

Original scientific paper

UDK: 327.56::351.86(075.8)

DOI: 10.5937/jrs18-42552

Received: 1 February 2023 / Accepted: 26 September 2023

## Underbalancing in a Regional World\*

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**Abstract:** This paper adapts underbalancing theory to explain regional powers' decisions when faced with the politics of great power intrusion. The paper finds two situations where regional powers defy expectations and details the causal models using India (1979-1980) and Russia (1996-1999) as illustrative cases. I find underbalancing theory wanting at the regional level. In each case, the regional power performs a variety of diplomatic maneuvers – not limited to balancing and underbalancing – to mitigate the fallout of great power decisions. This is explained by the power asymmetries dividing great and regional powers, both constraining the actions of regional powers while motivating more creative diplomatic practices. It is said that great powers are “Gullivers”, tied down by their many responsibilities. This paper tells a different story, in which obstinate great powers make decisions without consideration for the locale where those decisions are carried out. It is the regional powers that are tied down by geostrategic position and regional security externalities. However weak or strong, these externalities create threats too salient to ignore. The findings suggest international political processes and outcomes can only be comprehensible by accounting for regional contexts and regional powers.

**Keywords:** underbalancing, regional powers, neoclassical realism, regional security studies

### Introduction

Decolonization and the disintegration of Cold War bipolarity brought an end to constant great power interference in local world affairs. In turn, there developed a world distinguished by neighborhoods of states with somewhat autonomous patterns of security, or regional security complexes (Buzan and Wæver 2003). On the cusp of a new rivalry between the United States and China, one important question is whether regional autonomy will maintain or be once again coopted and defined by great power competition.

Regional autonomy depends in part on the actions of those states responsible for it, or regional powers. Limited evidence suggests that regardless of their relationship with a great power, regional powers work to shield their regions from external intervention (Hutto

\* *Disclaimer: The views expressed in this article do not necessarily represent the views of the United States Air Force or the Department of Defense.*

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2021). Contrasting evidence shows smaller regional states exploiting external interventions to their benefit (Acharya 1992; Hemmer and Katzenstein 2002; Lemke 2002), or regional powers adopting ambivalent and erratic regional postures (Hurrell 1992; Destradi 2017; Smith 2018; Nolte and Schenoni 2021). What might explain these conflicting findings? When do regional powers choose to balance and when do they eschew balancing for accommodation or isolation?

This paper offers preliminary answers to these questions, adapting Randall Schweller's (2006) theory of underbalancing to explain regional powers' balancing decisions when faced with a great power regional intrusion and shifting regional distributions of power. In many cases, Schweller's state coherence variable is enough to explain the balancing decisions of regional powers. There are situations, however, where we can only understand regional power balancing by assessing the character of regional security externalities. I identify two scenarios in which regional powers defy the expectations of underbalancing theory, in one instance deciding to abstain when underbalancing theory would expect them to balance, in the other deciding to balance when underbalancing theory would have them abstain. In both situations, the regional context of the threat appears to play a determining role in those decisions.

Because underbalancing theory is focused primarily on systemic interactions with the domestic politics of great powers, it must be "downscaled" to the regional level. To do this, I summarize underbalancing theory and its intervening domestic variables in detail. I then describe the regional security literature and argue that varying regional contexts have the potential to distort systemic pressures as they filter toward the domestic political level. This justifies the addition of a variable to explain regional power balancing: regional security externalities.

Out of this conceptual development proceeds two regional scenarios that defy the expectations of underbalancing theory. These scenarios, what I call the "Don't Borrow Trouble" and "For All the Marbles" models, are supported empirically with two case applications: India's purposeful underbalance of the Soviet Union and Pakistan in the wake of the 1979 Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, and Russia's failed balancing attempts prior to and during the NATO intervention in Kosovo in 1999.

The findings suggest that the application of underbalancing theory to the regional world may be too limiting. Great powers are distinct from regional powers in that they are less constrained by the system (Prys 2012), and regional powers are in turn more constrained by the decisions and behavior of great powers. For this reason, hard military power and balancing will factor less into the strategic options for a regional power when facing intrusion into its complex. The (under)balancing dichotomy, then, does not fully explain the foreign policy options of regional powers when faced with external threats or shifts in regional power distributions. Regional powers may respond with traditional balancing practices, but more often these efforts encompass proactive diplomatic maneuvering rather than reactive resistance. In both cases, rather than using coercion to affect great

power behavior, the regional powers leveraged diplomatic engagement to mitigate the consequences of great power decisions. Regional powers will therefore rely on a broader toolset than simply hard power.

## (Under)balancing in a Regional World

Underbalancing theory seeks to explain why, contrary to neorealist expectations, great powers will sometimes fail to balance against concentrations of power (Schweller 2006). The most famous example of this occurred in 1938, when rather than aggregating military power internally or establishing alliances externally to deter the Nazi threat, Great Britain and France appeased Hitler's ambitions at Munich (Schweller 2006, 9).<sup>1</sup> To explain this, Schweller argues that far from being automatic, balancing outcomes are contingent on domestic political circumstances that shape interpretations or ignorance of system level dynamics (Götz 2021).<sup>2</sup>

Schweller's explanation relies on the relative coherence of a state's domestic institutions which prompt or hinder quick responses to systemic uncertainty and threats. Alexander Reichwein summarizes the argument, "weak states are both unwilling and unable to balance against potential threats" (Reichwein 2012, 46). Schweller (2006, 47) identifies four variables that influence whether a state balances threat: elite consensus, elite cohesion, government or regime vulnerability, and social cohesion. Disunity among elites regarding the existence of a threat (elite consensus), or disagreement regarding who or what is producing the threat (elite cohesion) will harm a state's *willingness* to balance (Schweller 2006, 48; 55). Additionally, regimes that face potential removal from office (regime vulnerability) have trouble mobilizing the population to support balancing policies (Schweller 2006, 49), and a fragmented public (social cohesion) is unlikely to uniformly assess threats (Schweller 2006, 54). These two variables impact a state's *ability* to balance. In combination these variables generate a measure of domestic political cohesion, or "state coherence" (Mastro 2019).<sup>3</sup> In short, when these variables align in foreign policy interests and perspectives, we should be able to estimate a degree of state coherence. Misalignments, on the other hand, demonstrate incoherence.

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1 Waltz (1979, 106-107) differentiates these balancing practices as internal (the aggregation of military power) and external (the building of alliances). This paper does not explicitly differentiate between the two but instead follows Schweller by focusing on characteristics of internal balancing.

2 Götz refers to these as "moderating factors."

3 Mastro provides an additional domestic level variable to explain underbalancing in autocracies – regime legitimacy. They argue that because autocracies are more sensitive to political or ideological threats, autocrats have strategic incentives to downplay external threats in an effort to maintain internal stability. Mastro's measure differs from Schweller's not only in its applicability to an autocratic regime type but in expectations about how underbalancing occurs. In Schweller's view, underbalancing is a mistake stumbled into by weak governments, or an uncontrollable outcome of a broken policy process. Rather than accepting this, Mastro provides strategic agency to governments. On this point Mastro and this paper are aligned; underbalancing can be intentional.

The relative coherence (or incoherence) of a state's foreign policy process will prompt (or not) the state to respond quickly to uncertainties and threats. It is the process of structural inputs filtered through domestic politics that drives the foreign policy decisions of a great power. When examining the balancing decisions of states other than great powers, however, these structural inputs are filtered through more than simply domestic contexts since smaller powers face more environmental constraints (see Prys 2012).<sup>4</sup> This paper concerns the regional contexts in which regional powers' balancing decisions are made.

Regional security studies aim to determine the impact of regional variables on foreign policy outcomes. The notion of a regional security complex (RSC) implies "that regional security processes may have considerable life apart from the global system and may refract the impact of the global system" (Morgan 1997, 25). Rather than simply reflecting the international distribution of capabilities, regional politics operate according to their own logic (Buzan and Wæver 2003). Regional complexes emerge tied together by common security concerns and are typified in much the same way as international systems, according to their power distribution and ordering principles—determined by the number of regional powers and their level of influence over their neighbors (Buzan and Wæver 2003; Prys 2012; Nolte 2010; Destradi 2010; Stewart-Ingersoll and Frazier 2012). Regional security studies do not entirely discount domestic level politics. Instead, it suggests that it is only by examining regional patterns of security that the interaction of the system and units can be understood (Buzan and Wæver 2003, 43). These theoretical approaches are distinct, but it is not necessary that they conflict.

The principal difficulty in "downscaling" underbalancing to the regional level is the difference between great powers and regional powers. Obviously, regional powers are smaller than great powers; their power projection capabilities are not global. This distinction derives from the difference between international and regional systems. International systems are closed. Having no power as their superior, great powers are less constrained by the system. Regional systems, on the other hand, are open. This openness makes regional powers susceptible to external influence in a way that great powers are not (Prys 2012, 16–17; Copeland 2012, 51). In particular, regional powers are constrained by the decisions and behavior of great powers. To wholesale adopt and apply great power balancing expectations to regional powers is to ignore this important distinction.

Yet the local power asymmetry that regional powers enjoy with neighboring states produces regional power characteristics that mimic great powers on a smaller scale. Regional powers are better able to pursue their interests, maintain their independence, and set

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4 Schweller (2006, 85-102) does apply his theory to the small power case of the War of the Triple Alliance between Paraguay and allied Brazil, Argentina, and Uruguay, demonstrating that some expectations of underbalancing theory can be applied to non-great powers. In contrast to this paper, however, Schweller treats South America as a closed system, discounting external great power meddling and interference in the decisions and actions of the South American powers. For description, see: Galeano 1973; Washburn 1871.

agendas in their RSCs (Stewart-Ingersoll and Frazier 2012, 42).<sup>5</sup> These privileges generate a vested interest in their regions, and an incentive to maximize their security by maintaining stable regional security patterns. This tie implies two primary convictions of regional security studies, (1) that the national security of regional powers is intrinsically linked to their RSC, and (2) a regional power's autonomy is a function of its region's autonomy. Regional powers can be considered rational security maximizers not simply because they are still growing and have an "incentive to be moderate in their policies" (Copeland 2012, 58), but because their future growth is partially contingent on their region's autonomy. In this sense, there should be identifiable situations in which regional powers will balance and underbalance external regional threats, or changing regional distributions of power.

We know a great deal about the methods by which great powers balance (Paul 2005; Pape 2005; Tessman and Wolfe 2011; Ferguson 2012; Ikenberry 2016; Paul 2018), but given the power asymmetries between great and regional powers, we cannot generally predict where regional powers will locate threat as regional distributions of power shift. When great powers are identified as threats, however, it is most likely we would see regional powers practicing delegitimation due to power asymmetry. Some scholars refer to delegitimation as a form of "soft balancing," a reasonable alternative to balancing for smaller states in asymmetric power positions (Paul 2005; Pape 2005; Paul 2018). For Schweller, however, delegitimation, or "the discourse and practice of resistance" (Schweller 2006, 35), is not an alternative to hard balancing but an early indication of it. In essence, smaller, non-great powers can perform political, economic, and diplomatic actions that count as balancing without immediately meeting the traditional threshold of targeting "their military hardware at each other in preparation for a potential war" (Schweller 2006, 9).

Applied to regions the theory seeks to understand why a regional power that is expected to respond to changing distributions of power instead chooses to buck-pass, distance itself, hide, wait, appease, bandwagon, muddle through, or take "half measures" (Schweller 2006, 7).<sup>6</sup> Because regional powers are regional, their differences should lead us to expect that balancing decisions will be complicated not simply by their state coherence, but also by the distinct security patterns in their region. David Lake (1997, 52-55) measures such patterns in terms of security externalities.

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<sup>5</sup> For a description of these characteristics as they relate to great powers, see: Waltz 1979, 194–195.

<sup>6</sup> It is not a new observation that regional powers might underbalance. Sandra Destradi (2012) develops the concept of "reluctant" regional powers, defining reluctance as involving "a hesitant attitude and a certain recalcitrance about conforming to the expectations articulated by others." In the process, she sets reluctance against several related concepts, including underbalancing, and notes that underbalancing is "probably most associated with reluctance." This is because the ineffective half measures in Schweller's theory most closely associate with the "incoherence and ambivalence" in Destradi's concept of reluctance. Destradi, however, distances reluctance from underbalancing by labeling underbalancing as "a mistake." This is certainly the case from a neorealist perspective, which would anticipate drastic changes in power balances to present existential threats to the affected states (Schweller 2006, 10). As noted in a previous footnote, this paper does not presume that an underbalance is a mistake, but instead treats this as an empirical question.

Security externalities are those issues that bleed over a state's borders and into the security calculations of its neighbors. Regional security externalities tie affected states to a locality in ways that are disconnected from the global system. Lake (1997, 49) uses the security dilemma as an example:

To ensure its own safety against the possibility of attack, the state procures weapons and other armaments, which in turn pose a threat to other states equally uncertain about the intentions of the first... In short, the actions of each party impose costs upon the others, creating a negative externality that binds the relevant states together as a set of interacting units.

If the dilemma is limited in geographical scope, then the security dilemma is localized, and distinct patterns of security emerge for the relevant states. In addition, Lake (1997, 50) identifies four types of security externality: deterrence, war, transborder insurgency, and transborder terrorism.

Lake's concept of security externalities is also useful in better understanding regional transformation. Regional security externalities track the "flows of threats" that bind states together (Kelly 2007, 209). In other words, regions can be defined by the externalities that link their membership. "Local externalities that produce threats to physical safety bound the set of interacting states that constitute regional security systems" (Lake 1997, 49–50). Security externalities are thus latent linkages, that when activated provide us with a clear picture of the region and its members.

We might imagine security externalities to be always present in regions, such as a security dilemma derived from regional rivalry. Yet even rivalries, embedded into the patterns of regional amity and enmity, go dormant for long periods of time and materialize only when activated by some distinct event (Colaresi, Rasler, and Thompson 2007). The pressure to respond to activated externalities will be greater the closer in proximity the state to the threat.<sup>7</sup> As a security externality is activated by a distinct event, it creates a disturbance that echoes across definite sets of borders, pulling the affected states into its orbit. "The reach of the threat determines who is in and who is out" (Kelly 2007, 210). It is in these moments that regions can change and transform by incorporating (or discarding) states that had not (or had) been considered regional members. The strength of these externalities, or the potency of their disturbances, may help determine when regional powers will balance and when they will not.

Regional systems with strong security externalities should generate higher incentives for regional balancing as a regional power seeks to protect its position in the RSC. In turn, divisive or weak security externalities may create meager balancing efforts or insurmount-

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<sup>7</sup> Unlike Lake, who dispenses with regionness and treats externalities as able to reach any state from any locality (see Kelly 2007, 208–210), this paper views proximity and contiguity as much more important. See, for example, Buzan and Wæver 2003; Lemke 2002; Miller 2005.

able challenges to balancing. To assess divisive versus strong security externalities is to judge the quality and character of security in an RSC (Buzan and Wæver 2003). In this sense, we should expect that strong security externalities, in contrast to their divisive counterparts, will pull a regional complex together.

Four propositions emerge from the above discussion:

1. *Regional powers with high levels of state coherence will likely balance in the face of a regional threat.*
2. *Regional powers with low levels of state coherence will likely underbalance in the face of a regional threat.*
3. *Regional powers sharing strong security externalities with the regional complex will likely balance in the face of a regional threat.*
4. *Regional powers sharing divisive security externalities with the regional complex will likely underbalance in the face of a regional threat.*

Taken together, determining when regional powers will (under)balance during regional power shifts requires assessing the interaction of a regional power’s political cohesion *and* the strength of security externalities in the regional system. Half of the scenarios identified in Table 1 find no distinction in the outcomes predicted by underbalancing theory with the addition of the regional security externalities variable. In other words, state coherence might explain many instances of regional power (under)balancing, a testament to the strength of Schweller’s theory even when shifting its scope conditions.<sup>8</sup>

	Regional Power’s State Coherence	Regional Security Externalities	Schweller Prediction	Regional Prediction
	High	Strong	Balance	Balance
<i>Don’t Borrow Trouble</i>	High	Divisive	Balance	Underbalance
<i>For All the Marbles</i>	Low	Strong	Underbalance	Balance
	Low	Divisive	Underbalance	Underbalance

**Table 1:** Accounting for substitutability of state coherence and security externality variables on balancing outcomes

The addition of the regional security externalities variable, however, shows two situations where regional security externalities substitute for state coherence and outcomes diverge from underbalancing theory expectations. In one situation, a regional power is expected to balance and does not; in the other, a regional power is expected to underbalance and does not. First, Table 1 displays one instance in which regional powers with a high level

<sup>8</sup> Nevertheless, the two scenarios in agreement are overdetermined and require more process tracing to determine which holds more explanatory power. This is, of course, beyond the scope of this paper.

of state coherence will be likely to underbalance; this instance follows the logic of what I term the “Don’t Borrow Trouble Model.”

“Borrowing trouble” is a colloquialism that refers to a situation in which an actor has needlessly chosen to involve themselves. This does not always mean that the actor does not have an interest in the outcome of the situation. Instead, it suggests that either the potential positive outcome is outweighed by the costs of the actor’s involvement, the actor’s involvement would not change the outcome, or critically, that the actor’s involvement would make the outcome worse; thus, the instruction: “don’t borrow trouble.”

This model applies to scenarios in which the regional power’s state coherence is high while the security externalities in the region are divisive or weak. In these scenarios, regional power underbalancing is likely when facing a rapidly shifting distribution of power because the cost of balancing may outweigh the benefits the regional power would receive from such an act. Indeed, acting may undermine the very advantages balancing seeks to protect, and we may see the regional power behave in ways that do not accord with balancing indicators. Given that the regional power is relatively disconnected from or disinterested in its regional context, the regional power simply does not wish to borrow the trouble. This does not match the expectations of underbalancing theory, since it assumes that state coherence will drive the regional power to balance against potential threats emanating from shifting distributions of power.

Second, Table 1 displays an instance in which a regional power lacking state coherence may be likely to balance against external penetration, following the logic of what I term the “For All the Marbles Model.” “For all the marbles” refers to a high-stake situation in which a negative outcome would result in an unacceptable loss for the interested party. This typically means that the actor has identified the outcome of the situation as a vital interest. In this scenario, regional powers with low state coherence would be expected to underbalance were it not for security externalities defining the RSC.

It is the strength of security externalities that trigger threat identification by the regional power, driving it to balance against threat. The logic of the model follows closely with prospect theory, in which an actor is expected to be “risk-averse with respect to gains and risk-acceptant with respect to losses” (Levy 1992, 303–304; also see Kahneman and Tversky 1997). In other words, when a regional power shares strong security externalities with its neighbors, great power intervention creates situations that put regional powers in a position of playing “for all the marbles.”

The remainder of the paper analyzes two cases of underbalancing that follow the causal logic of the two models above: India’s refusal to balance the Soviet Union and Pakistan in the wake of the 1979 Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, and Russia’s attempt to balance the US and NATO before and during the 1999 bombing of Kosovo. Underbalancing theory applied to regional powers would expect the internally coherent India to have balanced against the Soviet intrusion into the region or a Pakistan seeking arms, yet it did not. Un-

derbalancing theory would not have expected the internally incoherent Russia to balance against the US and its allies in the Kosovo conflict, yet it tried desperately to do just that. I make the case that India’s refusal to balance in South Asia follows the logic of the Don’t Borrow Trouble Model, and that Russia’s failed delegitimation and balancing campaign against the US and NATO can best be explained by the For All the Marbles Model.

### Note on Methodology and Case Selection

The following sections apply an explanatory typology to generate congruence tests of the two models (Elman 2005). These are performed simultaneously by selecting cases containing extreme values on the key variables, state coherence and security externalities (George and Bennett 2004; Van Evera 1997, 58). In the case of India’s underbalance, state coherence is relatively high in a South Asian RSC divided by rivalry and ethnonationalism; in the Russian case it balances notwithstanding elite and social division due to strong security externalities activated within the Balkan subcomplex. The change in power distribution expectations and outcomes of these scenarios are summarized in Table 2. I engage in process-tracing to identify the causal connection between security externalities and regional power balancing decisions.

	<b>Change in Power Distribution</b>	<b>(Under)balancing Expectation</b>	<b>(Under)balancing Outcome</b>
<i>India and the 1979 Invasion of Afghanistan</i>	Soviet invasion of Afghanistan and potential US assistance to Pakistan	Indian balancing or delegitimation campaign (a practice or discourse of resistance) against the Soviet Union and Pakistan	Indian discourse of appeasement and acceptance
<i>Russia and the NATO Bombing of Kosovo</i>	US and NATO intervention and bombing of Serbian forces in Kosovo	Russian buck-passing, appeasement, or acceptance	Russian delegitimation campaign of resistance followed by a failed hard balancing attempt

**Table 2:** *Expectations of underbalancing theory compared with the outcome*

The cases are not controlled comparisons, but each case is similar in that activated security externalities reverberate across landscapes in ways that problematize the location and membership of the RSCs. Security externalities activated by great power involvement transform RSCs – If only for a brief period – and shift “who is in and who is out” (Kelly 2007, 210). In part, this is a function of the types of cases. In the case of India, the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan – a state that would not have been considered a member of the South Asian RSC in 1978 – reverberated across South Asia because of the non-aligned movement’s condemnation (of which India was the proverbial leader) as well as the threat perceived by India’s rival, Pakistan. In the case of Russia, an externality (translated through analogy) emerging out of the Balkan European subcomplex pulled Russia and the post-Soviet space into its orbit, momentarily making the subcomplex appear indistinct from both RSCs.

While the facts of the two cases are agreed upon, there rarely exists consensus around the intentions of leaders or the decision-making processes of their governments. Was the Indian government simply biding time for an arms acquisition process that would slowly intensify throughout the 1980s – thus effectively balancing (Gupta 1997; Smith 1994)? Was the Russian government actually coherent in its position on NATO affairs – since part of its disunity centered on the solution to the problem rather than the problem itself (Sergounin 1997)? The subjective elements of empirical findings will always loom large and be open to various interpretations. What is important for the purpose of this study is that these cases at their baseline demonstrate that outbreaks of conflict, war, and the imposition of great powers tend to disrupt local politics and upend established orders. It is in these moments of possible transformation when instances of regional power balancing are most likely: when regional systems are under contest, their boundaries porous and status uncertain.

### **Don't Borrow Trouble: India and the 1979 Invasion of Afghanistan**

The sudden and unanticipated Soviet invasion of Afghanistan occurred during a period of transition in Indian politics. Strong state coherence, particularly around Indian foreign policy, was buoyed by a renewed, consolidated political takeover by Indira Gandhi's Congress Party (I). Rather than assuage the non-aligned movement and condemn Soviet action, Indian political elites were relatively unified in identifying the regional threat as the United States-driven rearmament of India's regional rival, Pakistan.

Instead of balancing against Pakistan, however, India worked to shape regional understandings of the threat as one to South Asian autonomy rather than Indian security. Through careful diplomatic half-measures, India argued that balancing was an invitation for Cold War politics to enter South Asia, resulting in a loss of regional autonomy. Rather than balance any threat, India chose to not borrow the trouble, underbalancing Pakistan and the potential Cold War threat.

#### *Domestic Level: Strong State Coherence in India*

While it might be that elite cohesion reached its lowest level during the 1975 state of emergency and Indira Gandhi's brief exit from political power between 1977 and 1978, Indian elite consensus remained high regarding India's friends and enemies, as well as its role in South (Gupta 1980; Menon 1978; Ghosh and Panda 1983). It had signed a Treaty of Friendship with the Soviet Union in 1971, and while unpopular among the Congress Party's (I) political adversaries, friendly relations between the two went unimpeded during the brief Janata Party rule between 1977 and 1980 (Menon 1978, 739).

The elite consensus was compounded by mutual understandings of India's role in the world, first as the historical leader of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) of the Third

World, and second as the predominant regional power in South Asia (Jain 2005; Gupta 1982, 216). Most – if not all – foreign policy decisions made by Indian leaders were justified according to these two expectations.<sup>9</sup> As the de facto leader of the NAM,<sup>10</sup> India committed itself to articulate a foreign policy independent of United States-Soviet competition, mapping a way for members to avoid or mitigate the Cold War overlay. As the regional power over South Asia, India historically followed a doctrine of *Delhineation*, “which essentially argues that achieving South Asian peace, security, and stability requires a strong India exerting regional military superiority” (Dash 2001, 208).

Elites were also united around the potential threat presented by India’s regional rival, Pakistan. The two states had warred multiple times since their founding, most recently in 1971. Pakistan’s defeat and division in 1971 and India’s successful 1974 nuclear test widened the capability gap between the two, some might say to the point of Indian hegemony in the region. Nevertheless, concern remained about any future arms race (Gupta 1983, 202). This all increased the potential *willingness* of India to balance threats to its territory or interests.

Important for Indian *ability* to balance against threat, Gandhi’s regime’s vulnerability was quite low. Although politically imprisoned in 1978, the sweeping electoral victory for the Congress Party (I) in 1979 consolidated Gandhi’s power. Returning 353 parliamentarians to office and leaving all opposition only 132 seats, the electoral mandate was reinforced by public opinion, which favored Gandhi and the Congress unequivocally (Gupta 1981, 147; Ghosh and Panda 1983, 270; also see, Gupta 1980).

### *Regional Level: Divisive Security Externalities in South Asia*

Historically, the South Asia security complex is marred by divisive security externalities. While the states of South Asia share several common security issues – “ethnic sub-nationalism,” hunger, disease, and water security (Dash 2001; Buzan and Wæver 2003; Jain 2005)—the complex itself is fractured and without a common sense of threat (Haider 2001, 425; Muni 1985, 392) for two primary reasons: the Indo-Pakistani rivalry and the problems posed by overwhelming Indian power (Dash 2008).

The looming threat of India in South Asian security at least partially emanates from India’s contentious and sometimes violent rivalry with Pakistan. The reasons for this rivalry are myriad. As Dash (2008, 58) describes,

Reasons for interstate hostility between India and Pakistan include historic rivalries between Hindus and Muslims, past conquests of one group over the other, the bitter memory of partition, territorial disputes in Kashmir,

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9 This was the case even though much of the NAM disapproved of Gandhi’s stance on the Afghan invasion (Gupta 1981, 159).

10 Though this role did not go unchallenged, particularly by China after 1962.

mutually antagonistic constitutional principles such as India's secular as opposed to Pakistan's Islamic foundation of the state, and the memory of three major wars...

The India-Pakistan rivalry, therefore, envelops the South Asian region pulling proximate states into its orbit. As mentioned previously, India's quest for regional dominance is in part driven by this rivalry, so its rivalry with Pakistan is somewhat endogenous to South Asian threat calculations. The Soviet invasion of Afghanistan drove an interest in Pakistan to seek arms from the United States, and thus threatened to not only worsen the divisiveness of these externalities, but also undermine South Asian autonomy and Indian regional dominance.

While South Asian security dynamics were relatively autonomous throughout the Cold War (Buzan and Wæver 2003, 105),<sup>11</sup> the invasion of Afghanistan was one instance in which this autonomy was threatened. Cold War regional impositions by one superpower often drew in the other, and the divisiveness of South Asian security externalities (especially the India – Pakistan rivalry) created opportunities for the superpowers to coopt local allegiances and internationalize crises, potentially changing the character of regional security (Buzan and Wæver 2003, 63; Muni 1996, 328). Jawaharlal Nehru recognized this as one of the key foci of the NAM, “polarization of intraregional conflicts between the superpowers was the surest way of perpetuating them, thereby reducing the regional states to dependencies of outside powers” (Bhargava 1983, 11). Overlay in South Asia, then, was often in direct proportion to the patterns of enmity in South Asia.

India's regional powerhood was contingent on South Asian autonomy (Bajpai 1996, 297; Dash 2001, 208). As the Soviets invaded Afghanistan, the primary threat to regional Indian dominance was the rearmament of Pakistan with the aid of the United States. Unlike Pakistan's national assessment of the Soviet threat, or the United States' global assessment, India's regional position in South Asia and its linked security externalities dominated its perspective. To balance the Pakistani threat would have been to borrow regional trouble by inviting Cold War politics into the region.

### *The Soviet Invasion of Afghanistan and India's Purposeful Underbalance*

The Soviet invasion of Afghanistan was the hard test case for India's commitment to the Indira Doctrine, developed in part to signal India's intolerance to outside powers interfering in South Asian domestic affairs. Yet when eighty thousand Soviet troops pushed their way into Afghanistan to preserve the power of the People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan,<sup>12</sup> India's initial criticism turned quickly toward a purposeful underbalance of the Soviet Union, as well as the Pakistani response. India's underbalance took place in

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11 For a competing perspective, see Hanif 2010, 19.

12 For historical descriptions of and explanations for the Soviet invasion, see Cheema 1983; Gibbs 2006; Girardet 1985; Gupta 1983; Paliwal 2017.

two ways. First, India publicly consented to Soviet action and occupation in Afghanistan, to the chagrin of much of the NAM. Second, India sought to reshape the regional understanding of great power intrusion with the intention of avoiding potential US entanglement in Pakistani balancing and preventing a further Cold War overlay onto South Asia.

The Soviet military action was the first of its kind outside of the Warsaw Pact area and was nearly universally condemned (Cheema 1983). Seventeen nonaligned states immediately moved to condemn the hostile actions in the UN General Assembly, calling for an “immediate, unconditional, and total withdrawal of the foreign troops from Afghanistan” (Horn 1983, 246). India, to the surprise of its NAM partners, ignored this demand, instead offering a short statement to the assembly that placed trust in Soviet guarantees regarding a timely troop withdrawal and referring to the Soviet Union as a “friendly country” (Gupta 1983, 16; also see Ghosh and Panda 1983, 261). Additional Indian statements were issued emphasizing the Cold War politics behind the Soviet action, interpreting it as a reaction to the recently constructed US installation on the island Diego Garcia (Bhargava 1983, 149).

In hindsight, it may not be surprising that India appeased the Soviet Union in this instance, given their growing partnership across the 1970s and 1980s. Prior to the invasion, the brief and brittle Janata government put India on a trajectory of military modernization taking place throughout the 1980s with the Soviets as the primary patrons.<sup>13</sup> This is only hindsight, however, since five months after her reelection Indira Gandhi herself entertained the possibility of a large US arms package (Smith 1994, 111). The invasion threatened to set off a chain reaction in which US patronage might offer Pakistan massive amounts of economic and military aid, closing the gap on the regional dominance enjoyed by India since the division of Pakistan in 1971 (Smith 1994, 106). This suggests the Indian government hosted real concerns about the Soviet invasion and the Western reaction to it. In particular, US aid to Pakistan was viewed with suspicion. In general, the shifting distribution of power was a recognized threat to India’s position in South Asia.

The Cold War character of the conflict frustrated Gandhi (Gupta 1983, 110). Indian regional powerhood suffered under Cold War competition in South Asia. It sought to remedy this situation with diplomatic half-measures: attempts to mend fractured regional ties, mobilization of diplomatic resources to serve as a regional intermediary with the USSR to assuage tensions and encourage Soviet troop withdrawal as soon as possible.<sup>14</sup> As it sought to improve relations with China, a move that could isolate Moscow (Hilali 2001, 340), it simultaneously sent diplomats to plead the Soviet Union’s exit from Afghanistan – even a partial timetable for withdrawal (Horn 1983).

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13 The buildup was not the result of the crisis but instead contingent on the economic and military malaise of the 1970s prompting India to seek “problems to justify acquisitions, rather than *vice versa*” (Smith 1994, 104).

14 Note these political maneuvers do not meet the baseline definition for balancing through delegitimation – the discourse and practice of resistance.

While these efforts were largely unsuccessful (Gupta 1983, 136; Hanif 2010), Gandhi's aim was to secure South Asian autonomy, only possible if the USSR ended its involvement in Afghanistan before the US further involved itself.<sup>15</sup> The internationalization of the India – Pakistan rivalry would allow the superpowers to exploit the rivalry for their own ends, increasing the length and severity of any crisis (See, for example, Fukuyama 1982, 2). This future would involve Pakistan serving as a US power base to counter Soviet entrenchment in Afghanistan.

What was needed was a way to localize the Afghan crisis to Afghanistan and South Asia. It is broadly for this reason that India's primary focus was on the avoidance of US arms aid to Pakistan (Gupta 1983, 111). India pursued this by clarifying (in particular, to the US, Pakistan, and Soviet Union) the character of the Afghan invasion as a broader threat to South Asian autonomy posed by a potential Cold War overlay.

The Soviet invasion shifted the geostrategic position of Pakistan in South Asia (Wriggins 1984, 285). It was convinced it would be the next Soviet target (Cheema 1983, 238; Gupta 1983, 19, 144, 146), and so requested billions of dollars in military and economic aid from the United States.<sup>16</sup> To shape the outcome of these demands, Indian statements made clear that any US effort to reinforce Pakistan's defenses would only push India closer to the Soviet Union (Gupta 1983, 108). This adept political maneuver amounts to avoiding Cold War overlay by threatening Cold War overlay. The US wished to maintain what was left of Indian nonalignment, and so was unwilling to meet Pakistan's requests without Indian acquiescence (Gupta 1983, 146).

India also sought to broaden the frame of the threat, sending a diplomatic envoy to Pakistan to correct its "understanding of the nature of the [Afghan] crisis" (Gupta 1983, 117; also see Paliwal 2017, 68). The Indian envoy emphasized that the threat was not a Soviet invasion of Pakistan, but a Cold War confrontation on South Asian soil. India's role in effectively blocking US military assistance to Pakistan, however, impeded its ability to reframe the crisis for Pakistan. Yet, a convening of Islamic nations shortly after revealed that Pakistan had arrived closer to the Indian view of the threat all the same. While the conference was not uniform in its perspective of the crisis, Pakistani statements accessed India's framing of the threat, castigating the tendency of both superpowers to interfere "constantly" in the Islamic world (Gupta 1983, 154).<sup>17</sup> Pakistan was of the perspective that the underlying threat was a potential Cold War overlay of the region.

Indira Gandhi's objective had been to avoid an internationalization of the crisis without borrowing the trouble of directly opposing Soviet action or balancing Pakistan's response.

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<sup>15</sup> The US Central Intelligence Agency had been providing support to the mujahadeen in Afghanistan since early 1979 (Gibbs 2006, 254).

<sup>16</sup> Pakistan also requested US defense guarantees and the freedom to develop nuclear power.

<sup>17</sup> The Palestinian Liberation Organization, for example, warned the foreign ministers to avoid criticizing the Soviet action in Afghanistan "too much."

In this, she had only been partially successful. The US-Pakistan arms deal was indeed a failure, but rather than invoking the threat to the region of South Asia, Pakistan invoked the Islamic world at large. While South Asia and the Islamic world operated as distinct referents for the Cold War threat, the result was the same: localization of the crisis to Afghanistan.

It could be considered another failure of Indian foreign policy that localizing the threat did not hasten the Soviet withdrawal. In this regard, the case demonstrates the occasional helplessness of regional powers in the face of great power obstinance, and diplomatic half-measures are more about harm reduction in the face of dangerous great power encounters than they are about effective balancing. In other words, regional powers are often left with managing the consequences of great power decision making. India's purposeful underbalance is an excellent example of this diplomatic management, as its effectiveness in localizing the crisis kept Pakistan in a secondary regional position. India would spend the next decade widening the gap (See Gupta 1997; Smith 1994). India's success at least partially depended on the recognition by its peers as a South Asian regional power and the role's accompanying responsibilities. The case of Russia in Kosovo is not a case in which this recognition was granted.

### **For All the Marbles: Russia and the NATO Bombing of Kosovo**

At the onset of the Kosovo crisis, the Russian Federation's political and social environment was riddled with divides. Elite consensus and elite cohesion were mismatched, unable to prioritize threats, and the government while stable, was not yet able to mobilize social cohesion around a NATO threat. Yet, security externalities tying Russia to its former "near abroad" triggered concerns about the potential for its own Kosovo scenario in the Russian republic of Chechnya.

As American and European rhetoric emphasized the human rights issue in the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (FRY), between 1996 and 1999, Russia pursued a delegitimation campaign against the US and NATO to reinforce norms of sovereignty in the Balkans. Russia's last-ditch effort to seize the Slatina air base, a hard balancing effort, cannot be explained by Russian domestic politics alone but is understood best when considering the strength of security externalities between Russia and the Balkans. These regional level variables make clear that Russia was in a position of playing "For All the Marbles."

#### *Domestic Level: Weak State Coherence in Russia*

Russian elite consensus and elite cohesion were constantly at odds throughout the 1990s. While Russian elites generally agreed that the new federation was a great power and should act as one abroad (Heller 2014, 334), Pro-Western liberals' dominance over the security discourse in the early 1990s generated not only cooperation with NATO and the US

but also serious discussion of potential Russia-NATO integration (Sergounin 1997, 57). Following the US bombing of Bosnia in 1995 and NATO enlargement in 1997, however, this consensus began to break down (Frye 2000, 95).<sup>18</sup>

Yet the concern about NATO was incoherent. There was significant disunity in how to approach NATO encroachment into Russia's former near abroad. Elites were torn over whether NATO enlargement should take priority over potential conflicts in the North Caucasus (Jonson 2000, 60). In general, Sergounin (1997, 68) notes the failure of elites to "go beyond negativism and construct a positive security concept for the future" no matter their consensus on the threat. This dilemma suggests that although there did exist some elite consensus around the potential threat of NATO, there was no cohesion around the priority of the threat or what should be done about it.

The potential argument for Russian state coherence is mostly found in the regime vulnerability category. Boris Yeltsin's close relationship with the media yielded a tight grip on Russian politics throughout the 1990s. Administrative upheavals in the latter half of the decade, however, brought the regime's stability into question (Barry 2002, 136–138). Nevertheless, Yeltsin wielded power quite effectively and extensively across the political spectrum and might have had a ready ability to balance a NATO threat without elite consultation, although Russian social cohesion may have presented a problem in this regard.

It is readily acknowledged that at the time of the NATO campaign in Kosovo, "the majority of Russia's population" did not "share the Russian government's understanding of Russian national interests (Gobarev 1999, 5-6). At least one opinion poll at the time, conducted under the auspices of the Russian Academy of Science, found the public unified and overwhelmingly opposed to any Russian countering of NATO (Romanenko 2000, 12; also see Heller 2014). Social cohesion was also lacking as a result of the erratic and messy political environment (Barry 2002, 111) which spawned no less than five schools of Russian foreign policy regarding NATO (Sergounin 1997). Generally, Russia's *willingness* and *ability* to balance threats were torn between indecisive and competing camps.

### **Regional Level: Strong Security Externalities in the Balkans**

Although much of the Balkans trended toward membership with the European Union, the security externalities in the subcomplex (primarily ethnonationalism) were distinct from the rest of Europe (Buzan and Wæver 2003, 377). These security patterns tied the Balkans together, but they also pushed out past its boundaries, pulling outsiders into the orbit of any conflict in the subcomplex. Participation in any Balkans crisis by both Europe and Russia was likely.

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<sup>18</sup> This consensus would not be reflected across Russian society until after the Kosovo bombing in 1999.

For the Europeans and the United States, conflict in the Balkans represented a challenge to a cohesive European identity. To European elites, war in the Balkans meant war in Europe, and war in Europe was antiquated (Buzan and Wæver 2003, 387). For Russia, conflict in the Balkans – specifically ethnonational separatism – generated an internal military threat to Russia. From Moscow’s perspective, analogies of ethnonational claims to statehood generated analogies with similar claims in the Russian Republic of Chechnya. Any justification for revolt awarded to Balkan ethnonational groups was expected to embolden the Muslim Chechens (Brudenell 2008, 30).

The reach of Balkan security externalities is extraordinary, at times causing the boundaries of regional security complexes to become indistinct. Throughout the 1990s, competition between Europe and the Russian Federation for responsibility over the coming apart of Yugoslavia gradually demarcated the Balkan political project.<sup>19</sup> This contest was at the heart of Russia’s delegitimation campaign in the early days of the Kosovo crisis, as well as the ill-conceived and poorly implemented balancing effort against the US and NATO.

### *NATO’s Intervention in Kosovo and Russia’s Unexpected Balance*

In the three years preceding the Kosovo crisis, following the requested intervention by NATO in Bosnia in 1995, Russia worked to develop a security order in the Balkan sub-complex that reflected its interests. One vital interest was specifically tied to discrediting ethnonationalist separatism that could feed fires within the Russian Federation itself. Summarized by Russian Foreign Minister Igor Ivanov in a remark to US Secretary of State Madeline Albright, “we have many Kosovo’s in Russia” (Hughes 2013, 998). When the Kosovo crisis erupted, Russia leveraged these efforts in two ways. First, through a delegitimation campaign against the US and NATO during the peace process, Russia intended to place the OSCE and UN as the dominant security actors in the crisis. Second, when these efforts failed to secure Russian interests in Kosovo, it turned to traditional military balancing.

When the Albanian government collapsed in 1997, the dissident Kosovar Albanian Liberation Army (KLA) took advantage of the disorder and the consequent influx of new weapons and materiel, recommitting to its separatist movement against Serbia. Serbia’s brutal crackdown on all Kosovar Muslims and the displacement of over 200,000 people drove the UN to identify the situation as a threat to peace (Weller 1999). While Russian pan-Slavism from the very start led it to back its Serbian partner and urge caution against Western overreaction, the conflict pulled Russia and the rest of the Contact Group (US, Italy, Germany, UK, and France) directly into its orbit. It was Russia’s involvement in the peace negotiations at Rambouillet where its framing of the situation and balancing efforts are most stark, and its failures most consequential.

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19 For a theoretical description, see Hameiri 2013.

The Rambouillet talks created the framework by which peace in Kosovo would be supported and enforced. Negotiations were set against “non-negotiable principles” to provide a baseline for consensus. The list of principles was long, but while the OSCE is mentioned in the one-page list multiple times, nowhere is there a mention of NATO (Weller 1999, 224–225). Russia, thus, might have held some leverage in these discussions, but Kosovo insisted on a NATO-led implementation of the peace during the discussions at Rambouillet (Weller 1999) and while Russian obstruction delayed the discussion of implementation, NATO came out of the negotiations as the primary security actor in the conflict.

The agreement describes in detail the expectation for NATO to organize a peacekeeping force under the political control of the North Atlantic Council. All of this is qualified, however, by the obligation for NATO to act “in accordance with a Chapter VII mandate to be obtained from the Security Council” (Weller 1999, 246). NATO military action remained contingent on UNSC approval. In this sense, Russia exited Rambouillet still holding a principled veto over NATO coercive action. It was in this light that Russia learned of the US-NATO decision to take military action against Serbian forces without consulting with Russia through the NATO-Russia Council and without UN approval.

Upon learning of the decision to conduct NATO airstrikes without a Chapter VII mandate, Russian Prime Minister Evgenii Primakov famously ordered his plane in route to Washington, D.C., to return to Moscow (Heller 2014, 339). Russia completely suspended its relations with NATO shortly after (Jonson 2000, 66; Lynch 1999, 68) and intensified its rhetoric toward the US and NATO, using both legal and hard power discourse. In an editorial appearing in *The Washington Post*, the Russian Special Envoy and former Prime Minister Viktor Chernomyrdin, set NATO military action in conflict with standing international law, the Helsinki agreements signed between the US and the Soviet Union in 1975, and against “the entire world order that took shape after World War II” (cited in Lynch 1999, 67). President Yeltsin described the bombing of Kosovo as a “tragic and dramatic” decision, and angrily stated “We shall not give up Kosovo without resistance” (Romanenko 2000, 12). Foreign Minister Ivanov went so far as to suggest “Russia might respond to NATO air strikes by helping to rearm the Serbs,” and there is some evidence that this occurred (Heller 2014, 338).

From a certain perspective, Russia’s delegitimation campaign against the bombing of Kosovo might be measured as a partial success. Both Russia and NATO maintained an understanding that the geopolitical position of Russia made it centrally important to creating peace in Kosovo (Lynch 1999, 70). Partially as an attempt to mend the fallout, NATO centered the importance of Russia in resolving the conflict (NATO 1999) and establishing coordinated negotiations at the highest levels of the US and Russian governments (Hughes 2013, 1003). The US even uneasily acceded to UN control over the conflict resolution process (Lynch 1999, 76) and the UN Security Council approved Resolution 1244 (1999) designating Kosovo as an internal state issue, reaffirming Serbian sovereignty.

Any Russian diplomatic success was fleeting. It secured concessions only by dropping demands for UN control of the military operations and changing its position on the air campaign's termination timetable and was denied its own military sector in Kosovo (Lynch 1999, 76–77). Any Russian forces participating in the peace operation in Kosovo would do so as a party within sectors run by US, British, French, and German forces (Hughes 2013, 1005). Russia's principled equal status was upended. As this realization set in, Russian balancing took a turn to desperation.

Kosovo Force (KFOR) implementation discussions took place in Moscow and were directed toward determining a chain of command. Sometime before these talks, however, Russia reportedly laid plans to increase its bargaining position in Kosovo. John Norris (2005, 218) describes the operation:

A brigade of Russian soldiers serving as peacekeepers in Bosnia would cross overland through Serbia and seize Kosovo's largest airfield at Slatina. This was a key strategic bridgehead and would allow Russia to bring in paratrooper reinforcements to bolster its initial force... The troops at the airfield would then facilitate the immediate arrival of at least 600 Russian paratroopers flown to the site from Russia aboard six IL-76 transport planes. Russia would be able to negotiate its role within KFOR after having already created new facts on the ground.

One day following tense negotiations between NATO and Russian representatives in Moscow, 186 Russian troops crossed into Serbia en route for the Slatina Air Base at Pristina International Airport in Kosovo's capital city (Norris 2005, 219–220, 243). A further indication of a lack of elite cohesion in Russia, neither the Foreign Minister of Russia nor its special envoy to the negotiations were informed of the plan.

The Russian seizure of Pristina International Airport ended in humiliation. While Russia managed to take the airport and air base, it was not able to meet the requirements for the second and third phases of the operation. Hungary, Romania, Ukraine, and Bulgaria had closed their airspace to Russia, stranding the Russian convoy as NATO troops moved into Kosovo and Serb troops moved out. With no supply line the Russian troops quickly ran out of food and water and were left to haggle for rations with the surrounding NATO peacekeepers (Norris 2005, 285–289). In the end, Russia accepted a NATO unified command and the scattering of its forces across four sectors of Kosovo under Allied commands (Norris 2005, 290). After months of blustering and action over securing a Russian sector in Kosovo, these efforts came to a disappointing end.

It is difficult to argue that Russia was absent, ambivalent, or reluctant regarding the conflict in Kosovo. Russia's delegitimation approach was consistent and considered and achieved two of Russia's three objectives. First, through its involvement in the UN Security Council, Russia was able to ensure that UNSCR 1244 identified Kosovo as a "within state" issue, rather than an international one. Second, Russia's connection to Serbia and obstinance

throughout negotiations persuaded the US and NATO to cede ultimate authority for the Kosovo peacekeeping mission to the UN.

These successes were overshadowed by NATO's action without a UN mandate, as well as Russia's failed efforts to secure an equal role in the peace implementation process. Its last-ditch effort to seize the Slatina Air Base was an act of desperation that revealed not only Russian military weakness and political division but a lack of recognition of Russian regional powerhood. Russia could not maintain a presence in Slatina without a line of supply, and that required recognition and express permission from its Balkan neighbors. It received neither.

## Conclusion

Schweller concludes that the only states likely to respond to systemic pressures in ways neorealism would anticipate are those that are strong and internally coherent. In contrast, this paper suggests that when the scope conditions of underbalancing theory are shifted from great to regional powers, this may not be the case. Why? Because regional powers do not possess the material capabilities that allow them to project power in ways typical of great power politics. Unable to project power globally, regional powers are constrained by their geographic position, as well as by the decisions and behavior of those that can project power globally, great powers (Prys 2012, 15–17; Copeland 2012, 51). In this sense, regional powers cannot play the game of great power politics as neorealists conceive it. Their behavior often deviates from the (under)balancing dichotomy.

This point is particularly important in marking another divergence from Schweller's theory. Having identified the type of state that should most effectively balance, he goes on to note that these states will tend towards hegemony. This is for one reason – “it is easier to unify the state and society for conquest and expansion than for balancing against threats” (Schweller 2006, 126). For regional powers dealing with great power interference, this is simply not the case.<sup>20</sup> Even for the most internally coherent regional power, facing a great power with a view toward domination is highly unlikely. Effective balancing is more plausible still, but as we have seen, a difficult task (even when seeking to accommodate the great power's behavior).

What this paper does suggest is that we should expect regional powers to balance in instances of great power intervention when lesser options are depleted and their ties to the regional complex through externalities strong. At the onset of the Kosovo crisis, the Russian Federation's economy was in tatters, its military was weak, and its domestic politics riddled with divides. Yet, security externalities tying Russia to its “near abroad” triggered concerns about the potential for its own Kosovo scenario in Chechnya. Leveraging its

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<sup>20</sup> It should also be noted here that many studies have found that regional powers follow a wide array of strategies—not simply balancing or hegemony. See, for example, Destradi 2010; Stewart-Ingersoll and Frazier 2012; Nel 2010.

powerhood in the post-Soviet space, Russia was able to ensure that UNSCR 1244 identified Kosovo as a “within state” issue, rather than an international one. Additionally, in playing the intermediary between the US, NATO, and Serbia, it persuaded the US and NATO to cede ultimate authority for the Kosovo peacekeeping mission to the UN.

When these factors are not present, we should expect that regional powers will not balance, whether that behavior accords with Schweller’s conception of underbalancing, or a more purposeful and proactive “underbalance.” At the time of the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, Indian domestic politics were coherent, with a strong relative consensus around Indian foreign policy. Yet India’s rivalry with Pakistan provided a distinct view of the Afghan threat leading it to eschew balancing. India could not balance Pakistan for fear of inviting Cold War politics into South Asia. In turn, divisive South Asian security externalities also impeded India’s effectiveness in this reframing. Consequently, India was left with the options of consenting to the Soviet action as well as causing Pakistan to underbalance Soviet presence.

Could these cases be more easily explained using Stephen Walt’s (1985) balance of threat theory, in which balancing decisions are contingent on the appearance of aggression rather than simple power differentials? On its face, this seems like an applicable theory. Russia, threatened by NATO aggression in Kosovo, decided to balance. The details of the case, however, complicate this application. There was little consensus over the NATO threat prior to the Kosovo bombing, so while the NATO operation might explain the hard balancing that took place following Kosovo, it fails to explain the delegitimation campaign that took place prior to it. For the Indian case as well, the details complicate the application of the theory. The threat perceived was an abstract shift in the South Asian political landscape, not the outcome of any one state’s aggression. Regional contexts thus escape the somewhat narrow parameters of Walt’s eminent theory.

These findings also inverse common expectations of balancing outcomes. The logic of balancing theory suggests that when states fail to adequately balance, war occurs, and when states balance appropriately war is deterred. These cases demonstrate the opposite with regards to regional powers. When regional powers balance against great powers, war may be more likely. This may be the case because, as Dale Copeland suggests, regional powers are rising states that are cautious and who moderate their policies to ensure long-term growth. When a regional power decides to balance, it may be that it has discounted long-term growth, signaling more risk acceptant behavior (Copeland 2012, 58).

For Copeland, this finding generates a policy prescription. By identifying which regional states are likely to incite conflict, great powers can stabilize regions by aiding their capabilities, ensuring their calculations regarding future growth remain stable by assuring their regional position, and in turn keep their foreign policies cautious. In a way, this paper supplements Copeland’s argument while going beyond it to emphasize the importance of the regional context in which states are making these calculations.

Not all regional security externalities are created equal. Some are more important than others, and the ways in which they are activated and linked across time and space are difficult to predict. For example, it is true that Russia's power was on the wane as it drove forces into the Slatina air base – for all intents and purposes – to partition Kosovo. As a result, we might conclude that its foreign policy was necessarily more risk acceptant (leading it to take a “for all the marbles” approach). But Russia's decline was not new. It had been ongoing for almost a decade by the time of the Kosovo crisis.

Why did Russian balancing take place in 1999, why Kosovo? What the regional level opens to us, in this regard, is a window into what was being securitized for Russia (Buzan, Waever, and de Wilde 1998). It was not an abstract conception of power. Instead, Russia was concerned about international events complicating control of its territory. The security externality of ethnonational self-determination linked Russia with the Balkans. Russia's power imbalance with NATO factored into the outcome of the crisis, but it was not necessarily the entry point.

Moreover, the cases under review are not examples of great powers thoughtfully seeking to stabilize regions. They are ones in which obstinate great powers make decisions without consideration of the consequences for the foreign locale where those decisions are carried out. Waltz referred to great powers as “Gullivers,” tied down to the world by their many responsibilities (Waltz 1979, 187). Yet the cases in this paper tell a different story. It is the regional powers that are tied down by geostrategic position and shared security externalities with their surrounding neighborhood. These externalities create threats too close or salient to ignore.

Theories of great power politics too often overlook this level of management. Regional powers must rely on a broader toolset than simply hard power. Regional powers play diplomatic roles such as leaders, custodians, and protectors as they sort through great power politics (see Stewart-Ingersoll and Frazier 2012). These efforts often encompass more diplomatic maneuvering than accounted for by theories of traditional balancing practices.

In both cases, rather than using coercion to affect great power behavior, the regional powers first leveraged diplomatic engagement to mitigate the consequences of great power decisions. Both cases detailed here are largely ones of failure, but they are stories of only partial failure. India did succeed in preventing Pakistan from balancing and thus precluded a further Cold War overlay onto South Asia. Russia did succeed in containing the Kosovo crisis to a within-state issue, blunting any further justification for ethnonational self-determination in the region. How regional powers reduce the fallout from great power behavior is an important and understudied topic in International Relations, and one that regional security studies can help to explore beyond traditional concepts of balancing.

Theories of great power politics gained popularity during the Cold War. US – Soviet competition and the resulting overlay onto the once regional world pulled all local politics into

the global rivalry. With the rise of China and its increasing tension with the United States, any overlay reminiscent of the Cold War is unlikely. Yet, renewed multipolarity (or) risks the discipline of International Relations will once again overemphasize the role of great powers and system level dynamics. Regional security studies cannot prevent misrepresentations of international politics, but it can reshape the perspectives and redefine the understandings provided by their sweeping generalizations. Great power behavior filters downward through regions and regional powers, making it clear that international political processes and outcomes can only be fully comprehensible by accounting for them.

### **Acknowledgments**

The article benefitted from many conversations with Derrick Frazier, who also provided key points of feedback during the writing process. Much of this article was written under the auspices of the Faculty Research Focal Program at the United States Air Command and Staff College. Kathryn Boehlefeld also read a version of the manuscript and provided useful guidance during the early stages of writing. Finally, the author is grateful to two anonymous reviewers at JRS for their feedback.

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