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The post-Arab Spring Balancing Politics of the Middle East

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Proxy Balancing in the post-Arab Spring Civil Wars

Introduction

The Middle East within the ensuing years after the Arab Spring is witnessing a tremendous upheaval in a regional sense. From 2011 and onwards, the area is home to social turmoil, civil instability, economic downturns, international crises, and civil wars. The regional states, unable to absorb political and social pressure, have cracked from the inside where violent actors have emerged from the fissures to fill the power vacuums; millions were displaced and have become refugees so to escape the ever reverberating horrors; and de facto autonomous regions or other self-declared geopolitical entities sprang up from Africa to Asia, challenging the existing territorial orders. Though such developments are still myriad in scope and depth, and its impacts will possibly echo for decades due to their spillover effects, these observed occurrences indicate that the epicenter of these crises, the Middle East -especially the key localities of Syria, Yemen, and Libya- is currently in a complete maelstrom; where state and nonstate actors as well as regional and non-regional powers viciously compete for further influence, security, and most importantly survival. Given this snapshot of the post-Arab Spring environment in the Middle East, it catches the eye that this complexity is harboring an interesting regional checkerboard framework of dynamic competitive atmosphere that is worth scrutinizing; since, within the following “Arab Winter” civil wars, not only the regional states are in competition, but also the region’s various nonstate entities are in rivalry, especially the nonstate surrogates of states.¹ These intricate interactions transmutates the Middle East into a Gordian knot and provides a puzzle for both the actors and the observers in several ways on the way to better conceptualize these behavioral peculiarities.

This paper deliberates on the further examination of this particular observation on strategic dynamics of the post-Arab Spring atmosphere, namely, the state-nonstate partnership within the Middle Eastern civil war competitive milieu through the theoretical framework of balancing behavior. Conceptualizing this particular relation as ‘proxy balancing’ or balancing

¹ On the various non-theoretical conceptualizations of the term Arab Winter, see the two noteworthy articles of: <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/middleeast/9753123/Middle-East-review-of-2012-the-Arab-Winter.html> or <http://www.economist.com/news/middle-east-and-africa/21685503-five-years-after-wave-uprisings-arab-world-worse-ever> Regarding a similar analytical representation see: Quinn Meacham “The Evolution of Islamism since the Arab Uprisings” POMEPS

via proxies, which is simply defined as a state balancing behavior that aims to counter influence seeking activities of other states, through the utilization of nonstate actors in competitive environments, such as subversive interference and enhanced political penetration within a particular competitive environment where there is high sensitivity towards relative gains and an aspiration for influence seeking, utilize nonstate actors as proxies or mediaries to not only check others' (both states and nonstate actors) influence enhancing behaviors but also to improve their positions. This textual pondering stands out as a distinction among the conventional balancing literature of Realist and Neorealist International Relations Theory.

This paper, revolving around the question of the origins and applicability of proxy balancing, primarily examines the post-Arab Spring literature and takes the discussions and observations within it as an initial stepping stone for this puzzle that is centered on regional rivalry and the unorthodox motives that are related to this unusual countervailing strategy in the Middle East. Trying to combine the discussions provided within the civil war and proxy literatures with the theoretical conceptualizations of the balancing and Balance of Power studies, it attempts to define the term proxy balancing before attempting to observe the existence of this phenomenon within the events of the Levant and the Middle East in the post-2011 era. It shows that even though the abstract definition of proxy balancing is possible, its observance within the civil war dynamics may be problematic since there exists diverse state-nonstate relationships that even though resemble a proxy one, can also be actually formulized as beneficiaries, supported groups, or surrogates. This study therefore is still subject to further development and thus, it embraces the agenda that additional scrutinization is necessary for a definitive answer considering the occurrence of proxy balancing.

I. The Overall post-Arab Spring and International Politics Literature

At a general glance, though it is acknowledged that the events were mainly domestic in essence and have spiraled into the international arena once its violent repercussions have spilled over, it would be surprising to state that the overall comprehensive works on the Arab Spring events have scarcely mentioned strategic dynamics that boil within the transforming region, such as the emerging proxy conflicts, attempts of influence seeking, state-nonstate relations, or let alone balancing, as major drivers within that atmosphere that have further escalated the unrest into full-blown civil wars. Yet, it can be argued that, a close scrutinization is still deemed as necessary, so that the conceptual formulation of proxy balancing that this paper puts forward, would have a contributory value on the explications regarding the overall

post-2011 events of the Middle East as well as an alternative standpoint for the furthering of the Area Studies analysis on the repercussions of the Arab Spring.

Ergo, this literature review on the post-Arab Spring scholarship displays that, even though there are significant to the point descriptive-observational studies, the major existing literary works on these tumultuous events have generally neglected in discussing any regional strategic interaction aspect of the post-uprising events, and have mainly focused on domestic dynamics, party politics, factionalization, and regional transformation, thereby in a sense leaving a gap for further contribution and scrutinization concerning the underlying reasons for the prolongation of the region's civil wars, and additionally, provides the opportunity for the insertion of an alternative theoretical lens for the explication of the spiral and escalation of violence in the post-Arab Spring environment.

For instance there is a general tendency to explicate upon the domestic politics of the pre and post Arab Spring, especially, a focus on state-civil society convulsion, namely the “dynamics of unruliness, defiance against, and the resistance to an authoritarian rule” and the repercussions it brings on the general public sphere and its transformatory elements.² Such studies have generally adopted a pure internal affairs approach focusing on “public mobilization” and public “space occupation” of symbolically taking back what the authoritarian regimes have claimed to be the symbol of their power and the multidimensional, that is political and social push and pull between the government and the people for the purpose of status quo sustainment or revisionism.³ Others look from a comparative politics perspective and examine the trends that exist within the Arab uprisings, looking for commonalities and the conditions that explicate upon oscillatory image of social upheavals and their repercussion, in which arguing that initially there exists a “rapid political opening” where there is actually a “demonstration effect that raise the hopes of freedom” and a chance of change before the state apparatuses react to suppress it and then there comes a period of resistance by both parties, which the one party seeking to attempt to recapture that previously attained political alteration opportunity and the other moving towards to completely block it.⁴ These studies prudently also do embrace an international perspective and add the dynamics of “contagion effect” within their trend analyses as well as the possible counter-reactionary behaviors of neighboring states, who feel vulnerable from the revolutionary ferments that

² Larbi Sadiki *The Routledge Handbook of Arab Spring*. 1

³ Ibid. 2.

⁴ Laurence Whitehead On the ‘Arab Spring’: Democratization and Related Political Seasons *Routledge Handbook of Arab Spring*

have the potential to destabilize their own regimes if not moved against; thus arguing that the regional and global powers, if affected, may adopt “interventionist geopolitical responses”.⁵

On furtherance, some additional comparative studies on the post-Arab Spring have examined why the upheavals occurred in some of the Arab countries but not in others, thereby trying to look for commonalities and intercepting patterns so to evaluate how the events unfolded from the Arab country to country in parallel segments. These studies, mainly embracing a domestic politics perspective have examined for intercepting patterns in economics, political regime, leadership traits, cultural aspects, as well as “duration and [the degree of] human cost”.⁶ Interestingly these comparative studies do possess an international relations perspective so that they can compare the approaches of both the regional countries and the major powers towards the ramifications of the Arab upheavals in the post-2011 period. Such a perspective display that there have also existed certain patterns of state behavior vis a vis the Arab countries that rests on a spectrum that oscillated between “wait and see” policies of status quo seeking to “mediation” and then to rebel support or rebel assistance of revisionism.⁷ With further explications on the distribution of relations of major powers and regional states on approaching to the tumultuous events, these studies mainly focus on “contagion” and “regime stability” as the main factors that determined for the taking up of a particular stance towards the major epicenters of rebellions such as Syria, Egypt, and Yemen.⁸

Some of the other major works provide a retrospective analysis questioning the depth of the impact that the states and societies witnessed after the popular uprisings that span from Morocco to Iraq. These scrutinizations focus on several determinants, mainly economics, in discussing how the premature transition to the neoliberal world economy have disrupted the political-economic system within these countries, the rise of food prices and complications regarding the cost of food import, the status of the dynamic youth bulges and demographic factors, as well as the “brittleness” of state institutions and especially fragileness in face of a countrywide popular uprising leading to disintegration and uncontrollable civil strife.⁹

⁵ Ibid. 21.

⁶ Mustapha Kamal al-Sayyid. “Arab Spring: “Why in some Arab Countries but not in Others?” *Routledge Handbook of Arab Spring*

⁷ Ibid. 58-60

⁸ Ibid. 59.

⁹ James Gelvin “Conclusion: The Arab World at the Intersection of the National and Transnational” 246. *The Arab Spring: Change and Resistance in the Middle East*.

Literature on Balance of Power and post-Arab Spring Middle East

Probably observing that there was a gap on the explication of the regional strategic aspects of the post-Arab Spring there do exist several deliberations that link theoretic conceptualizations with actual state behaviors within the framework of realpolitik and other Realist standpoints that frame power, security, or influence seeking within the maelstrom atmosphere of the boiling countries. One particular article was for instance on the changing alignments and alliance politics of the region after the Arab Uprisings, primarily criticizing the high tendency considering the examination of the upheavals through a domestic politics perspective composed of “regime security”, “regime survival”, or “regime collapse”, thereby, arguing for the literary deliberation of the ramifications of the general events from an international relations perspective, especially through the “changes in the shifting regional balance of power”.¹⁰ It discusses for instance how the regional system has itself began to transform when the major states of the locality, namely Egypt, Iraq and Syria, “were no longer the protagonists in regional leadership struggles, but instead they had become arenas for struggle themselves” due to the existing civil strife and instabilities observed within them, which prompted other regional powers such as Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Iran, and Turkey driving forward to fill the power vacuum thereby forming new alignment constellations.¹¹ It is argued that these states, with their various approaches to the emerging conditions of the civil war situations and political instabilities within the regions, have all sought different ascendance opportunities but all failed due to “unanticipated consequences of their activist foreign policies” and the complications arising from overstretching.¹²

The works that combine the analysis of strategic atmosphere of the post-Arab Spring milieu and proxy dynamics are also low in number, yet provide interesting and enlightening remarks. These cluster upon studies on Islamism or Political Islam and regional analysis. For instance Ryan explicates upon the regional rivalry between Saudi Arabia and Iran and its repercussions towards the region through discussing both the role of power politics and the issue of sectarianism, namely the Sunni-Shia divide; stating that the Gulf countries had a particular perception of the situation as of “proxy struggles between Saudi and Iranian led blocs in the regional balance of power”.¹³ It is later discussed that such a bold move was evident when the GCC intervened in Bahrain so to suppress anti-dissent towards the Bahraini

¹⁰ Curtis R. Ryan “Inter-Arab Politics and international relations in the Middle East” *Reflections on the Arab Uprisings*. 27-30.

¹¹ Ibid. 27-28.

¹² Ibid. 28.

¹³ Curtis Ryan. “Inter-Arab Relations and the Regional System” *The Arab Uprisings Explained*. 120.

government that is, “to curb the power of ideas deemed too subversive for regime security” as well as to balance or rollback the Iranian sphere of influence with the vis a vis the smaller Gulf states.¹⁴ Hence Ryan implies that three main remarks can be inferred from this interaction, such that, that primarily it was evident that there stands an attempt to “counter” the “Iranian incursions against the regional balance of power”; a bloc of authoritarian regimes interfering with the public opinion seeking to embrace democratic values and; an increasing sectarian standpoint coupled with an “ideological rhetoric”.¹⁵

Through a similar perspective, Quinn Mecham also combines sectarianism and proxy conflicts. With a special emphasis on Syria, he discusses how the civil conflict has acted as a “catalyst for a new level of proxy conflict between the Middle Eastern actors” and acting as a reflection for the rivalry among the Sunni Gulf countries and Shiite Iran. The author provides a complex yet accurate picture of how the process of international actors’ usage of proxies within these civil wars have an influence on the funding and behavioral patterns of the Islamic groups as well as the formation and transformation of their militant nature, which eventually leads to the further enlarging of the adversarial gap between the two dominant sects within Islam. Mecham’s arguments are clear and easy to pictorialize, such that his argumentation, again tracing the developments in Syria, and Iraq, progresses from the following linear logic: once the nonviolent protests evolve into a civil conflict, the rebels, if whom are receiving support from outside regimes, and if are fragmented, not only compete for the securing of their funding from the third parties, but also seek to “distinguish themselves from other groups through ideology”.¹⁶ These types of proxy relationship reflect the sectarian and religious “tendencies of the funders” and completely place the rivalry on sectarian lines as the other groups receive funding from the rival camp. This implies that, in Mecham’s words “both sides [begin] to view the civil war as existential sectarian conflicts”.

It is evident that the post-Arab Spring literature do touch upon important regional strategic issues but rather has displayed a retrospective stance regarding the domestic political transformations, societal changes, the dynamics in the political agenda, regimes and changing political systems, which nevertheless do deserve strong recognition, yet it can be argued that aligning such explications with the analysis that attempts crossbreeding of conceptual and theoretical approaches would have a different potential in understanding the background, developments, and dynamics that seem to be unearthed. Such an approach also provides the

¹⁴ Ibid. 120.

¹⁵ Ibid. 121.

¹⁶ Quinn Mecham

opportunity for theorists to provide more concise or refined versions of the ones that are comprehensively provided with utmost depth and are difficult to follow. The approach provided here seems to attempt just that, it observed the potential within the relatively untitled strategic international studies on the post-Arab Spring dynamics and seeks to provide an improved explication by approaching from a theoretical perspective.

However even though they do touch upon the issue of proxy warfare and strategic interactions they do not answer the question of why do the third party states engage in such a proxy conflict in the first place? Why do they select to intervene in such a behavioral pattern and seek to support certain factions that are in conflict not only with the regimes of states such as in Yemen and Syria, but also among other nonstate actors who also act as agents for other countries or political bodies as well? Though it is possible to come up with certain inferences such as cost aversion, or to seek support in toppling the hostile regimes indirectly, the main causal driver is observed to be missing. This paper proposes that a much more coherent and refined explanation can be provided through the Neorealist literature of International Relations especially via the elements from the Balancing Theories that are attached to it, most prominently the concept of Proxy Balancing. Yet it is additionally argued that this concept itself is greatly understudied and underspecified, this section thus not only provides the juxtaposition of proxy balancing vis a vis other balancing theories but also attempts to further refine it.

Nevertheless, the Arab Spring literature touches upon the significant and worthy instance of competition and environmental interaction within the post-Arab Spring civil wars, that is, it emphasizes the issue of rivalry among the regional powers *vis a vis* each other not through the conventional action-reaction cycle of arms buildup, threat signaling, or state-state alliance formation that is mainly expected from a traditional Realist perspective, but rather, a particular influence expansion and balancing indirectly, namely through the adoption or employment of nonstate proxies. This implies that the region's major powers such as Turkey, Saudi Arabia, Iran, and Qatar are in rivalry with each other in influencing the outcomes of the civil wars through an indirect interference by supporting various groups that have particular loose alignment. These groups, although seem irregular at first and which vary from a spectrum of religious extremists to more secular groups interestingly do fight via the adoption of conventional warfare with tanks, heavy artillery, mechanized infantry, and stormtrooper tactics which makes them difficult to conceptualize through pure a military perspective. Such an observed instance have been elaborated within the Arab Spring literature rather descriptively, as a painting, without providing much explanation of why do states employ

proxies within these civil wars in the first place. It is precisely this particular query that this paper attempts to revolve around, and thereby argues that the a cross breed of balancing literature and proxy war scholarship can pave a more enlightening way over the foundation set up by the Arab Spring literature.

Civil War and Proxy Literature

It was observed that the overall post-Arab Spring literature, although touching upon the civil wars of the region, rarely provide explanations of why such state-nonstate interactions have occurred in the first place and do not discuss the abovementioned instance on proxies. What do the overall literary works of the civil war literature say? Is it possible to make contributions to the civil war literature as well? Primarily it should be stated that the civil war literature is absolutely immense, with explications ranging within a linear spectrum that includes causes of civil wars, in-conflict dynamics, and war termination as major headlines. It is in the in-conflict processes that we observe the branching off of the deliberations on proxy formation, proxy support, or outside intervention through proxies. Under this framework, it was observed that the proxy-civil war literature is divided according to two categories, such that these were perceived to be state-rebel support and its reflections on proxy relationships, and third party intervention to intra-state conflicts with proxies as partners.

Within the existing works on external state and rebel (proxy) support in civil wars in various forms, it is argued that “the degree to which external states support specific actors in conflict, influence the dynamics of those conflicts”.¹⁷ Through a statistical analysis, for example, Cunningham et. al presents that there seems to be a trend of supporting both parties within civil wars. It was argued that the “majority of these cases” were militaristic in nature, such as, military materials or troop support; whereas in “rare” instances, nonmilitary support was also granted, in the form of financial assistance, “logistics”, or in medical supplies.¹⁸ However, the presentation of observed instances in framed forms is stated to be just one side of the picture, and therefore, it is asserted that since the majority of civil war literature is on “conflict outbreak”, there is an exclusion of “other important questions”, such as the character of the actors as well as their perceptions concerning their objectives and “current empirical analyses have said little about the motives, tactics, and organizational capacity” for supporting

¹⁷ Cunningham et. al “Nonstate Actors in Civil Wars: A New Data Set”. 527.

¹⁸ Cunningham et. al “Nonstate Actors in Civil Wars: A New Data Set”.

sides in civil wars, or engaging in cooperation with proxies via assistance, thereby actually missing the main reasons behind interacting with parties to a civil war and forming proxy relationships in the first place.¹⁹

To fill this scholarship gap, there have emerged some noteworthy, yet scarce studies that provided possible answers to the abovementioned questions. One significant attempt was provided by Maoz and San-Akca, who analyze the strategic conditions under which states support nonstate actors in civil wars.²⁰ They, for instance, show that state motives, such as favoring revisionism or dissatisfaction with the current regional order, and “lack of capabilities for a direct confrontation” with their opponents, have a positive impact on the likelihood of supporting nonstate actors that would be utilized within that rivalry.²¹ So to “substitute for direct confrontation with the rival”, additional stipulations, apart from these factors, was put forth, indicating that variations in state perceptions and assessment, as well as, “fear of retaliation” either dissuades or encourages contemplations to provide support nonstate groups. Though the study analyzes the conditions for the probabilistic occurrence of support, considering the background reasons for granting assistance however, was indicated as a tendency of an aversion to cost and direct retaliation, such that, a state, to channel more resources “to dealing with domestic opponents” cooperates with nonstate groups which not only implicitly follows that states’ interests abroad, but also prevents direct intervention by the rival, thus acting as a buffer zone.

Other studies discuss through what ways states choose to support a particular proxy if there already exists a number of other alternative groups. These studies, most notably, Sozer, argues that there is no general criteria for states that delineate their decision patterns of selecting a particular proxy over others. It presents that “each state places greater importance on some variables and ignores others when choosing a proxy”, thereby displaying its contextual nature and indicating that issues that range from ideational commonalities to similar adversaries and shared interests when it comes to selecting particular proxies. Salehyan on the other hand do also touches upon this conundrum through the examination of cost assessment and proxy formation issue in civil wars, and discuss the conditions and timing of “empowering proxies”.²² Discussing the “delegation to rebels” a proxy status through a principal-agent theory, it is displayed that such an action is implemented as a “cost saving device” that is aimed to substitute using own forces directly, as this requires high costs and

¹⁹ Cuninghame et. al “Nonstate Actors in Civil Wars: A New Data Set”.

²⁰ Zeev Maoz & Belgin San-Akca “Rivalry & State Support of Nonstate Armed Groups”.

²¹ Maoz & San-Akca “Rivalry & State Support of Nonstate Armed Groups”.

²² Idean Salehyan “The Delegation of War to Rebel Organizations”.

casualties; is executed as a response to “lack of time” or inability to complete “task specific expertise”; as well as responding to incomplete information problems that might put the states’ own military under great risk

The second category within the civil war literature that examines proxy relationships is the instance of third party intervention to intra-state conflicts with proxies as significancies. For instance Duner, who inquires whether civil wars are actually internal wars by itself or are a different kind of international wars that include both domestic and global actors, explicates upon the various forms of external involvement and discusses the issue of proxy intervention. It is argued that the conceptualization of interventions can be framed within a 2x3 matrix of direct and indirect forms with combat, para-combat, and supporting actions, and that military supplies, contiguity, and external competition actually influences the selection of a particular type of intervention. Proxy intervention, which is difficult to place among them, is termed to be “dubious” such that power relations –especially the means that a principal implements to influence a proxy to intervene– between the patron and client “must be formulated”, and “if one examines alleged cases of proxy intervention in light of such a definition, it is not possible to demonstrate that the intervening state actually acted as a proxy”.²³ To clarify the term proxy intervention however, Duner argues that since the “traditional way of intervention is obsolete”, and because “it has become more hazardous for a country to invade with its own troops”, intervening through indirect means has emerged as a trend.²⁴ With an aspiration to manipulate a domestic conflict, states turn to unconventional ways such as subversion or indirect assistance so that they can distance themselves from the direct repercussions of the conflict and “more easily cope with the international consequences” and thereby, among the pool of possible reaction patterns, getting the job done by others for you is a particular method of indirect intervention. However, Duner’s main emphasis is on the principal-agent power relationships that are composed of ideational and material interactions that form the structure of the relation. The second main issue among the works on civil war intervention and its linkage with proxy relationship is the assessment of utility. Loveman for instance, who examines the concept of proxy intervention and discusses the main elements in use under this specific behavior, argues that a linear developing response pattern of states vis a vis the international systemic and global technological dimensions have actually led to the implementation of proxy war. Since due to multipolarity and the presence of weapons of mass destruction have negated the preference of war making as they increased economic costs,

²³ Bertil Duner “External Military Intervention in Civil Wars in 1970s”.

²⁴ Bertil Duner “Proxy Intervention in Civil Wars”.

endangered escalation, and heightened casualties, under a traditional sense, states sought “replacement[s]” that would “satisfy their own interests” as well as preserve their security and survival.²⁵ Such a method therefore, “advertized their interests in foreign territory while remaining safe and aloof”, thereby presenting state preferences towards aversion t costs while being able to stay in the rivalry or competitive race.²⁶ A similar argumentation that examines external involvement towards supporting secessionist movements or rebels, is given by Heraclides, who discusses this interaction, deliberating that reasons for involvement is divided into several categories for states, such that utilitarian, “mixed”, and “affective consideration” can be one of assessment of states, conveying that, among the sample set of cases ranging from the Asia-Pacific to Africa and the Middle East, international political considerations is the most significant factor that can be observed as the major determinant.²⁷

These literary works indicate that there is already a major headway that discuss proxy warfare in civil wars, thus there is a potential to make a contribution these available works through the insertion of the concept of proxy balancing and discussing it through the cases of the post-Arab Spring civil wars. However, to understand balancing, it is a necessity to examine it theoretical background. Therefore, can the balancing literature help us come up with particular explanation of such an eventuality, and hence, can we formulize the term proxy balancing? The next section discusses the balancing literature and discusses the main logic behind it thereby unearthing the major dynamics of proxy balancing.

II. Balance of Power Theory

In order to understand the concept of proxy balancing it is necessary to examine its origins, that is, the general theoretic studies on the concept of balance of power and balancing. This section displays that since the Balance of Power Theory is mainly an abstraction that attempts to explicate system-wide tendencies, in general, it aspires to provide grand theoretic assumptions, which pave the way for further studies on balancing that grants precision. The section also displays that since Balance of Power is critiqued –even with its such broad theorizing– due to its narrow scope, and its applicability is only valid within particular systems, mainly the European nation-state environment, it is thus open for further supplements using the logic that resides in balancing theories, which describe particular state

²⁵ Chris Loveman “Assessing the Phenomenon of Proxy Intervention”.

²⁶ Chris Loveman “Assessing the Phenomon of Proxy Intervention”

²⁷ Alexis Heraclides “Secessionist Minorities and External Involvement”.

behavior preferences for this countervailing strategy which, eventually may be used to refine the concept of proxy balancing.

Main Assumptions

Balance of Power Theory, perhaps one of the best and widest known theoretical framing of states' general behavioral tendency in world politics, is a large body of scholarly works that reside mostly within the Realist paradigm that revolves around the argumentation that "some combination of mechanisms –that do not vary across temporalities or spatialities– endemic to world politics creates pressures for the formation" of a general tendency "for the formation of balances of power in international system".²⁸ It is difficult to formulize and describe a distinct variant of this theoretical conceptualization²⁹ "since there is no single Balance of Power Theory but instead a variety of Balance of Power Theories" that not only overlap with the Theories of Power Balance and the Theories of Balancing, yet, due to its deep Realist roots, it is nevertheless possible to unearth the foundational pillars of this particular approach.³⁰ It is argued that primarily "all versions of Balance of Power Theory begin with the hardcore assumptions of Realist Theory", perceiving an anarchic international system, taking of nation-states as key actors, assuming that these units seek security or power, and possessing a degree of rationality to pursue their ambitions.³¹ Additional formulations are later on added as supplements, in exemplification, such as, the necessity of an "existence of a number of great powers" or "a flexible alliance system" so to enable functionality and applicability.³²

Assuming that states' primal aspirations are for seeking of power and security that will enable the sustainment and furtherance of their survivability, territorial cohesion, or

²⁸ These mechanisms are argued to be either structure based, such as self-help anarchic systems where power, security, and survival are general drivers, or human nature based, such as "a human tendency to pursue power for its own sake". Daniel Nexon "The Balance of Power in the Balance" However, it should be noted that there are debates considering the "strengths of these mechanisms and processes in producing outcomes" see: Nexon "The Balance of Power in the Balance" For a general map of Balance of Power Theories and their relation to the Theories of International Relations see also Nexon "The Balance of Power in the Balance"

²⁹ Other meanings attributed to a balance of power include a situational description regarding "of a snapshot of current configuration of power", a policy description "of actions a state takes in pursuit of a particular or in cognizance of current configuration of power", or as a symbolic description that is "invoked to support prudent approaches to foreign policy" Vasquez and Elman "Realism and Balance of Power"

³⁰ Jack Levy "What do Great Powers Balance against and When?" in T.V. Paul *Balance of Power: Theory and Practice in the 21st century* On the polysemy problem of Balance of Power and the different interpretations of its meaning see: Ernst Haas (1953). Considering other Balance of Power Theories see: Nexon "The Balance of Power in the Balance"

³¹ Levy "What do Great Powers Balance against and When?" There are also observations of Kaufman, Little, and Wohlforth in *The Balance of Power in World Politics* that critique such over-generalized assumptions and which display that the "international system is [actually] a mix of anarchy and hierarchy".

³² Levy argues that the addition of such assumptions in fact creates complications. For a discussion for these additional supplements see: Levy "What do Great Powers Balance against and When?"

independence, the theory further conceptualizes that the actors react not only to prevent the emergence of an over-preponderant state that would both endanger their survival with its excessive relative power, but also against its behavior and capacity towards altering the structure of the system, as they seek to “maintain an approximate equality of distribution of power in the system” since “the country whose power is increasing will take advantage of its superior strength to attack its now weaker adversaries”.³³ This latter mentioned, that is, a propensity towards the retainment of the system’s anarchic structure is the “unintended consequence of the actions of many states, as each attempts to maximize its own interest under the existing constraints”, thereby granting an ‘automatic’ balancing tendency in which even though “no state is interested in a mere balance of power, the efforts of all states to maximize power leads to an equilibrium”.³⁴

Alternatively, it is also argued that rather than a systemic pressure based balancing, it may actually down to the ‘manual’, deliberate, and “purposeful actions of statesmen who believe that survival was best achieved through balanced power” that creates an urgency to take action; or in some cases, the consequences of a ‘dyadic’ interaction that stimulates an intention “to counteract a growing threat” are the main drivers for the balancing of power.³⁵ This implies that the Balance of Power Theories’ predictions vary according to the level of analysis that they present themselves in, therefore, it is thus described that a systemic Balance of Power Theory indicates “balancing coalitions will form against any state that threatens to gain a position of hegemony” and in a responding manner, “sustained hegemonies rarely form in multistate systems” that will endanger others’ autonomy; meanwhile a unit level Balance of Power Theory displays a tendency of general reaction towards preponderant external threats.³⁶

³³ Levy. “What do Great Powers Balance against and When?” Organski & Kugler *The War Ledger* For additional aims see: Gulick *Europe’s Classical Balance of Power*, who argues that the “basic aim of the Balance of Power is to insure the survival of independent states” to “preserve the system”, and to prevent “preponderance”.

³⁴ Arnold Wolfers 1951 40-41. However there are also argumentations that clarify this assertion through the stipulation that states “engage in balancing not for the primary purpose of maintaining a balance but because limiting the power of others is necessary to maintain their own security and independence; that is, the maintenance of the system is the unintended consequence of the actions of many states each of whom attempts to maximize its own interests under the existing constraints”. Jack Levy “Balances and Balancing”

³⁵ Colin Elman “Balance of Power Theory” *Realism Reader*. For a “semiautomatic” or hybrid systemic balance of power, in which a systemic balancer state steps up to hold the balance, see: Levy “What do Great Powers Balance against and When?”

³⁶ Levy “What do Great Powers Balance against and When?” However there do exist major critiques regarding the recurrent formation of balancing against hegemonies in both regional and in world systems, such that Kaufman et. al. argues that even though balancing forms in one way or another, “sometimes they breakdown into fragmented or non-polar systems, but more often they [do] breakdown into unipolar or hegemonic systems”. “Conclusion: Theoretical Insights from the Study of World History” in *The Balance of Power in World History*

Balancing and to Balance

Before moving on, it is considered significant to clarify the terms of ‘balance’ and ‘balancing’ since these two terms mainly get mixed up or are used inter-changeably; thereby creating complications within different conceptualizations and confusing the accuracy of comprehension within the Balance of Power studies. Thus, it can be stated that as a component of a systemic theory, balance mainly refers to a system-wide distribution of power or resources that displays a more or less equality of power and resources among the major actors within that system.³⁷ Other interpretations also exist and adoptions of alternative definitions other than an equal balance, such that a “favorable balance”, an “unfavorable balance” or “any distributions of power” are also observed to be present.³⁸

As it can be observed, balance is a “systemic outcome, an equilibrium of military capabilities in the system” defined in terms of the quotient of relative distribution of capabilities among the actors within that system.³⁹ Balancing however, in its most common form, is a foreign policy behavior, it is “what a state does” to self-augment or to “change” its capabilities,⁴⁰ as a response to others’ strategic actions so to “deter or defeat”,⁴¹ “or to counteract”, another state, a coalition of states, or a bloc.⁴² Other scholarly works try to give more consistency and clarity through additional conceptualizations, such that balancing refers to different responses. Schweller for instance, provides a more military strategic definition, one that argues of a behavior that of “aggregation of military power through internal mobilization or the forging of alliances to prevent or deter the territorial occupation, political or military domination of” of a foreign state of coalition.⁴³ Crawford, on the other hand provides an abstract formulation of a particular power ratio in which the lower-capable party, balances against a stronger one by “either adding [capabilities] to its own stack, or by subtracting from [the power] of the stronger one; if the balancer can do both, then it is a real

³⁷ An equality of power actually refers to “the ability to prevail in a military confrontation”. Vasquez and Elman “Realism and the Balance of Power”. If distribution of resources is the operational definition, than “resource extraction”, “resources commitment proportionality”, “resource application skill”, and “resource endowment” are taken into consideration as the main factors of analysis, on this type of interpretation see: Vasquez and Elman “Realism and the Balance of Power”.

³⁸ Before determining whether there exists a balance, it is a necessity to conceptualize the system which is taken into scrutiny. If the worldwide system is the main focus then, the balance of the distribution of power refers to the rough capability equilibrium among the poles of the system. Levy “What do Great Powers Balance against and When?” Other theoretical approaches such as the ones that reside in Rise and Fall Realism, assert that the system is in balance if a hegemon is on top of the power pyramid and possessing an enhanced preponderance over other major powers. Organski and Kugler *The War Trap*

³⁹ Vasquez and Elman “Realism and the Balance of Power”.

⁴⁰ Kai He “Undermining Adversaries”

⁴¹ Vasquez and Elman “Realism and the Balance of Power”.

⁴² Morgenthau & Thompson ?

⁴³ Schweller “Unanswered Threats”

coup”.⁴⁴ Robert J. Art, however provides a perceptual definition such that via balancing states, through an amplification of its own capabilities, attempt to “create a better range of outcomes” in correspondence to its rival(s) so to “diminish the advantage enjoyed” by them.⁴⁵ To wrap such a conglomeration of conceptualizations Nexon, within an aspiration to refine and conjoint the definitional polysemy, consequentially argues that balancing, in general, are “strategies [military or non-military] aiming to enhance or pool the state’s capabilities, or to reduce the capabilities of the threatening state”.⁴⁶ This implies that balancing is a reaction pattern of states,⁴⁷ for the purpose of a particular policy, such as attaining additional security or to check others’ gains, it is aimed at “changing a state’s relative power [against] its rival’s to its own favor”,⁴⁸ and is targeted at a particular adversary, in the form of a threat, a rising power, or “a traditional rival”.⁴⁹

So in what ways do states balance? There are at least four different conceptualizations. The classical or traditional version of balancing process includes external and internal efforts, corresponding to “strengthening or enlarging one’s own alliance or to weaken or shrink an opposing one” and “to increase economic capabilities, military strength, or developing clever strategies” respectively.⁵⁰ Modern interpretations of the traditional version also includes the internal-external dichotomy but nevertheless provide in a more refined sense, such that other than making or disrupting alliances, these works also include resource cooperation through formal diplomacy within external balancing, and innovating military and production technologies, resource management, and arms acquisition within internal balancing.⁵¹ A third distinction made for countervailing methods include the division of balancing into hard, soft, and asymmetric versions, in which the first one refers to military means, such as alliance formation and arms procurement, the second one corresponds to diplomatic maneuvers through “ententes” or “ad hoc coalitions” and international institutions that would pave the way for future hard balancing, and asymmetric balancing refers to use of asymmetric warfare methods such as “insurgency” or “terrorism” to resist or check the stronger state, and the unconventional attempts of nonstate actors to counter-react against an adversarial target

⁴⁴ Timothy Crawford “Wedge Strategy”.

⁴⁵ Robert J. Art ?

⁴⁶ Daniel Nexon “The Balance of Power in the Balance”

⁴⁷ The balancing behavior of nonstate actors, also exist, however, there seems to be much more scholarly work to be done so to produce a theory of nonstate actor balancing. For an attempt see: T.V Paul “Introduction: Enduring Axioms of Balance of Power Theory and their Conceptual Relevance”. in *Balance of Power in the 21st century*

⁴⁸ Kai He argues that power may be “measured in both material and ideational terms” such that in addition to “material and economic capabilities, influence and legitimacy is also counted”. “Undermining Adversaries”

⁴⁹ Kai He “Undermining Adversaries”.

⁵⁰ Kenneth Waltz *Theory of International Politics* Chapter 5.

⁵¹ Vasquez & Elman “Realism and the Balance of Power”.

state.⁵² The fourth formalization of balancing is the most comprehensive abstraction in which it examines the joint correspondence of military and non-military balancing with positive and negative balancing, thereby creating four combinations. It is asserted that while positive balancing are attempts to “increase a state’s own power against its rival” its positive-military dimension reflects the militaristic classical methods of internal and external balancing; whereas a positive nonmilitary balancing aspect refers to assisting allies through “technology transfer” or “economic aid”.⁵³ On the contrast, negative balancing are efforts “to undermine a rival’s relative power” by either through military methods such as subversion or wedging, or via non-military ways, for instance, by the means of “economic sanctions”, or forming “institutional constraints”.⁵⁴

Balancing of Threat

Balance of Threat Theory formulized by Stephen Walt is a theoretical standpoint that aspires to distill Waltz’s systemic Balance of Power approach into a theory of foreign policy through the medium of domestic factors, mainly through the lens of threat perception.⁵⁵ The theory mainly focuses on alliance dynamics of states, and additionally, tries to reveal the conditions that may lead to such discrepancies under different circumstances regarding their alignment. This implies that states might respond differently to the sources of complications arising from the international system through various means, as such, they may balance, as Waltz argues, to counter the issue which is in a form of a rising power so to insure security, or may bandwagon, which implies joining the ranks of the other power-amplified party if it believes it cannot stop it through the means available at its disposal, or if it is too weak to stand up to it. Walt argues that even though there is a larger emphasis towards the degree and importance of power as a whole, when it comes to analyzing particular state foreign policies further refinement is necessary, through which, therefore, he not only reformulates the conceptualization of power into aggregate power, proximate power, and offensive power for better operationalization, but also inserts the crucial variable of motives, that is, intentions of aggression. Thus in a simplified deliberation this particular standpoint displays that states not solely balance against the rise of a power bloc or a state, as power is not the only determinant in world politics, but crucially against the posture of that particular party, that is, whether it is possesses an aggressive expansionist intentions or adopts a passive one with limited aspirations.

⁵² T.V Paul “Introduction: Enduring Axioms of Balance of Power Theory & Their Contemporary Relevance”

⁵³ Kai He “Undermining Adversaries”.

⁵⁴ Kai He “Undermining Adversaries”.

⁵⁵ Stephen Walt *Alliance Formation and Balance of World Power*

Further, it was possible to observe that Walt, within his theoretical deliberations discusses the possibility of the impact of additional domestic variables in influencing state alignment such as ideological similarity, foreign aid, and direct/indirect manipulation, which then he links them with the issue of proxies in international relations. Regarding proxy-patron relationships and the formation of stronger alignment ties, or in his terms “reliable proxies”, Walt discusses the factor of aid provision and offers the elaboration of cases such as the existence of various foreign aid sources, the conditions of bargaining between the patron and client, and the contingencies regarding the room of maneuver for both sides regarding abandonment or over-attachment considering a particular significant conflict. Thus, Walt states that “for all these reasons the provision of military or economic assistance is likely to be a rather weak tool of great power influence. Not only great power clients demonstrate a remarkable ability to defy their patrons but earlier great powers derived equally evanescent beliefs”. This implies that even though external aid has the potential to strengthen a proxy alliance it occurs so only in the presence of “shared political interests” and the situational “context within which aid is provided”.

Balancing Interests

Another balancing theory that resembles Walt’s which that examines state balancing or bandwagoning behavior vis a vis the conditions of the overall international system is Schweller’s Balance of Interests Theory. Schweller however critiques Walt in the sense that he has formulated his theory on a relatively narrow types of states, mainly security seekers or status quo states that seek to preserve their statutes through either balancing, that is countering the threat, or bandwagoning, that is joining the stronger or threatening side. Arguing that Walt’s such dichotomy rarely reflects the myriad of types of states, Schweller seeks to introduce revisionist powers or states that are seeking grander ambitions other than security for the purpose of obtaining additional significancies that are aspired to be obtained. Thus, in this framework it is argued that while balancing is pursued for “the protection of values already possessed”, bandwagoning “is to obtain values coveted” which implies that “balancing is driven by the desire to avoid losses” and “bandwagoning by the opportunity for gain”.

Schweller discloses that states not just balance against a vortex of arising power or a particular state emitting aggressive intentions, rather more rigorously he argues that balancing or any other strategic behavioral pattern of a state depends on both what the state wants in general world politics, ranging from security to world domination, and the degree of

investment that of a particular state has implement, so that it would have the capacity to either protect its possessions or to extend its objectives. Hence, state interests and thereby the investment that comes with it in accordance to the responses that a state conveys ranges from a complete “defensive positionality” that “pays high costs to protect what they possess” to “unlimited aims revisionism”, which shows signs of “willingness to take great risks to improve its condition”. This implies that states that seek to preserve their values (status quo states) are responders to the revisionists who want much more than security but also additional significancies, entailing that if the “initial pressures” or “aggression” of the latter are reacted by the “counter pressure” of former states, then the “vernacular of modern realism refers to this reaction as balancing behavior”. Thereby, like Walt, Schweller concludes that “in the absence of reasonable threat states need not to engage in balancing”.

Balancing Risks

Risk Balancing Theory, put forth by Taliaferro, is an approach to contemplate upon the puzzle that plagues great powers in world politics. This conundrum revolves around explicating the instances of major state action taking place in the near or extreme “periphery regions that do not directly threaten the security of great power homeland”, the apparent “persistence” in the initiation and continuation of such costly endeavors, and a perseverance in rivaling other great powers in “consequential regions” that possesses a certain propensity of high risk of failure.⁵⁶ A Defensive Realist, Taliaferro follows from a –what Grieco has formulated as “defensive positionalist”– status preserver assumption; a one that postulates that states react to strategic actions of other powers –even through costly endeavorous strategies– so to “avoid perceived losses” if they assess that their position (both in terms of material capabilities or perceived status) in the system is under a hazard of declination relative to others due to the consequences of power or security enhancing actions taken by them. A combination with prospect theory, this type of balancing defends that state decision makers posses a certain anticipation level regarding world political fluctuations, and assesses the ramifications of these systemic action-reaction cycles in terms of “gain and loss” and estimate the possible damaging reverberations of the unilateral actions taken by those states. This implies that losses “weigh more heavily than the prospect of gains”, and thereby, states “initiate risky diplomacy or military intervention to avoid those losses” if a certain action of a state anticipates a “diminution of relative power or status”. Thereby states take actions to lower their losses or risks from a particular event or chain of event by balancing against them

⁵⁶ Jeffrey Taliaferro *Balancing Risks*

even though this might at first seem a dangerous and costly policy but is considered a necessity so to prevent material and subjective values that are deemed worthy and so to thwart falling of dominoes and to sustain credibility, status, and influence.

Soft-Balancing

Soft Balancing is a relatively new theory, but nevertheless is a one that is still based upon the old-school conventional balancing principles, such that while it adheres to the argumentation that states “balance against indirect threats as well as direct threats to their security”, it aspires to analyze the temporality that has risen after the fall of the Soviet Union, thereby discussing not only the new great power balancing environment under the unipolarity of the United States but also questioning that whether counter-pressures by other states are adequate to check the power of the unipole and if the traditional ways of balancing is a prudent way to cope with US preponderance. In explication, it is argued that soft balancing are certain particular activities that are aimed not to “directly challenge” the unipole head-on, but to “use non-military tools to delay, frustrate, and undermine aggressive [its] unilateral policies” via the implementation of “international institutions, economic statecraft, and diplomatic arrangements”. This type of approach comes from the observational assumption that since internal balancing is complicated and a much costly activity for secondary states under the shadow of the unipolar system, where the preponderant party is much above its counterparts framed in military, economic, territorial, and demographic aspects; and because the difficulty of external balancing based on the complexity of interactions and commitment required to form a large enough counter-weight coalition, states “turn to soft balancing measures to achieve” a behavioral response to “equalizing the odds” in an effort to check the unipole. Therefore, to balance and “hinder a unipole that poses no direct threat in near future” soft balancing includes a range of activities spanning from territorial defiance, to entrapping diplomacy, economic tools, and signaling of resolve which are divergent from the conventional conceptualization of balancing policies adopted within the great power rivalry traditionalized through military and strategic means.⁵⁷ Within this behavioral framework, soft balancing has four objectives, that are: to make the world more costly, less friendly, and more difficult for the unipole, as well as to set-up a foundation for future hard balancing opportunities.

⁵⁷ Robert Pape “Soft Balancing against the United States”

Asymmetric Balancing

Asymmetric Balancing, a term of the 21st century, approaches the issue of checking a dominant power via unconventional strategies that involves “terrorism, insurgency, and supporting non state actors” or additionally through “anti-access strategies and brinksmanship” for the achievement of certain countering objectives. The concept further reflects that states that are weak in confronting the unipole –or any other dominant power– but do not wish to back down or lose their status or position within the international system by conventional head-on confrontations, seek alternative means to curtail that hegemon’s power by employing rather indirect but also attritional strategies that resemble asymmetric warfare.⁵⁸ A rather second interpretation of Asymmetric Balancing includes the counter-reactions of nonstate actors and terrorist organizations.⁵⁹ This particular approach however provides a rather unorthodox tendency towards the balancing concept, stipulating that “beyond connoting the idea of counterweight, balancing also signifies opposition or resistance”, as well as a “behavior aimed at undermining a hegemon” therefore arguing that nonstate actors also engage in balancing actions but rather within an unconventional mentality. It follows that since these nonstate actor organizations lack the adequate hard power capacity to match an adversarial state directly, they refrain from the traditional balancing behavior of envisaged within the classical Balance of Power Theories, thus, rather than pushing their state adversary back by traditional means, they engage to “force a hegemon to alter its policies” or at least to “trigger a chain reaction” that will “culminate in the overthrow of regimes allied to a hegemon” by means of acquiring WMDs, disrupting troop deployment, wedging, and through information warfare.⁶⁰

Offshore Balancing

Offshore Balancing is a particular strategy envisaged by the US decision makers in response to the over-active and dragging foreign policy initiatives that requires high commitment of American military, economic, and political engagement in the 21st century. This type of balancing requires not direct intervention as embraced in the previous doctrine that necessitates keeping military units “at the center of” a particular flashpoint, but rather to act to counter any complications from “offshore”, that is mostly relying on regional allies and supporting them only if the regional balance is disrupted, and keeping the US military within

⁵⁸ Lawrence and Prabhakar “Evolving Maritime Balance of Power in the Asia-Pacific”

⁵⁹ Christopher Layne “War on Terrorism and the Balance of Power” in T.V. Paul *Balance of Power: Theory and Practice*

⁶⁰ Christopher Layne “Terrorism and the Balance of Power” in T.V. Paul *Balance of Power: Theory and Practice*

naval and air bases rather than large ground deployments. This balancing behavior, additionally embraces disengagement from further military commitments, “insulate[s] the US from great power wars”, “eschew[s] any ambition of perpetuating US hegemony”, and dissuades from attempts of saving “failed states” through military intervention for humanitarian” reasons”.⁶¹ Thus, this strategy envisages countering any regional challengers that threaten to disrupt the balanced order guarded by the US regional allies without over-committing further military deployments and engaging “when necessary to assist the weaker side in the conflict” thereby preventing any enmeshing entanglements within attritional regional power rivalries that do not threaten American security position directly.⁶²

Negative Balancing

This type of balancing behavior is a complete distinct one from the traditional ones in the sense that this particular action by states aims at decreasing power of a rival rather than increasing the potential or capabilities of itself to counter that adversary. Thus this implies that negative balancing is a “state strategy or diplomatic effort to undermine a rival’s power” whereas positive balancing attempts to “strengthen own power in world politics”. Negative Balancing as a concept materialized after the emergence of a puzzle that questions the nonpreferentiality of the traditional balancing options within the post-Cold War period via the inquiry of “why states do not form alliances and conduct arms races to balance against power or threats as they previously did”, especially against the unipolarity of the United States. Kai He argues that we do not see such frequent amount of external or internal balancing since states, living under the much calmer environment of the unipolar system and free-riding of the security provided by the hegemon “choose other strategies of balancing beyond” the aforementioned traditional forms and opt to use “negative balancing strategies to undermine each other’s power”. These strategies are exemplified as “economic sanctions, strategic noncooperation, institutional constraints, military subversion, destabilizing the rival regime”. The issue of selecting positive and negative balancing depends on the issues of threat perception and the degree of relative and absolute gains, such that, it is hypothesized that if the menace is assumed to be high then it is expected that a higher likelihood of traditional balancing of self-power enhancement to occur, and if the opposite is the case, then negative balancing is anticipated. And in parallel, if a state aims to increase both its relative and absolute gains then it is positively balancing, but if it only seeks to increase its relative gains then it engages in negative balancing.

⁶¹ “Offshore Balancing: An Alternative Grand Strategy”

⁶² A Return to Offshore Balancing John Mearshimer

Remarks

What do these myriad of balancing theories present us? They display that there exists major patterns that are covered within the theorization of balancing. These include balancing as a response pattern, the dichotomy of conventional/unconventional balancing techniques, the discussion of nonstate actors that engage in balancing as well, the introduction of the term negative balancing, the concept of balancing from a far, and hard-soft balancing typologies. Primarily, it was observed that balancing is an action that is taken to be a response towards a threat or a complicatory issue that has risen within the external environment of the actors that needs to be counteracted upon. Since states, and even nonstate actors, have a degree of sensitivity towards their own security and survival, they, under certain conditions, contemplate that they are or might be under a menace that hinders their major motives and interests. Thus as a counter-reaction, so to rectify that peril which moves towards enhancing its own capability or to amplify its own relative power position vis a vis others, these actors feel an urge to respond. Although it was observed that there exists a debate on whether the tendency is to balance against power or against threat, the foreign policy version of balancing of power indicate that states balance power only if certain conditions that entail it are present as well, most importantly aggressive or antagonistic intentions that includes power projection while presenting itself as a threatening entity.

It was also scrutinized that states, theorized to have a certain aversion to loss, react to certain issues that are perceived to make a negative impact on their share of distribution of capabilities across the system, that is, they feel an urge to respond to events, or others' moves, that are assessed to have a prospect in diminishing their power position unless they do something about it. Deriving from the Waltzian tradition of possessing a motive for seeking to protect their position in the system, such as a superpower taking steps to solidify its position as a superpower and responding to events that might led to its declination -termed as "defensive positionality"- states sometimes even respond to external complications that seems unnecessary, risky or hazardous, and may persist in doing it even though it may sound unreasonable at first. These actions of course may produce entanglement, entrapment, or suffering in terms of manpower and material; though the players, nevertheless, to prevent the extent of negative external repercussions of a particular event, war, or interaction that might damage their power position or security in the system take steps to secure themselves from it and react to rectify their losses. States' or maybe even nonstate actors' reaction and balancing patterns in response to issues that are perceived to have negative ramifications come in varying types, such that the outcome of the event would fall within the range of their

expectation levels. Thereby the amount of effort required and the risk to be faced to counter an event is judged according to a reference point that the state subjectively perceives.

In similarity with the abovementioned statement, it can be observed that states' motives and the values that they attribute significance is also a noteworthy factor that drives these actors' balancing behavior. If, for example, a state, or any other actor is a status quo security seeker, this indicates that the player will highly value what it possesses and might disregard acquisition of additional values that are not related to security issues. This displays that as motives vary so does the attributed value to the possessions at hand, or acquisitions I desire, thereby triggering counter-reactions accordingly with security seekers showing tendency to react to complications that jeopardize their values possessed, while greedy actors respond differently as they seek the obtainment of additional values.

The second main pattern observed within the balancing theories is the emerging dichotomy of conventional and unconventional balancing strategies. It can be scrutinized that meanwhile traditional balancing methods such as internal and external hard balancing through capability enhancement via production and complex alliances ever exists, other balancing techniques are present as well that diverge from the traditional style to a more distinct one that prioritizes soft power or asymmetric strategies. These indicate that balancing strategies are not confined to the military-realpolitik axis but rather is conceptualized to include diplomatic and economic types that albeit negates head on confrontations, still proves to be effective within the global economy or under complex diplomatic arena which isolates and strangles others. Another interesting aspect that can be conveyed is the emergence of asymmetric balancing among the strategies of countervailing. This type has presented that not only states might prefer to damage others or check others' moves through unconventional war-making styles that includes subversive activities, but also nonstate actors such as terror groups or insurgents that also seek to equilibrate and check others' activities do so through unprecedented methods, such that they possess aspirations to acquire weapons of mass destruction or are engaging in information warfare. Such a position displays that balancing behavior, either through conventional or through unconventional methods are employed by both state and nonstate actors that aspire to protect themselves from others' power enhancement activities and influence seeking, and these actors are not afraid to play dirty if it necessitates thereby signifying a tendency of a transference of asymmetric techniques into the overall international systemic interactions.

Thirdly it was observed that balancing conceptualizations other than traditional balancing methods of capability enhancements vis a vis others have sprang up through the introduction of the term negative balancing. While most balancing methods includes actions that revolved around improving the power position of the actor involved, negative balancing discussions have provided an alternative framework by stating that players of the international arena not only seek to improve their capabilities so to check others, but also employ strategies of balancing that diminish others' power vis a vis themselves. This indicates that it is possible to go beyond traditional sense of balancing strategies and to formulize novel actions that these actors might employ so to bring down others' capabilities to a lower level, which may include subversion or undermining regimes through wedging or divide and balance strategies. The introduction of negative balancing concept is significant since it paves the way for the examination of various types of behavior patterns of states and nonstate actors use to destabilize or balance each other without resorting to traditional militaristic means conceptualized by the Cold War theorists.

Additionally, it can be observed that balancing behavior can also be done from afar, and does not require contiguity or direct contact but rather indirectly through regional allies that monitor the regional balances and act as a buffer that delimits other great power incursions. This signifies that traditional dyadic balances of power argument that compares states' capabilities vis a vis each other is partial, and it is possible to add regional allies within power grids as well that not only enhances the non-interfered actor's own power projection but also it limits others' and thus acquisition of regional or secondary powers under a sphere of influence is a significant balancing policy so that the actor can diminish others' potential alliance partners by placing them within its own alignment umbrella.

A Critique

In a remark, we can state that Balance of Power Theory is a model that primarily reflects an examination of a general tendency among states, that reside under a self-help anarchic system of security seeking as the main motive, to accurately react against perceived attempts of systemic changes or other power enhancements –especially the alterations that may hinder their security– and secondly, the main drivers that urge states to respond to preponderant concentrations of power that will not only disrupt their positions within the system (as they fear that they may lose their previous ranking within the systemic distribution of capabilities) but also to the fear of a structural change that may form a hegemonic

hierarchical arrangement. As a reaction states engage in balancing behavior of various types to bring the system into an equilibrium of parity where no single state or coalition be able to rule them all. Lastly, these reactions can be automatic or manual depending, on the level of analysis that the scholar aims to perceive the world; but may also be dyadic, if the dependent variable is state foreign policy.

However, it can be observed that the Balance of Power Theory, even with its adopted system-wide assumptions, is subject to criticism, thereby, paving the way for its cross-breed with other theoretical approaches as well as other operational variables so to enhance its explanatory power and applicability to regional issues as well. The weaknesses that the theory possess are rooted from the empirical facts that the majority of this abstraction was theorized from, that is, the interactions of the European great powers, and hence, its presentation “as universals, applicable to any international system” is problematic, such that in the major studies of Balance of Power Theorists such as Gulick or Claude, the Balance of Power system is centered upon an analysis of 19th century Europe,⁶³ the “key actors are European great powers”, and the major unit of scope is “land-based” militaries seeking dominance within the continent rather than an all-inclusive agenda that incorporates global or maritime powers as well.⁶⁴ The operationalization of equilibrium or disequilibrium (war) is also measured in this sense, that is, the balance or imbalance observed is actually perceived to be present or nonpresent among the great powers in Europe, “not among the states in general”.⁶⁵ This Eurocentricism unfortunately plagues the Balance of Power Theory such that its empirical validity is observed to be based upon the conditional assumptions that define the system, the units within the system, and an accurate measurement of power distributed within the system,⁶⁶ implying that significant care “in generalization of Balance of Power Theory to contemporary regional systems, including the Middle East”.⁶⁷

Thereby, to explicate upon proxy balancing in the post-Arab Spring civil wars, it is a necessity that we have to descend down from the pure systemic or great power-centered Eurocentric Balance of Power Theory to a regional balance of power approach that would not only adhere to the fundamental Realist tenets, but also that would fit in with other balancing theories meanwhile distinguishing itself through novel contributions such as providing an intersection point within both military and non-military balancing, and situating in between

⁶³ Edward Gulick, Inis Claude

⁶⁴ Jack Levy “What do Great Powers Balance against and When?”

⁶⁵ Jack Levy “What do Great Powers Balance against and When?”

⁶⁶ Levy & Thompson “Hegemonic Threats and Great Power Balancing in Europe (1495-1999)”

⁶⁷ Jack Levy “What do Great Powers Balance against and When?”

positive and negative balancing through the addition of the utilization of nonstate actors as both a tool for influence, security, or power extension, as well as, checking others' similar moves in kind. In fact, most scholars do indicate such a necessary tendency so to improve the explanatory potential of balance of power conceptions occurring among not only great powers but between secondary states in different regions.

Application of the Concept of Balance of Power to Regions

The application of the concept of balance of power to regions and thus to proxy balancing in the Middle East is a controversial issue, and hence, it is subject to several debates. In simplification, there exists three sides to this theoretical contention, such that these divide according to: optimists, who support the extension of traditional balance of power concepts into contemporary cases through a modern and novel approach; skeptics, who discuss that direct application may be problematic, and thus, further theorizing is necessary; and finally the conditionalists, who argue that a more rigorous approach is necessary so to apply the concept, since the complications arising from anarchy and great power engagement/disengagement may disrupt balancing dynamics among secondary states within particular regions.

The optimists mainly argue that there is a significant reasonable potential in moving further than the “traditional understanding of the military strategic concept”.⁶⁸ This approach arises from theoretical and empirical observations that signify that there is a certain trend going on since the days of unipolarity that somehow limits the frequency of traditional hard balancing occurrence in the international system. Within an empirical framework, it was perceived that states, in a majority, has abandoned conventional hard balancing strategies and are in pursuance of diverse other methods in seeking security, thereby prompting the inquirance of traditional explanations that delineate how the balancing world would works. Secondly, this group of scholars argues that a form of globalization has created new threatening issues, which transcends borders and the territorial state system, such as “transnational terrorism”, or the complexities and difficulties in “translating economic power into military power” due to the complex democratic and liberal forms of government that possesses excessive checks and balances that limit militaristic policies.⁶⁹ Lastly, these works present another noteworthy observation, and that is, the complex diversity that exists at the

⁶⁸ T.V Paul “Balance of Power: Theory and Practice in the 21st century.”

⁶⁹ Ibid.

regional level in which “hard balancing, soft balancing, and asymmetric balancing occurs”.⁷⁰ Theoretically however, these optimists have perceived that the traditionalists within Balance of Power Theory are rigid, that is they fail to account for “in-between categories of states behavior that can be derived from other approaches”, thereby “cannot satisfactorily explain the realities of the contemporary world” such as “tacit or indirect means” rather than conventional and direct hard balancing.⁷¹ Secondly, they have discussed that the customary approaches were narrow, with a large emphasis on militaristic balancing, thereby framing the issue of counter-reaction in narrow operational terms that were unused anymore in the 21st century among states, thereby there is a necessity of “broaden the concepts of balancing behavior”.⁷² And lastly, these argumentations criticize that the conventional approaches completely disregard the nonstate actors, “their balancing behavior and their state sponsors, as well as the instance of asymmetrical balancing where a weaker state uses unconventional strategies to balance the other.”⁷³

In light of these criticisms, then, how do the optimists offer a translation for regional balancing? In explication, it is argued that in contrast to the great power interactionary system where conventional balancing is down-trending, “specific regions of the world experience balance of power dynamics, where traditional rivalries and conflicts persist”.⁷⁴ Therefore, in relation, it is implied that optimists stipulate that there is a significant amount of relevancy of great power Balance of Power Theory vis a vis the regional balancing dynamics; where the “rising powers”, in the form of states or coalitions, trigger counter-reactions.⁷⁵ Similar to great power interaction it was observed that states, in fear of predatory behavior that might hinder their security and survival, balance against concentrations of power or threats emanating from “revisionist” powers, so to bring the regional system into equilibrium.⁷⁶

Skeptics on the other hand notify that care must be taken in “generalization of Balance of Power Theory to contemporary regional systems, including the Middle East” since it was initially conceptualized for the behavioral dynamics of great powers, especially European ones, rather than all the states in the system.⁷⁷ Skeptics, hence, are cautious in direct

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ T. V. Paul “Conclusion Chapter”.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Jack Levy “What do Great Powers Balance against and When?”

application and implementation of the theory to regional dynamics without any pre-defined “theorizing about balancing in particular regions” and are in deep thoughts “about the theoretical dynamics of power politics in any set of nested systems”, thereby their inclination of theorizing first, then, if possible application and testing is another defended argumentation.

And lastly, conditionalists, who reside at the middle of the theoretical argumentations on the application of Balance of Power Theory, adopt a contingent standpoint, indicating that only through the insertion of assumptions and abstractions can the theory be implemented to regional systems, and hence, negating its direct and naive application. The conditionalists’ critique rests on the debate of the presence or nonpresence of an anarchic system in regions and whether the interloping of great powers under the mask of “police, referee, broker, or banker” to the area, problematizes the notion of self-help, indicating that the “regional balance of power is not autonomous” but actually in an inter-dependent relationship with “cooperative, competitive, and hegemonic” approaches of the great powers.⁷⁸ This, that is, the consequences of great power interference with the regions in general has two ramifications, which has an influence on regional balancing mechanisms: these are “great power disengagement” and “great power engagement”.⁷⁹ It is thus argued that the presence or nonpresence of these conditions determine the degree of balancing among regional powers.

As major remarks, it was observed that if the great powers pursue a disengagement policy due to lack of interest or desire, then the “region is an autonomous system” where states attempt to balance as if it is a self-help anarchic system detached from others’ intervention. However, if great powers possess an inclination to engage in the form of “arms investment” or “supply of technology transfer” due to the “extension of their competition to various regions through [their] balancing” or as a result of hegemonic intervention, then there occurs to be a two level balancing behavior in which the regional power may balance others through an alliance with the great power thereby initiating a patron-client relationship, or a great power may support certain favorable secondary states through various means of “diplomatic support”, “financial aid”, or “military assistance” so to negate the “attempts to dominate a region” by a particular adversary.

What do we make of these discussions that contemplate on the applicability of Balance of Power Theory to regional rivalries and regional countervailing activities? It is possible to scrutinize that there exists a theoretical and methodological debate on how to

⁷⁸ Benjamin Miller “The International System and Regional Balancing in the Middle East” in T.V. Paul *Balance of Power: Theory and Practice*

⁷⁹ Miller “The International System and Regional Balancing in the Middle East”.

accurately apply the concept between optimists who favor a more modern approach that can explicate the dynamics and response patterns of the 21st century, skeptics who have a cautious approach in directly applying the logic since it was primarily constructed for the behaviors of great powers, and conditionalists, who assert that even though the concept is applicable, the status of the great powers vis a vis the regions make an impact on balancing within different dimensions thereby granting a contingent theory. Under the light of these stipulations, this paper adopts a conditionalist approach and argues in line with the optimists that the main rationale of the theory, that is, due to the fact that the existence of certain strategic considerations that are still active among regional dynamics, reacting against power, security, or influence enhancements of other states through diverse internal and external as well as military and nonmilitary means, so to check its aspirations to improve its position either in the region or in the system in general is also active in regions as well, due to possession of states having similar motives as the great powers.

Nevertheless, the paper aspires to examine the regional balancing dynamics by theoretically isolating the intervention of great powers, thereby abstracting the formulation of the conditionalists' great power intervention, and assumes a *ceteris paribus* framework that assumes great power disengagement. Even though it is acknowledged that the regional balancing dynamics has a double dimension, the lens that is preferred in the herein work aspires to examine the counter-reactions of solely the regional powers vis a vis their rivals and the various balancing approaches, such in the type of proxies, thereby narrowing the scope to the region or subsystem. Therefore, it is subjectively formulized that rather than an incorporation of both the locality and the system, a pure regional perspective might produce a more coherent reflection for the post-Arab Spring civil war deliberations, that are mainly attached to Area Studies. Such an approach is also adopted so to be a building block for further studies that would incorporate the great powers as well and thus it is presented as an initial step in combining both Arab Spring and proxy literatures.

Apart from this methodological standpoint, it was observed that it is here that we see the first glimpses and development of the concept of proxy balancing, where under regional kinetics, great powers and even secondary states initiate patron-client or patron-proxy relations with either other states or through nonstate actors so to balance or negate others' efforts of influence, security, or power enhancement. As the modern approaches aspire to propose the addition of new conceptual explanations to the phenomena that is occurring within the 21st century, theoretically, as in the words of Nexon, we do have the potential to move further than the conventional formulations and begin to consider "different forms of

balancing beyond standard menu of arms and alliances” such that the novel reaction activities as in example of “divide and balance”, “proxy balancing”, “balancing through public goods substitution”, “binding” or “wedging” can be revealed to be certain mechanisms that reside under state inventory of balancing.

III. Proxies

The term proxy has been around within International Relations for a long time. Mentions of such a type of warfare and behavioral pattern have been mentioned in Arathustra of Ancient India, the writings of Thucydides, in Machiavelli, and Clausewitz, within the World Wars, during the Cold War, and in the 21st century, which signify that even though time changes, the competitive aspect of politics does not, and thus even in the ancient times, states have tried to use symmetric as well as asymmetric methods to overcome their enemies.⁸⁰ Even though this type of approach to war or conflict has been used frequently, attempts for its theoretical conceptualization has emerged during the Cold War years when the two poles, reaching a level of mutually assured destruction, sought “a convenient way to exert influence and maximize interests in the 3rd world while simultaneously reducing the risk of conflict” through allies and clients. Then what is a proxy and what is proxy warfare, and in conjunction how can we relate them to proxy balancing?

The definition of proxy is difficult since there is more than one conceptualization of it. For instance, Bale defines that proxies are “confederates who can be relied upon to act on the sponsor’s behalf”, Loveman classifies that proxies are any actors “who are engaged in conflict” that are supported by external parties, whereas Hughes, state that proxy is a term that corresponds to “nonstate paramilitary group receiving direct assistance from an external power”. This indicates that there is no single generally accepted definition of this term, and it is exposed to contextual or subjective formulations. Nevertheless, from their abovementioned definitions’ intersection points, it can be identified that proxies are directly or indirectly supported agents who are either state, nonstate, or any other international or domestic collectivity, that share certain interests and are strategically linked to a third party or parties that is/are not directly engaged in the conflict but notwithstanding possessing an aspiration to influence the outcome of the conflict that the proxy is actually fighting in.

⁸⁰ For the history of proxies and proxy warfare see: Geraint Hughes *My Enemy’s Enemy: Proxy Warfare in International Conflict*.

To overcome such terminology issues, it was observed that there have emerged a certain scale to determine if the group is a proxy or not by asking:

- (1) whether the group is attacking targets or following policies “that it would otherwise not have attacked if it were not receiving support from a state”,
- (2) “in the absence of state support” has it altered its tactics, aims, or objectives than before it did receive,
- (3) if the group is using military tools or techniques that it would not “have adopted had it not been receiving support from a state” ?⁸¹

If the answer to the first question is yes then the group is a proxy, if the responding to the second question is yes then it is not a proxy, and if the reply to the third question is yes then the group is called a beneficiary not a proxy. Proxies are also different from surrogates, which are “substitutes” that are utilized for the “maintenance of deniability”.⁸²

Considering the categorization of proxies, it is possible to argue that apart from the traditional conception of nonstate actors such as “factions in a civil war”, insurgents, mercenaries, militias, criminal units or terror organizations, states can also be judged as proxies of other states or other nonstate actors, which makes possible for the occurrence of four combinations of proxy relations: a state being a proxy of another state, a nonstate being a proxy of a state, a nonstate being a proxy of a nonstate, and a state being a proxy of a nonstate.⁸³ It should be noted that proxies are not formal alliances but rather a type of informal partnerships of shared interest for the sake of cooperating to oppose a common adversary.⁸⁴ One controversial issue is the granting of proxy status to terror organizations by states. According to Bale, one can legitimately refer to terror groups as agents or proxies of states if the “security services” of that certain state has itself formed the groups as a “pseudo-terror organization, that remain under the secret services’ direct control”, if the agents of a state has “penetrated” a particular terror organization by infiltration and had carved themselves a place of position that would enable them to drive the organization, and if the

⁸¹ Jeffrey Bale “Terrorists as State Proxies” in *Making Sense of Proxy Wars*

⁸² Jeffrey Bale “Terrorists as State Proxies”.

⁸³ Geriant Hughes *My Enemy’s Enemy: Proxy Warfare in International Politics* For a different core-periphery distinction see: Chris Loveman “Assessing the Phenomenon of Proxy Intervention”.

⁸⁴ On this distinction see: Hughes *My Enemy’s Enemy*

groups “gradually lose their ideological purity” and presently act with solely “materialistic motives”, therefore becoming a hybrid mercenary-terror group.⁸⁵

How are proxy relations formed in the first place? The major conditions for the setting up of proxy interactions require a certain framework, that is, it is “context specific”, such that a particular “consent” is required along with a “perception of gain”, and a degree of engagement that may be structured through common political, social, religious, or cultural ideational factors.⁸⁶ This foundation is then to be supplemented by “assistance and sponsorship”, a “common enemy”, and a “sustained” amount of contact.⁸⁷ However it should be noted that the relations between the patron and client, once formed, are in flux, that is it is “fluid”, it may vary according to the conditions in war as its magnitude changes, and the patron may renege its partnership with the proxy if it assesses that no further gains to be made, thereby leading to an “affiliation deterioration”. Once formed, the relation between the proxy and the patron may be sustained in various ways, however most proxy relations revolve around the granting of support that might be material or nonmaterial in essence.⁸⁸ These indicate that the proxy-patron relationship requires a compatibility of interest, an exercised authority over the proxy, an asymmetrical status between the two parties, and a flow of support which the proxy utilizes in the conflict.⁸⁹

Proxy Warfare

To understand proxy balancing it is necessary to conceptualize proxy warfare first; since, state or nonstate actors utilize these proxies in international and domestic conflicts so that they will “act as supplements” for their war waging, or as a “substitute for direct involvement” while they themselves are pursuing particular interests.⁹⁰ This type of rivalry, called as proxy warfare, is hence, a behavioral pattern in which certain patrons, though mainly states, who indirectly engage to an existing conflict for the purpose of making an impact on its course so to attain a preferential consequence that is suitable to their ambitions, choose to provide assistance in various types and maintain a form of partnership with the combatants

⁸⁵ Jeffrey Bale, “Terrorists as State Proxies”.

⁸⁶ Andrew Mumford *Proxy Warfare*

⁸⁷ Andrew Mumford *Proxy Warfare*

⁸⁸ For the type of relationships see: Bertil Duner “Proxy Intervention in Civil Wars”.

⁸⁹ Regarding the necessary conditions for proxy relation formation see: Duner “Proxy Intervention in Civil Wars”.

⁹⁰ Geriant Hughes *My Enemy's Enemy: Proxy Warfare in International Politics*

who are perceived as clients, surrogates, or unofficial partners that might keep them at a distance from the direct ramifications of their indirect intervention.⁹¹

Utilization of Proxies

If this issue is such controversial in essence, then why do actors use proxies as a tool or why they engage in proxy warfare. The proxy literature argues that there are four main reasons,⁹² these are: for opportunistic gains, for cost aversion so to negate costs of direct conflict or retaliation, for sustainment of power projection while abstaining from direct engagement, and to influence the outcome of the conflict while standing aloof. Intervening to the conflict via proxies for opportunistic gains correspond to actions for the purpose “obtaining concession”, “to weaken adversaries”, or to “annex or transform” its territories in favor of the intervening state.⁹³ These aims indicate that the patron state, if it aspires to alter the existing status quo in the locality where the conflict has triggered a rivalry, it seeks to improve its position via the utilization of proxies so that a more favorable environment would emerge that would satisfy the revisionist stances of the state vis a vis others.

Considering an aversion to costs, it is argued that, states, even though seeking an interference, aim to respond by “minimizing inputs while maximizing outputs” thereby acting indirectly so to “circumvent paying blood price” or other costly investments that requires not only humanitarian but also material expenditures which entail diversion or allocation of resources and avoiding political obstacles that demand approval.⁹⁴ Directly influencing a conflict from afar is also problematic since the actor, apart from domestic complexities also has to cope with the international pressures and constraints, such as international law or international regimes that might create complications. Therefore to “let someone else do the job entirely or partial” seems to be a rational choice, since the state may decide its investment on the proxy, which consequently minimizes costs of direct retaliation, and if done covertly enough, conceals the state from other detriments as well.

Proxies are also utilized for power projection into the contested zones so to push back others’ influences. Since using proxies “augment” one’s own power it “supplements means of

⁹¹ There is a debate on whether only indirect assistance is called proxy war, and whether we should exclude direct involvement with proxies as

⁹² For a discussion of other reasons see : Hughes *My Enemy’s Enemy*

⁹³ Hughes, *My Enemy’s Enemy*

⁹⁴ Mumford *Proxy Warfare*

waging war” while diminishing the adversary’s security by weakening it through opening of asymmetric fronts and implementation of unconventional methods of war. Since security seeking and positional enhancement are significant in rivalries, states’ utilization of proxies are significant additions to their capability pool.

Lastly, proxies are options for states so to have an weight on the consequences of a particular conflict and to obtain favorable results from it without directly intervening. It is argued that states strive to “influence the outcome of a conflict in pursuit of strategic policy objectives”, and to obtain a certain range of outcomes that would limit others’ gains. Additionally, the proxy literature also embraces Realist terms such as relative gains or security dilemma, in which states possess a sensitivity regarding others’ winnings and correspond it to gains it had obtained, the difference ratio is contemplated to reflect either a preponderance or a weakness that should be reimbursed. Proxies therefore

Proxy Balancing

To conceptualize proxy balancing, the paper utilizes the findings related to the balancing literature of the previous section so to work alongside the conceptual framework acquired from the intersection of theories of balancing. It was observed that there is a narrow and a broad definition of proxy such that groups acting on others’ behalf –surrogates- and who are receiving external backing –beneficiaries- are also conceptualized as proxies, a more coherent description necessitates that, to be defined as a proxy, a particular group or groups who are supported directly or indirectly through an external party should be pursuing strategies that they would not have implemented unless the backing of the patron and who are not altering objectives within the presence of the patron. This indicates that terms such as surrogates, beneficiaries, and substitutes are also placed within the concept of proxy, though it is sensible to adhere to the second more narrow definition.

Secondly for the proxy-patron relationship to occur there should be an intersection of interests and an asymmetric power relation between the two parties. This relationship is situational, that is it can vary from case to case depending on its framing through diverse factors of political or cultural perceptions, though further commonalities may also include a desire of gain and an aspiration to have an influence on the conflict. It was also found that this relationship also requires supplements through sponsorship, a common target, and a degree of contact. This large frame thus displays how the relations are formed and sustained.

Thirdly, it was founded that the desire of a patron to employ proxies are numerous such that it may be for the purpose of an opportunism, such that the patron would seek concessions, to degrade others' power, or to control territory or other strategic values; so to decrease costs of direct engagement that would entail high expenditures or to refrain from casualties; for the aspiration of power projection that would enhance its own power without the utilization of military forces, or to decrease others' influence seeking indirectly. Lastly, it was found that states utilize proxies so to influence the consequences of a conflict without directly engaging in it.

The balancing aspect comes when a state or any other patron perceives a threat to be addressed, it assesses a certain risk to its security, survival that may be subject to a hazard unless intervening, and a consideration of spectrum of values that it attributes to significance and a requirement to either enhance its own values or to protect it from others' encroachments vis a vis the regional interaction of states. Such countervailing motives are actually implemented by the combination or intersection of the methods that other balancing theories present, thus, proxy balancing may either be pursued through positive or negative balancing, in which a proxy may enhance a states' power or it may act to diminish others, it is at the intersection of hard and soft balancing such that a state counteracts against its adversary via granting heavy equipment to its supporting groups without any alliance commitments. Thirdly, the balancing via proxies lies at the intersection of direct and indirect balancing, that although it is offshore balancing, the patron may step up its support or interference as the conflict turns phase. Lastly, proxy balancing is also at the intersection of asymmetric balancing and symmetric balancing such that a state not only balances another state through its utilization of proxies but also balances the other patrons' clients who are utilized for similar reasons.

III. Empirical Case Studies

This section seeks to provide an examination of the instance of proxy balancing within the cases of Syria, Yemen, and Libya after the events of the Arab Spring. Starting from the observational assumption that there exists a rivalry among the regional powers as well as the nonstate actors for various furtherance of their motives, interests, or influences, complex partnerships are possible to be scrutinized. Even though it was possible to claim that a regional balancing is possible to observed through the moves and countermoves of states, the assertion that these states balance through proxies do seem to be an initially premature argumentation. Since, even though it is possible to perceive that there do exist various state-nonstate interactions of distinction, the framing of these relations as a proxy one requires a more comprehensive research that requires more time and commitment, therefore this study, for now refrains from making claims on such a direct deliberation.