (e.g., the military, big business, and parochial pressure groups with an interest in war, military mobilization, empire, or protectionism) and (2) central authority and the state's institutional structures are so weak that the state can be easily hijacked by "special interest" elite groups for their own purposes. Forced to engage in a competitive process to mobilize mass support for their parochial policies, powerful elite groups propagate strategic rationales for their preferred policies, which they eventually come to believe. These rationalizations for policies that benefit narrow elite groups are the so-called "myths of empire" or "myths of security through expansion," which include the beliefs that conquest pays, that military success will induce bandwagoning and falling dominoes, and that threats and offensive strategies are the most effective means to enhance the state's security and influence.¹⁵

These myths would be relatively harmless if they were not translated into actual policies of war, expansion, and military preparations. It is the peculiar dynamics of the policy process in cartelized systems that turns these myths into especially reckless foreign policies. Given the weakness of central authority and the praetorian nature of the society,¹⁶ the policy process within these states is characterized by logrolling among competing elite groups, which generates more extreme expansionist policies than any individual group would prefer if it ruled on its own. The logic is that "logrolling works by giving each group what it wants most, so that even if only some of the groups in the coalition favored policies leading to war and expansion, that would be enough to make their adoption likely" (Mansfield and Snyder 1995, 31-2).

The arguments presented in this paper, however, suggest that Snyder's theory is underspecified.

Specifically, elite fragmentation, which is similar to Snyder's notion of competing elite groups, is a necessary but not sufficient condition for overexpansion. As I will show, the degree of elite cohesion combines with the level of elite consensus to produce several predictions regarding a state's likely grand strategy, only one of which is overexpansion.

How It Works

Consider a hypothetical German case sometime during the Wilhelmine era. Assume that there are only four elite groups that can, but may not, exert influence over German foreign policy: (1) pan-Germans, (2) Junkers, (3) the German Navy League, and (4) Industrialists. At any given time, any group may support the status quo over expansionist policies. When they do support expansion, however, the four groups support the following: Pan-Germans and Junkers desire Continental expansion, while Navy groups and Industrialists favor colonial expansion. In Table 1 (below), *elite consensus* refers to whether elite groups agree that there are structural opportunities for German expansion and whether Germany should take advantage of those opportunities; *elite cohesion/fragmentation* refers to whether there is a conflict of interests among the elite groups regarding where, if conditions are perceived to be ripe, Germany should expand. In this stylized example, overexpansion (or reckless expansion) is defined as the combination of Continental *and* colonial expansion; whereas limited (or cautious) expansion is defined as *either* Continental *or* colonial expansion.

Table 1. Predictions of German Expansion based on Elite Consensus and Cohesion

Situation 1.

<u>Elite Consensus</u>	<u>Elite Fragmentation</u>
Pan-Germans and Junkers: Expand Now	Continental Interest
Navy League and Industrialists: Expand Now	Colonial Interest
<i>Predicted Outcome: Overexpansion (Continental and Colonial)</i>	

Situation 2.

<u>No Elite Consensus</u>	<u>Elite Fragmentation</u>
Pan-Germans and Junkers: Expand Now	Continental Interest
Navy League and Industrialists: Status Quo	Colonial Interest
<i>Predicted Outcome: No or Limited Expansion (Continental Only)</i>	

Situation 3.

<u>Elite Consensus</u>	<u>Elite Fragmentation</u>
Pan-Germans and Junkers: Status Quo	Continental Interest
Navy League and Industrialists: Status Quo	Colonial Interest
<i>Predicted Outcome: No Expansion</i>	

Situation 4. (Industrialists and the German Navy League are weak non-elite groups)

<u>No Elite Consensus</u>	<u>Elite Cohesion</u>
Pan-Germans: Expand Now	Continental Interest
Junkers: Status Quo	Continental Interest
<i>Predicted Outcome: No or Limited Expansion (Continental Only)</i>	

Situation 5. (Pan-Germans and Junkers are weak non-elite groups)

<u>No Elite Consensus</u>	<u>Elite Cohesion</u>
Navy League: Expand Now	Colonial Interest
Industrialists: Status Quo	Colonial Interest
<i>Predicted Outcome: No or Limited Expansion (Colonial Only)</i>	

Situation 6. (Pan-Germans and Junkers are weak non-elite groups)

<u>Elite Consensus</u>	<u>Elite Cohesion</u>
Navy League: Expand Now	Colonial Interest
Industrialists: Expand Now	Colonial Interest
<i>Predicted Outcome: Limited Expansion (Colonial Only)</i>	

As the Table 1. shows, Germany is not predicted to overexpand in five out of the six situations. In fact, *Situations 2-5* are examples of underexpansion, assuming that the objective structural-systemic factors (hypothetical in this case) were conducive either to German Continental or Colonial expansion or both. Remember, when we say that a state “underexpanded,” we are implying that a “normal” state under the same conditions would have expanded or expanded more than did the so-called underexpander.

Having considered how domestic politics can inhibit normal expansion, let us now turn to underbalancing and unanswered threats. The British case in the 1930s is an exemplar of inaction in response to a threatening external environment. In Arnold Wolfers (1962, 13-16) words, the house was unmistakably on fire, and yet the British did not experience an irresistible compulsion to rush toward the exits. The British case divides nicely into two periods: 1933-1936 and 1937- March 1939 (prior to the German occupation of Prague). Throughout the period, British domestic politics were fragmented among the three major parties (Labour, Conservative, and Liberal) and competing elite factions within those parties. The level of British fragmentation, however, was not uncharacteristic of democratic systems in “normal” times. Prior to 1937, however, British elite fragmentation was somewhat strangely accompanied by an overwhelming consensus among elites and public opinion for appeasement. Isolationists on the Right, pacifists on the Left, and pro-League enthusiasts at the Center all supported, for various and not entirely compatible reasons, conciliation of the revisionist dictators through the machinery of collective security as against a more proactive balancing policy of rearmament and defensive alliances (see Table 2 below).

This is quite interesting for two reasons. First, it shows that elite consensus regarding grand strategy is not necessarily accompanied by and does not require elite cohesion. Second, and more important, elite consensus is not a sufficient condition for appropriate balancing behavior. As the British case prior to 1937 demonstrates, a consensus among elites and the mass public may form in support of an alternative strategy to balancing, e.g., appeasement and conciliation of the threat. Indeed, alternative, non-balancing policies will typically be attractive for reasons I will discuss below.

After the remilitarization of the Rhineland in 1936, policy consensus among British elites was replaced by an intense and evenly matched political struggle. Elites divided into two camps: those who supported the government’s policy of appeasement and those who favored Churchill’s strong deterrence

strategy of arms and allies to encircle and contain Germany and the aggressors (see Table 3 below). While Chamberlain's opponents were more talented and eloquent than his supporters, appeasement and the "Munich spirit" triumphed because anti-appeasers were hopelessly fragmented politically and could not -- or, more accurately, would not -- form a united campaign front in opposition to Chamberlain, whose supporters included the mass of Conservatives, old isolationists on the Right, Liberal and Labour pacifists, and a few Nazi sympathizers. Churchill's supporters from the extreme right-wing of the Tories refused to become politically intimate with Labour, while Labour's leadership similarly worried about upsetting its own supporters by mingling with Tories. Moreover, within the Conservative party, Eden "had no intention of voluntarily subordinating himself to Churchill...and, without him, the prospect of a substantial Conservative secession disappeared" (Parker 1997, 219).

What does the case show? Just as effective deterrence of a powerful revisionist state or alliance requires the formation of an equally or more powerful and determined coalition of status-quo states opposed to aggression, the adoption of an effective balancing strategy by individual states requires a solid and united domestic majority of elites and the mass public in support of rearmament and the search for allies. This is no easy task, however. Balancing is a costly strategy that entails sacrifices in terms of: (1) human and material resources that could be directed toward domestic programs and investment rather than national defense, and (2) when alliances are necessary, foreign-policy autonomy. In the absence of a clear majority of elites in favor of a balancing strategy, therefore, an alternative policy -- and not necessarily a coherent one -- will prevail, even when elites are fragmented. This is because a weak grand strategy can be supported for many different reasons, e.g., pacifism, isolationism, pro-enemy sympathies, collective defense, a belief in conciliation, etc. Consequently, appeasement and other forms of under-balancing will tend to triumph simply because they are the path of least domestic resistance and appeal to a broad range of interests along the political spectrum. In short, underreacting to threats, unlike an effective balancing strategy, does not require overwhelming, united, and coherent support from elites and masses; it is *the* default strategy.

Table 2: British Elite Views on Grand Strategy, 1933-1936

<u>Elite Groups</u>	<u>Grand Strategy</u>
Mass of Conservatives (Baldwin, Eden, Chamberlain)	Passive Appeasement; No Continental Commitment; Armed Forces for National Defense to Promote British Isolationism and Neutrality
Churchill Conservatives	Arms and Allies against Germany
Labour	Disarmament and International Conciliation; “Yes” to limited armaments for the League of Nations and Collective Security; “No” to armed forces for National Defense
Liberals	Strongly Pro-League; Opposed to Rearmament and British Neutrality in Southern and Eastern Europe; Strongly Oppose Economic Nationalism
Lloyd George Liberals	Active Appeasement; Determined Pursuit of Settlement with Germany

*Elite Consensus and Fragmentation: Near Unanimous Support for Appeasement Consequence:
Underbalancing*

Table 3: Two Competing British Grand Strategies, 1937-39

<u>Elite Groups</u>	<u>Grand Strategy: Chamberlain Appeasement</u>
Mass of Conservatives Tory Isolationists Nazi sympathizers Labour and Liberal Pacifists	Active Appeasement; Limited Liability on the Continent; Rearmament for National Defense of the Homeland and the Empire
<u>Elite Groups</u>	<u>Grand Strategy: Churchillian Deterrence</u>
Mass of Labour (Attlee-Macmillan) Tories Lloyd George Liberals	Armed Coercive League of Nations to Resist the Right-Wing Aggressors and Impose Disarmament on Germany; Encirclement of Germany through Communists Alliances with Russia and France; Commitment to the Defense of Eastern and Southern Europe

*Elite Dissensus and Fragmentation: Incoherent Grand Strategy
Consequence: Underbalancing*

Conclusion

This paper has offered a tentative explanation for the opposite phenomena to overreactions to structural-systemic factors: (1) ambivalent hegemony or an underreaction to opportunities and (2) hypo-balancing or an underreaction to perceived threats. There has been little theorizing about this type of maladroit behavior within the balance-of-power literature. As far as I know, there is only one study on the reluctance of powerful states to seek regional hegemony (Zakaria 1998). If the hypotheses suggested in this paper are correct, however, the competitive elite politics that Snyder blames for overexpansionist policies are just as likely to produce underexpansion. Specifically, a logrolling process among elites may generate more cautious foreign policies than any individual elite or elite interest group would have preferred acting on its own. This dynamic seems to capture the underreaction of democratic states to the rise of Nazi Germany during the interwar period. Moreover, as Deborah Larson (1991) has shown, small nondemocratic European states cracked under Hitler's pressure rather than balancing against it precisely because they suffered from the kinds of internal divisions described in this paper.¹⁷ A similarly process may explain the reluctance on the part of so many regional powers outside Europe to make serious bids for regional hegemony.

Likewise, there have been few studies of hypo-balancing. In recent years, the term "buck-passing," a form of underreaction to threats, has been commonly used to describe the behavior of states that attempt to ride free on the balancing efforts of others. Thomas Christensen and Jack Snyder (1990) have theorized that states will buck-pass in a multipolar system when they perceive that defense has the advantage in military technology.

The logic of Christensen and Snyder's elegant theory is, on its face, quite intuitive and persuasive. Yet, their buck-passing hypothesis skirts the issue of how to define and measure the offense-defense balance (ODB). According to their theory, the ODB is simply whatever leaders rightly or wrongly perceive it to be. And because they offer a structural-systemic theory of alliance patterns, they must adopt a conceptualization of the "subjective" ODB as a system-wide attribute. But why should we expect all leaders to perceive or misperceive the ODB in the same way? Why is not the ODB a regional attribute? or something that can be said to exist only between pairs of states (conflict dyads)? Further, does not it make

more sense to measure the ODB separately at the tactical, operational, and/or strategic levels of military operations than to use one aggregate, system-wide measure of the concept?¹⁸

In Christensen and Snyder's two cases (alliance patterns prior to World Wars I and II), leaders got it wrong both times: they perceived offensive advantage in 1914, and defensive advantage before 1940. Aside from revealing the murkiness of measuring the offense-defense balance, this misperception on the part of elites begs the prior, and arguably more important, question: why did they get it wrong when they had every incentive to get it right? And why, when the status-quo states were perceiving defensive advantage in 1939, were the aggressor states correctly perceiving offensive advantage?

The actual variation among states in their perceptions of the ODB and their strategic behaviors within the same systemic environment suggests that the likely causes of buck-passing behavior reside not at the structural-systemic level of analysis but rather, consistent with the arguments of this paper, at the domestic level. This is not surprising, since the choice to balance against threats, like all national-security decisions, is a product of the domestic political process (see, e.g., Levy and Barnett 1991, 1992).

The basic arguments of this paper are broadly consistent with the neoclassical realist perspective, which emphasizes that systemic pressures must be translated through intervening variables at the domestic level (Rose 1998). Specifically, the works of Aaron Friedberg, William Wohlforth, Thomas Christensen, and Fareed Zakaria have all shown that the manner in which states assess and adapt to changes in relative power capabilities is a function of their domestic politics and, therefore, often involves indirect and complex processes.¹⁹ Along these lines, this paper suggests other mechanisms by which domestic politics may intervene to thwart the predictions of realist balance-of-power and hegemonic-war theories.

ENDNOTES

¹Curiously, as Vagts (1948, 89) points out: “There seems to be no extant written description of the [mediaeval] period presenting the relative position of pope and emperor as more or less evenly weighted -- a position that, if assessed, must have been actually reached during their power conflict at various times. Nor is there any known mediaeval prescription that calls for such a relation of strength and position in the interest of harmony or peace in the Christian world and as a solution to their struggle.”

²I say “regional” hegemony because, since 1648, there has never been a global hegemon -- the presence of which contradicts the core logic of balance of power -- and only one state, the United States, that has ever successfully achieved regional hegemony.

³Throughout the Cold War, the U.S. operated under the assumption that the Soviets were seeking regional hegemony in Europe.

⁴For instance, Kenneth Waltz (2000, 28) writes: “Unbalanced power, whoever wields it, is a potential danger to others....In international politics, overwhelming power repels and leads others to try to balance against it.” Similarly, Christopher Layne (1995, 138) maintains that “in unipolar systems there is no clear-cut distinction between balancing against threat and balancing against power. This is because threat inheres in the hegemon’s power.” For a similar view, see Mearsheimer (2001, 31).

⁵For instance, Mansfield and Snyder (1995; 2002, 297-309) argue that poorly institutionalized, democratizing states, which they distinguish from “coherent” democracies, are especially warprone because competing elites employ nationalist rhetoric to mobilize mass support and then get locked in to the belligerent politics and foreign policies unleashed by this process.

⁶For comprehensive reviews of the literature, see Stein (1976) and Levy (1989). Studies that embrace the proposition that external threat increases internal cohesion include Stein (1978), Christensen (1996), and Russett (1990). For an excellent review and critique of the “external conflict produces internal cohesion” logic that informs the scapegoat theory of war, see Blainey (1973, Chap. 5). Stein (1978, 87) accepts the claim that external threat increases group cohesion, but he discredits the logic behind scapegoat or

diversionary theories of war: “[P]olitical leaders who count on foreign adventures to unify their country and cement their positions should think again. Manufacturing crises may enable leaders to expand the powers of the state but, in one manifestation or another, cohesion will surely decrease. Only if there is a perceived threat will cohesion increase.”

⁷The classic statement of the group-binding functions of conflict is Simmel (1955). For a thorough examination and updating of Simmel’s theoretical propositions on conflict, see Coser (1956).

⁸Most notably in Waltz (1979) and Walt (1987). For a comprehensive discussion and debate on realism’s “balancing proposition,” see Vasquez and Elman (2002).

⁹For a similar discussion on collective-action problems and institutional design, see Wendt 2001, 1023-4.

¹⁰See Thelen 1998, xvi. Peter Berger (1998, 355) writes: “Essentially the notion of ‘normative order’ means the way in which any human group tries to answer two fundamental questions: *Who are we?* And, *How are we to live together?*”

¹¹As Stein (1976, 145) notes, the “outgroup conflict increases internal cohesion” idea “has been called a ‘ubiquitous principle’ and ‘Coser’s strongest theme’ (LeVine and Campbell 1972, 31). None of Coser’s qualifications and necessary conditions are mentioned, nor is the counter-hypothesis elucidated. As Mack (1965, 389) points out, ‘Coser’s *The Functions of Social Conflict* runs the risk of being accorded that peculiar form of academic obeissance in which a work is cited by everyone and heeded by no one.’”

¹²Coser, *The Functions of Social Conflict*, pp. 92-93 (emphasis in original).

¹³I am grateful to Jack Snyder for this hypothesis.

¹⁴See Snyder (1991, 6-7). For a nice summary and critique of Snyder’s book, see Zakaria (1992).

¹⁵Jack Snyder (2000, 66-83, Chap. 3) uses essentially this same argument to explain why democratizing states are more warprone than any other type of state; also see Mansfield and Snyder (1995, 19-38).

¹⁶Praetorian societies are those in which there is great pressure for mass political participation but institutions for effective participation are weak. See Huntington (1968, 78-92).

¹⁷For historical details of the various cases, see Rothschild (1974).

¹⁸For reasons why the offense-defense balance should not be conceptualized at the systemic level, see

Shimshoni (1991).

¹⁹For a review and analysis of the various works by these neoclassical realists, see Rose (1998) and Schweller (2002).

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