

Whither the Balancers?

The Case for a Methodological Reset

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Abstract: *Post-Cold War, balancing theory has fallen on “hard times.” A question of crucial importance for 21st-century peace and stability concerns how Asia-Pacific secondary states are responding militarily to China’s rise. China’s rapid growth, military modernization, and controversial policies vis-à-vis contested space and territories on its periphery make it a prime candidate for counter-balancing behavior. Yet several recent studies claim that secondary states are accommodating, even bandwagoning with, Beijing. This study challenges these claims, attributing them largely to problematic research designs not uncommon in the wider balancing literature. It proposes a methodological corrective, arguing for widespread employment of an alternative analytical framework relying on clearer definitions and explicitly delineated sets of 21st-century-relevant metrics reflecting the myriad ways contemporary militaries enhance their capabilities in response to perceived threats. Applied systematically to original analysis of the contemporary Asia-Pacific, this framework uncovers what existing studies miss—evidence of practically significant, and accelerating, balancing against China.*

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*“[Governor Romney] mentioned the Navy, for example, and that we have fewer ships than we did in 1916. Well, Governor we also have fewer horses and bayonets, because the nature of our military’s changed.”*³

U.S. President Barack Obama’s response to his challenger Mitt Romney’s criticisms that America’s “Navy is smaller now than at any time since 1917” and that its “Air Force is older and smaller than at any time since it was founded in 1947” was a memorable moment of the 2012 U.S. presidential debates.⁴ Such criticisms are nothing new to presidential campaigns, of either party. Challengers often make similar claims to imply that the incumbent has allowed U.S. military capabilities to atrophy. Related, albeit far more extreme, criticisms of Obama’s policies already manifest in the 2016 campaign.⁵

As captured in Obama’s (admittedly hyperbolic) retort, in this specific instance Romney’s rhetoric appeals to a widely-held, yet often inaccurate, belief that military power is best measured by the most easily quantifiable, conspicuous metrics; that larger numbers necessarily indicate greater warfighting capability. Advocates of defense spending reductions often make similarly problematic claims; e.g., that the U.S. Navy has sufficient firepower simply because its aggregate tonnage is “bigger than the next ten (or more) navies combined.” Though often based in fact, such claims can be misleading and often do not produce much practical light useful for defense planners.

Reliance on the most conspicuous and easily measurable—often quantitative—metrics also permeates the international relations literature. Though past studies demonstrate the limitations of such “traditional” approaches, especially when employed exclusively, usage remains widespread.⁶ This article examines several pitfalls of associated methodological approaches for the validity,

³ “Transcript of the Third Presidential Debate in Boca Raton, Fla.,” *New York Times*, October 22, 2012, <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/10/22/us/politics/transcript-of-the-third-presidential-debate-in-boca-raton-fla.html>.

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ Micah Zenko, “Republicans Won’t Stop Saying Our Military is Weak,” *Foreignpolicy.com*, February 18, 2016. <http://foreignpolicy.com/2016/02/18/republicans-wont-stop-saying-our-military-is-weak/>

⁶ Stephen Biddle demonstrates that the standard metrics for military effectiveness permeating the theoretical literature predict real military outcomes “no better than coin flips.” He warns against over-reliance on simple, but often misleading, measures of military capabilities. Stephen Biddle, *Military Power* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004). For other seminal works in related literatures, see Allan R. Millett, Williamson Murray, and Kenneth H. Watman, “The Effectiveness of Military Organizations,” *International Security* 11, no. 1 (1986): 37–71; Stephen Peter Rosen, “Military Effectiveness: Why Society Matters,” *International Security* 19, no. 4 (1995): 5–31; Allan R. Millett and Williamson Murray, eds., *Military Effectiveness 3 Volume Set*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010). More recently, see Risa Brooks and Elizabeth Stanley, eds., *Creating Military Power: The Sources of Military Effectiveness* (Stanford, Calif: Stanford University Press, 2007); Keir A. Lieber, “Mission Impossible: Measuring the Offense-Defense Balance with Military Net Assessment,” *Security Studies* 20, no. 3 (2011): 454–455.

reliability, and practical relevance of international relations theory. Its critique focuses on one core literature—that on balancing. Specifically, it highlights issues with how some recent scholarship applies this concept in answering a question of crucial importance to 21st-century international relations: how are “secondary states” in the Asia-Pacific responding militarily to China’s rise?

Indeed, the contemporary Asia-Pacific provides a fertile testing ground. China’s rapid economic growth, military modernization, and controversial policies vis-à-vis contested space and territories on its periphery make the region a prime candidate for balancing behavior. Yet in apparent contradiction of theoretical expectation, several recent studies addressing this issue most directly have concluded that secondary states are *not* balancing against China; rather, they are increasingly “accommodating,” even “bandwagoning” with Beijing.⁷ Together with recent cogent critiques of the “soft balancing” literature, these findings suggest grave implications for balancing theory’s continued relevance in the 21st century.

This article offers a nuanced counter-argument. While recognizing deficiencies in both structural Realist balance-of-power theory and problematic “concept creep” (e.g., “soft balancing”), critical examination of definitions and metrics employed in these studies of secondary state responses to China’s rise casts doubt on their claims. An original empirical survey demonstrates that balancing against a perceived China threat—concrete and potential—is not absent—but significant, and accelerating. Existing studies’ arguments to the contrary can be attributed to both inherently problematic methodologies—issues that also manifest to varying degrees in the wider balancing literature, and which have been “present since the creation”—and military vicissitudes that have rendered reliance on several traditionally favored metrics (e.g., number of military personnel/platforms; new formal treaty alliances) insufficient, in many

⁷ David C. Kang, “Hierarchy, Balancing, and Empirical Puzzles in Asian International Relations,” *International Security* 28, no. 3 (Winter 2003): 165–80; David C. Kang, “Getting Asia Wrong: The Need for New Analytical Frameworks,” *International Security* 27, no. 4 (Spring 2003): 57–85; David C. Kang, “Why China’s Rise Will Be Peaceful: Hierarchy and Stability in the East Asian Region,” *Perspectives on Politics* 3, no. 3 (2005): 551–54; David C. Kang, *China Rising: Peace, Power, and Order in East Asia* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), chap. 3; David Kang, “Paper Tiger,” *Foreign Policy*, April 25, 2013, http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2013/04/25/paper_tiger_china_military_buildup; David C. Kang, “A Looming Arms Race in East Asia?,” *The National Interest*, May 14, 2014, <http://nationalinterest.org/feature/looming-arms-race-east-asia-10461>; Robert S. Ross, “Balance of Power Politics and the Rise of China: Accommodation and Balancing in East Asia,” *Security Studies* 15 (September 2006): 355–95; Steve Chan, “An Odd Thing Happened on the Way to Balancing: East Asian States’ Reactions to China’s Rise,” *International Studies Review* 12, no. 3 (2010): 387–412; Steve Chan, *Looking for Balance: China, the United States, and Power Balancing in East Asia* (Stanford University Press, 2013), chap. 3. Most recently, see Fu contribution to Fu, Ronan Tse-min, David James Gill, Eric Hundman, Adam P. Liff, and G. John Ikenberry. “Correspondence: Looking for Asia’s Security Dilemma.” *International Security* 40, no. 2 (2015): 181–204.

instances misleading or obsolescent. Rapid changes in military technology and the ways in which states act to deter would-be adversaries or prepare for military conflict today necessitate critical reflection before employing the long-favored, conspicuous, and most easily quantifiable metrics typically associated with the traditional, yet amorphous, usually underspecified categories of “internal and external balancing.”

This article’s primary objectives are to highlight several definitional and methodological issues in the balancing literature and to propose and systematically test a straightforward, broadly-applicable analytical framework designed to standardize approaches in conformance with best practices in social science. Standardization and improved methodological transparency improves inter-rater reliability. Meanwhile, explicit, contemporized, and more expansive lists of better-specified “internal” and “external” force development and employment measures that 21st century states can adopt in response to perceived external threats, coupled with explicit consideration of underlying causal drivers of observed outcomes, enhances validity of empirical tests for balancing behavior in a contemporary context. While designed for the balancing literature, this framework and its associated metrics should be broadly applicable.

To demonstrate the advantages of the proposed framework, this study applies it systematically through an original empirical analysis of secondary state military policy responses to China’s rise. It reveals how vague definitions and problematic metrics have led several existing studies to overlook or misdiagnose important empirical trends, which in turn has contributed directly to dubious claims that key states are bandwagoning with, or accommodating, China.

On a more general level, this study has implications for a wider debate in the literature about the continuing relevance of balancing theory. Especially in the context of manifest balancing behavior against the U.S. by China over two-plus decades, and by and against Russia in Eastern Europe today, it provides further evidence that neither the rejection of core theoretical tenets nor the dismissal of the concept as a useful lens through which to understand contemporary international relations is appropriate. Balancing continues to account for important phenomena powerfully affecting peace and stability, even in a globalized world characterized by extensive economic and security interdependence. That said, structural Realist claims of inevitable balancing exclusively against *capabilities* under the constraints of anarchy are indeed problematic.⁸ Yet

⁸ Stephen G. Brooks and William C. Wohlforth, “Hard Times for Soft Balancing,” *International Security* 30, no. 1 (2005): 72–108.

current developments in the Asia-Pacific, and increasingly Eastern Europe, show that the more basic idea that states will balance militarily against perceived threats is not anachronistic. One does not need to “stretch” the concept (e.g., “soft balancing”; see below) to find contemporary manifestations of theoretical and practical significance.

This article consists of six sections. It begins with an overview of important trends in the balancing-related theoretical literature since the 1970s. Section 2 offers brief critiques of general and region-specific balancing literatures. It calls for a methodological ‘reset’ and standardization. Section 3 proposes a straightforward, two-step analytical framework to facilitate more valid and reliable empirical tests for balancing behavior in the 21st-century. To demonstrate its potential advantages, Section 4 applies it systematically to an empirical analysis of the contemporary Asia-Pacific—specifically, the military responses to China’s rise of four neighboring states. The penultimate section discusses the study’s general implications. The final section concludes.

I: ‘Hard Times’ for Balancing Theory

In his seminal study, Kenneth Waltz offers a structural theory of international politics arguing that anarchy compels states to pursue “self-help.”⁹ In this view, the outcome of inter-state competition is a recurrent pattern of balances-of-power whereby weak states form balancing coalitions to deter rising powers. One of Waltz’s major contributions is his division of policy responses by states to the growing capabilities of others into two categories: “internal balancing” and “external balancing.”¹⁰ Whereas Waltz’ systemic theory says little about foreign policy decisions of individual states,¹¹ Stephen Walt’s later study provides a seminal theory of alliance formation. Walt argues against the neorealists claim that states balance against power (military capabilities) alone. Instead, Walt introduces a subjective variable: threat perceptions.¹²

Despite a surge of scholarship in the 1980s and 1990s, balancing theory has of late fallen on “hard times” in the international relations literature generally, as well as recent studies most directly examining secondary state responses to rising China today. The foundational theories put

⁹ Kenneth N. Waltz, *Theory of International Politics* (Reading, Mass.: Addison-Wesley Pub. Co., 1979).

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 118.

¹¹ Thomas J. Christensen and Jack Snyder, “Chain Gangs and Passed Bucks: Predicting Alliance Patterns in Multipolarity,” *International Organization* 44, no. 2 (1990): 137–68.

¹² Stephen M. Walt, *The Origins of Alliances* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990).

forth by Waltz and Walt have attracted widespread criticism.¹³ Scholars have noted a conspicuous absence of balancing against the U.S. “superpower,” even at the peak of its so-called unipolar moment.¹⁴

In the wake of the U.S. invasion of Iraq in 2003, several scholars attempted to save balancing theory from its critics by introducing the concept of “soft balancing,”¹⁵ which Pape defines as “nonmilitary tools to delay, frustrate, and undermine aggressive unilateral U.S. policies.”¹⁶ Several cogent scholarly critiques have convincingly dismissed soft-balancing as excessive “concept stretching,” i.e. broadening the meaning of the balancing concept “to refer to a phenomenon entirely distinct from the one it previously meant.”¹⁷ By capturing all state efforts to influence the foreign policy of another the definition of soft-balancing is too all-encompassing to be analytically tenable. The apparent implication? Balance-of-power and soft balancing theories are fundamentally flawed, especially when applied to the post-Cold War world.¹⁸

In short, over the past two decades major scholarship on balancing-related theories, including foundational books and efforts to salvage balancing theory as applicable in the post-Cold War world, have been widely—and often persuasively—criticized. Even in the contemporary Asia-Pacific, where China’s rapid, across-the-board rise in all elements of material power presents a “most-likely” case for eliciting balancing behavior, several recent studies conclude that China’s neighbors are *not* balancing, nor will they in the future balance, against Beijing.

¹³ See Paul Schroeder, “Historical Reality vs. Neo-Realist Theory,” *International Security* 19, no. 1 (1994): 108–48; Randall L. Schweller, “Bandwagoning for Profit: Bringing the Revisionist State Back In,” *International Security* 19, no. 1 (Summer 1994): 72–107; William C. Wohlforth et al., “Testing Balance-of-Power Theory in World History,” *European Journal of International Relations* 13, no. 2 (June 2007): 155–85.

¹⁴ Even Waltz wrote that the absence of balancing against the U.S. hegemon is an “unnatural” condition. Kenneth N. Waltz, “Structural Realism after the Cold War,” *International Security* 25, no. 1 (2000): 56. See also T. V. Paul, James J. Wirtz, and Michel Fortmann, eds., *Balance of Power: Theory and Practice in the 21st Century* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2004); William C. Wohlforth, “The Stability of a Unipolar World,” *International Security* 24, no. 1 (1999): 5–41.

¹⁵ See Robert A. Pape, “Soft Balancing against the United States,” *International Security* 30, no. 1 (2005): 7–45; Paul, Wirtz, and Fortmann, *Balance of Power*.

¹⁶ Pape, “Soft Balancing,” 10.

¹⁷ Brooks and Wohlforth, “Hard Times for Soft Balancing,” 107; Stephen G. Brooks and William C. Wohlforth, “Brooks and Wohlforth Reply,” *International Security* 30, no. 3 (2006): 191; Stuart J. Kaufman, Richard Little, and William Curti Wohlforth, eds., *The Balance of Power in World History* (Houndmills, Basingstoke [England]; New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 3.

¹⁸ See Brooks and Wohlforth, “Hard Times for Soft Balancing,” 75. For more on this debate, see Paul, Wirtz, and Fortmann, *Balance of Power*; Pape, “Soft Balancing”; Robert J. Art, “Correspondence: Striking the Balance,” *International Security* 30, no. 3 (2006): 177–85; Brooks and Wohlforth, “Brooks and Wohlforth Reply”; Keir A. Lieber and Gerard Alexander, “Lieber and Alexander Reply,” *International Security* 30, no. 3 (2006): 191–96.

Whither the balancers?

II: The Case for a Methodological Reset

Despite apparent shortcomings in structural Realist variants of balance-of-power theory and soft balancing literatures, recent real-world developments suggest that on both theoretical and practical grounds discarding the balancing concept itself as invalid or obsolete would be ill-advised. The end of the Cold War did not herald the end of history. While the United States will remain the preeminent global power for the foreseeable future, leaders of China, the nation with the world's second largest (and rapidly growing) economy and military expenditures, have long been characterized as worshipping at “the high church of Realpolitik.”¹⁹ For its part, Beijing clearly perceives the U.S. military and Washington's hub-and-spokes alliance system as a threat and is balancing against it. In Europe, Russia's 2014 annexation of the Ukraine was, according to the Obama administration, disturbingly redolent of “great power” behavior from a bygone era. As Russia under Putin undertakes an ambitious, multi-year rearmament program and its defense spending reaches all-time highs, European countries have moved to strengthen deterrence with Washington and among themselves.²⁰ In short, circumstances in the world today suggest that balancing behavior remains an identifiable and geopolitically consequential phenomenon in international politics.

Salient problems with balancing theory, therefore, are not inherent in the basic concept itself—the idea that states enhance military capabilities in response to perceived external threats. Rather, they appear to figure most prominently in structurally deterministic arguments, already effectively challenged by key studies cited above, and the specific focus of this article: problematic methodological approaches used to derive and implement empirical tests of the theory. Of particular issue are vague, inconsistent definitions and operationalization of dependent variables, as well as a tendency to analytically privilege the most conspicuous and easily measurable—yet sometimes misleading—metrics. Either approach risks specious conclusions.

¹⁹ Thomas J. Christensen, “Chinese Realpolitik,” *Foreign Affairs* 75, no. 5 (October 1996): 37.

²⁰ “John Kerry to Travel to Ukraine,” *Politico*, March 2, 2014, <http://dyn.politico.com/printstory.cfm?uid=3D8DDFD0-4551-4934-93EE-211853F9DE42>; “Russian Defense Budget to Hit Record \$81 Billion in 2015,” *Moscow Times*, October 16, 2014; “US Military Spending Falls, Increases in Eastern Europe, Middle East, Africa and Asia Says SIPRI,” *SIPRI*, April 13, 2015, <http://www.sipri.org/media/pressreleases/2015/milex-april-2015>; “Nordic Pact Heightens Tension with Russia,” *EUObserver*, April 13, 2015, <https://euobserver.com/foreign/128297>.

II.1: A Critique of General Approaches

An ideal methodological framework for empirical tests for balancing should begin with an explicit, analytically tractable definition for the dependent variable of interest: balancing behavior. Indeed, recent scholarship (e.g., the soft balancing literature) has been criticized for not explicitly defining the concept or, alternatively, “stretching” it to such a degree that it becomes fundamentally different or so all-encompassing as to be unfalsifiable. Yet even in the “hard” balancing literature definitions of the most ubiquitous dependent variables are often vague and inconsistent, rendering standards for empirical testing unclear. Furthermore, the literature generally relies on the fairly amorphous and underspecified Waltzian categories of internal and external balancing (see below); it lacks standardized, explicit, and contemporized lists of metrics appropriate for testing for balancing behavior in the 21st century. Simply put, key social-scientific best practices are often bypassed. Indeed, even some small-n qualitative studies do not provide clear evidence that the suspected causal mechanism is actually at play: i.e., demonstrate empirically not only observations of the dependent variable (efforts to enhance military capabilities), but also a causal link to the suspected cause (a perceived external threat from another state, often a rising power)—as opposed to some exogenous factor. The potential costs of low specificity, limited transparency and inconsistent methodological approaches are reduced validity and inter-rater reliability. Such approaches also frustrate efforts to evaluate a given study’s argument.

These methodological issues are neither new nor unique to either quantitative or qualitative approaches; rather, they trace their roots to foundational categories, definitions, and metrics. In his seminal study, Waltz argues that states pursue “self-help” through two strategies aimed at maximizing relative power: “internal balancing” and “external balancing.” Waltz defines the former as “moves to increase economic capability, to increase military strength, to develop clever strategies” and the latter as “moves to strengthen and enlarge one’s own alliance or to weaken and shrink an opposing one.”²¹ Such concepts are powerful, and pedagogically useful. Yet these category labels and relatively vague definitions have proven methodologically problematic in practice; often generating problems when it comes time to design rigorous, replicable empirical tests of balancing behavior. Subsequent scholarship has generally adopted Waltz’s original binary

²¹ Waltz, *TofIP*, 118.

categorization without addressing related issues or attempting to standardize lists of associated metrics to measure.

Specifically, by baking the term “balancing” directly into the metric categories’ names themselves, Waltz’ labels assume an implicit causal claim—that any observation of associated metrics must be, *ipso facto*, evidence of balancing behavior. This setup has led some studies to impute, rather than empirically demonstrate, associated causal claims. This is problematic, as factors other than perceived external threat (e.g., domestic politics; prestige-seeking) could be driving military decisions. Furthermore, because these two categories are amorphous the associated metrics with which scholars should operationalize, measure, and test for “internal” or “external balancing” are left unclear.

Absent a clear, standardized definition of “balancing,” methodological framework, and associated metrics, existing studies tend to loosely operationalize the key dependent variables of interest with vague, underspecified yet excessively restrictive definitions along the lines of “arms buildups” and “alliance formation,” respectively (See **Table 1**). Even those studies offering improved definitions (e.g., Schweller 2006) typically lack lists of specific candidate metrics with which to operationalize these concepts and test for balancing. As demonstrated below, employing such loose definitions and standards risks neglecting practically significant internal and external measures that contemporary states adopt to enhance aggregate military power in response to perceived threats—i.e., the very behavior implied (but underspecified) in Waltz’ original framework.

Table 1 Sample definitions of “internal and external balancing” behavior from major works in the “hard” balancing literature (general and specific to the contemporary Asia-Pacific)¹

Internal Balancing (“ARMING”)	External Balancing (“ALLIANCES”)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “moves to increase economic capability, to increase military strength, to develop clever strategies” (Waltz 1979) • “Arming” and “military allocations” (Morrow 1993) • <i>No explicit definition given</i> (Schweller 1994) • “building up their own capabilities” (Brooks and Wohlforth 2005) • “intense arms acquisitions”; “arms races” (Ross 2006); N.B.: <i>no explicit definition given; inferred from text</i> • the creation or aggregation of military power through internal mobilization [...] to prevent or deter the territorial occupation or the political and military domination of the state by a foreign power or coalition (Schweller 2006) • “military preparations and arms buildups directed at an obvious threat” (Kang 2007) • “Increasing one’s armament” (Chan 2010) • “Policies seeking to increase one’s own defense efforts” (Chan 2013) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “moves to strengthen and enlarge one’s own alliance or to weaken and shrink an opposing one” (Waltz 1979) • “ally in opposition to the principal source of danger” (Walt 1985) • “allying with others against the prevailing threat” w/ an alliance defined broadly as “a formal or informal arrangement for security cooperation between two or more sovereign states” (Walt 1987) • “Alliances” (Morrow 1993) • “Allying with others against the prevailing threat” (Schweller 1994) • “aggregating their capabilities with other states in alliances” (Brooks and Wohlforth 2005) • “formal alliances”, “great power military policies and secondary state alignment policies”, “secondary state’s policy toward such issues as a great power’s strategic interests vis-à-vis third parties, arms imports, defense planning, and provision of military facilities to a great power.” (Ross 2006); N.B. <i>no explicit definitions given; inferred from text</i> • “the creation or aggregation of military power through [...]the forging of alliances to prevent or deter the territorial occupation or the political and military domination of the state by a foreign power or coalition (Schweller 2006) • “forging countervailing military alliances with other states against the threat” (Kang 2007) • “Aligning oneself with allies for common defense” (Chan 2010) • “Policies seeking to [...] combine [one’s own] defense efforts with those of others” (Chan 2013)

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²² Ibid., 118; Stephen M. Walt, “Alliance Formation and the Balance of World Power,” *International Security* 9, no. 4 (Spring 1985): 4; Walt, *The Origins of Alliances*, 17; James D. Morrow, “Arms Versus Allies: Trade-Offs in the Search for Security,” *International Organization* 47, no. 2 (Spring 1993): 208; Schweller, “Bandwagoning for Profit,” 80 citing Walt 1985/7; Brooks and Wohlforth, “Hard Times for Soft Balancing,” 76; Randall L. Schweller, *Unanswered Threats: Political Constraints on the Balance of Power* (Princeton University Press, 2006), 9; Ross, “Balance of Power Politics and the Rise of China,” 360–61; 368; Kang, *China Rising*, 51; Chan, “An Odd Thing,” 399; Chan, *Looking for Balance*, 59. As noted above, the ‘soft balancing’ literature relies on even vaguer definitions; ‘soft balancing’ appears to be a catch-all term for almost any measure aimed at influencing other states. For example, see Pape, “Soft Balancing,” 10.

In short, four decades after Waltz coined “internal and external balancing,” many scholars adopt this vague and binary categorization uncritically, without addressing its associated methodological problems. Consequently, definitions and associated metrics widely employed in the balancing literature are underspecified and inconsistent. As illustrated in the next section, the tendency to privilege a few relatively conspicuous and easily measurable yet in some cases insignificant, obsolescent, or otherwise misleading metrics, coupled with loose standards concerning pinpointing causal mechanisms and conceptual stretching, is also not uncommon.²³

The potential pitfalls of such widely-used approaches manifest in several recent studies directly addressing the question of secondary state responses to China’s rise. Each study concludes that China’s neighbors are not engaging in balancing behavior.²⁴ The disconnect between such conclusions and a far more complicated empirical reality is demonstrated in Section 4.

II.2: Bandwagoning with China? A Case-specific Critique

China’s rapid economic growth, military modernization, and increasingly controversial policies vis-à-vis contested space and territories on its periphery make the contemporary Asia-Pacific a prime candidate ripe for balancing behavior. Yet several recent studies addressing this issue directly have concluded that secondary states are not only not balancing against China; rather, they are alleged to increasingly “bandwagon” with or “accommodate” Beijing as its economic and military power grow.²⁵

II.2.a: Problematic Definitions and Conceptual Dichotomies

To define balancing such that any significant evidence of cooperation or engagement in other domains (e.g., trade) is interpreted as evidence that the state neither perceives a threat nor is adopting military policies to balance against it is an unrealistic standard. Such an approach constitutes excessive concept “stretching” and seemingly conflates balancing behavior with *containment*—two analytically and theoretically distinct concepts. Whereas the former is a military domain-specific response to a perceived direct or indirect military threat, the latter is an

²³ Keir Lieber and Gerard Alexander note that “loose standards” have allowed scholars “to code as balancing against a certain power action that is clearly not directed at that power.” Lieber and Alexander, “Lieber and Alexander Reply,” 194.

²⁴ Several studies admittedly predate the acceleration of balancing behavior since 2010 (see Section 4). Nevertheless, stated rationales for why balancing had/would *not* occur are either unrelated to material forces or predict the categorically opposite outcome as China grows more powerful—i.e., *increasing* accommodation.

²⁵ See footnote 5.

across-the-board, multi-domain strategy designed to weaken *all* aspects of an adversaries' material wealth and power and predicated on an assumption that two states have nothing to gain from *any* economic cooperation. Conflating the two generates an evidentiary threshold so extreme that few, if any, real-world cases—past or present—seem to qualify (the Cold War a possible exception). It renders the balancing concept of negligible utility outside the realm of pure theory, except in the most extreme cases.

Yet suggestions of mutual exclusiveness exist in the literature claiming that balancing is not occurring in the contemporary Asia-Pacific. One recent study suggests that cutting trade with China is a condition for identifying balancing behavior.²⁶ Another's claim hinges on treating positive diplomatic/economic interactions and efforts to "turn latent power into military capabilities" ('balancing') as mutually exclusive policy choices; suggesting states cannot do both simultaneously.²⁷ Such extreme dichotomies of "pure cooperation" versus "pure competition" and their associated definitions of balancing behavior render these studies' empirical claims unfalsifiable. Applied to the contemporary Asia-Pacific, they imply that states cannot seek benefit from China's rise economically while simultaneously balancing it militarily in response to perceived concrete security threats, or merely as a hedge against uncertainty concerning its future intentions and trajectory. Stretching the conceptual scope of balancing beyond the military domain generates unrealistically strict conditions that few states can satisfy. Even beyond the contemporary Asia-Pacific one would be hard-pressed to find a modern historical case that meets these conditions simultaneously during peacetime.²⁸ One consequence of such definitions is that practically significant balancing behavior is systematically overlooked.

A standardized definition of balancing with contemporary, real-world relevance should restrict the concept to policies in the military domain, and not be conditional on absence (or reduction) of commerce or diplomatic cooperation with the state constituting the perceived threat. Conversely, evidence of engagement in self-interested commerce or cooperation should not

²⁶ Chan, "An Odd Thing," 398, 401.

²⁷ For relevant definitions, see Kang, *China Rising*, 51, 53. See also Kang, "Why China's Rise Will Be Peaceful," 552.

²⁸ Many historical examples of states with tense or even adversarial relationships that nevertheless cooperated in other domains exist. For example, Britain cooperated with Germany throughout the 1930s while simultaneously engaging in a military buildup aimed at balancing against it. Art, "Correspondence: Striking the Balance," 180. For a more general argument, see Peter Liberman, "Trading with the Enemy: Security and Relative Economic Gains." *International Security* 21, no. 1 (1996): 147–75.

necessarily be interpreted as bandwagoning or accommodation—two theoretically-loaded concepts in the security studies literature not originally conceived as tantamount to the mere existence of bilateral trade. Beyond its theoretical and methodological benefits, such an approach would be consistent with that adopted by most contemporary policymakers, whose own views (and policies) tend to reflect such domain-differentiated nuance.²⁹

II.2.b: Problematic Metrics and Causal Inferences

Given rapid changes to the nature of and technologies involved in 21st century warfare, selective focus on a few conspicuous, easily observable and measurable (and often exclusively quantitative) indicators increasingly risks overlooking important concomitant phenomena and, accordingly, can lead to unwarranted causal inferences. In particular, more personnel or platforms do not necessarily indicate greater effective military capabilities, while fewer mean less. Similarly, stable defense budgets as a percentage-of-GDP or in the context of economic and fiscal challenges do not necessarily evince an absence of practically significant balancing behavior. A related issue is conclusions drawn based exclusively on observed outcomes without digging into underlying causes.

Such general methodological issues manifest in existing studies arguing that secondary states are not balancing against a perceived threat from Beijing. The following analysis highlights four cases-in-point. These studies should be applauded for identifying several noteworthy and theoretically- and practically-significant trends—especially their pushback of extreme claims of “arms races” unfolding across the contemporary Asia-Pacific. Yet their empirical analyses are, at best, incomplete; they overlook practically significant balancing behavior. Consequently, they reach unwarranted conclusions of “bandwagoning” with and “accommodation” of Beijing. In particular, consideration of a more exhaustive set of relevant metrics together with more extensive analysis of underlying causal mechanisms would have revealed practically significant balancing behavior where instead none was found.

“Internal Balancing”

²⁹ As then-Australian Defense Minister Smith argued, “there’s no inconsistency between a military alliance [...] with the United States and a comprehensive bilateral relationship with China.” “Australia Insists China Is ‘measured’ on US Troops,” *AFP*, November 21, 2011. Trade relations do not necessarily mean Australia is unconcerned about China; nor does Canberra balancing militarily preclude efforts to engage in mutually-beneficial commerce.

A popular metric for measuring internal balancing is military spending. The sub-literature on the contemporary Asia-Pacific is no exception. Recent studies claim that defense spending trends demonstrate that China's neighbors perceive no threat from—and therefore cannot be balancing against—Beijing.³⁰

Defense spending can be a very useful metric for measuring balancing behavior. As with any single metric, it is, at best, insufficient and may even be misleading if used inappropriately. How several recent studies employ regional defense spending data reveal potential pitfalls of insufficiently critical or solitary reliance on the most conspicuous, often quantitative metrics. Most importantly, regardless of their slopes—positive or negative—spending trends *in isolation* are insufficient grounds for concluding whether balancing behavior is occurring. Military funding is but one factor *potentially* affecting effective military power. Furthermore, it is an abstract input; not a specific, targeted output. Specific policies achieving effective enhancement of military capabilities against a perceived threat (output), regardless of associated cost, is a more useful metric. After all, even enormous defense spending increases may generate negligible—or even negative—practical benefits for strategic objectives (e.g., Wilhelmine naval buildup). Spending trends are metrics important to any study of balancing. But their significance should be analyzed, not imputed uncritically.

Nevertheless, in two recent studies military expenditures as percentages-of-GDP are problematically treated as the sole criterion for judging whether internal balancing is occurring.³¹ Beyond the danger of solitary reliance on any single metric as a general rule, defense spending in GDP-percentage terms is particularly problematic for two additional reasons: First, widespread and rapid economic growth across the Asia-Pacific has in important cases enabled significant increases in *absolute* defense spending. The resulting increased investment in military power has enabled practically significant enhancements to military capabilities that a focus on spending on a GDP-percentage basis misses entirely. Ironically, China's relatively stable defense budget *as-percentage-GDP* itself over the past two decades provides the most salient case-in-point, as China's military capabilities have grown in leaps-and-bounds (as has its *absolute* defense

³⁰ See Chan, "An Odd Thing"; Chan, *Looking for Balance*, chap. 3; Kang, "Paper Tiger"; Kang, "Looming Arms Race?"

³¹ Chan, "An Odd Thing"; Chan, *Looking for Balance*, chap. 3.

spending).³² Second, these studies baseline analyses of contemporary military expenditures trends before the Cold War's end.³³ That secondary states' defense spending as a percentage-of-GDP today is generally below late-Cold War levels sheds important light on leaders' domestic priorities, and drives home the important point that the Soviet Union was a bigger concern. But it lends minimal purchase to answering these studies' stated research question: whether states *today* perceive China as a threat and are balancing against it militarily.³⁴ Here, a comparison of U.S. defense spending during the Cold War and today illustrate this point.

Misapplied, other quantitative metrics widely-used to measure internal balancing can also risk problematic inferences. In particular, a common tendency is to conclude from quantitative decreases (or increases) in numbers of personnel or weapons platforms that states must be a) reducing (or enhancing) their military capabilities and therefore b) do not (or do) perceive an external threat. Yet to do so without considering strategic context, qualitative characteristics of the specific unit/platform in question, and the causal driver of observed quantitative changes is ill-advised. For example, to buttress the claim that regional states do not fear China's rise one recent study points to absolute reductions in Vietnam's and Japan's ground forces.³⁵ Yet as demonstrated in Section 4, when examined in strategic context quantitative decreases can paradoxically suggest *increasing* balancing against perceived threats from China. Indeed, the Asia-Pacific is a largely maritime theater where most contemporary flashpoints involve maritime territory, features, and resources. When coupled with shifts in force structure and posture to confront perceived threats in other domains (e.g., maritime or air), ground force reductions can effectively result in *increased* capabilities useful for confronting a particular threat. This is especially true for states with historically massive and poorly educated, trained, and equipped land armies. Again, China itself provides a case-in-point.³⁶

Analyses of balancing based on one or several quantitative metrics with insufficient consideration of strategic context, underlying causal drivers, and other potentially more practically

³² Adam P. Liff and Andrew S. Erickson, "Demystifying China's Defence Spending: Less Mysterious in the Aggregate," *The China Quarterly* 216 (2013): 805–30.

³³ Kang, "Paper Tiger."; Chan, *Looking for Balance*, chap. 3.

³⁴ For related critique and rebuttal, see Fu-Liff/Ikenberry exchange in Fu, et al. "Correspondence" 181–186; 196–198.

³⁵ Kang, *China Rising*, chap. 3.

³⁶ Between 1991 and today, PLA ground forces have shrunk by roughly 1,000,000 personnel. Between 1991 and 2011, the number of combat aircraft declined by nearly 70-percent. This "leaner, meaner" PLA far better prepared for a 21st century conflict today than in 1991, when it was bloated and qualitatively backward—largely reliant on 1950s-era Soviet weaponry.

consequential quantitative and qualitative trends are often incomplete and risk unwarranted causal inferences. In the two instances above, metrics harnessed to argue that states are bandwagoning with or accommodating Beijing in important cases actually suggest the diametrically-opposite phenomenon.

“External Balancing”

Similar methodological issues manifest in analyses of metrics frequently associated with Waltz’ second category of “external balancing.” Two popular quantitative metrics are U.S. military personnel stationed in the country of interest and formation of formal military alliances.

One recent study of the contemporary Asia-Pacific bases measurement of secondary states’ external balancing behavior entirely on the first metric.³⁷ Singular reliance on U.S. military personnel is excessively U.S.-centric and methodologically problematic, especially in an era and region in which the U.S. military focuses on “places, not bases.” Ironically, increased focus on *access* to military facilities of allied and partner states instead of increasing permanently-stationed personnel—and rotations of personnel currently stationed in countries on China’s immediate periphery is a direct response to a perceived China threat. The goal is to move bases beyond the reach of China’s increasingly robust short- and medium-range conventionally-tipped ballistic missile arsenal. Far from being a sufficient metric for measuring external balancing behavior in the Asia-Pacific today, it arguably is not even necessary.

Another recent study concludes from the absence of new formal mutual defense pacts in the region that secondary states are not externally balancing against Beijing.³⁸ Though faithful to traditional metrics widely employed in the balancing literature, applied to the contemporary Asia-Pacific this seems an inappropriate standard. First, many of the region’s wealthiest secondary states—those most capable of effectively balancing against China—were *already* established U.S. treaty allies throughout the period under examination. Second, singular reliance on such a high evidentiary threshold leads one to overlook substantial and accelerating efforts of both U.S. allies and non-allies to deepen practical defense cooperation, interoperability, and other military ties with the U.S. *and with one another* through measures short of signing conspicuous new treaty alliances.

³⁷ Chan, “An Odd Thing,” 399–401.

³⁸ Chan, *Looking for Balance*, chap. 3.

III: Toward an Integrated, Standardized Methodology

This section proposes a straightforward, two-step methodological framework to facilitate valid and reliable empirical tests for balancing behavior in a 21st-century context. It offers explicit and analytically tractable definitions; proposes extensive and better-specified menus of candidate metrics most relevant for measuring state-led efforts to enhance military capabilities in response to a perceived external threat; and stresses the importance of linking observed military policy outcome(s) (dependent variable) to the posited driver of those outcomes (independent variable).

A better integrated, more standardized analytical framework for tests of balancing behavior should begin with an explicit, analytically tractable definition of the dependent variable that is faithful to the spirit of the concept as originally conceived. It must avoid inappropriate “concept-stretching.” Accordingly, the proposed framework has at its core a strict definition taking balancing back to its “hardest” conceptual roots: *Balancing behavior* is 1) restricted to the military domain; 2) a policy response to perceived direct or indirect *military* threats to a state’s security or material interests by another state; and 3) characterized exclusively by efforts to enhance the state’s *military* capabilities to deter or, if deterrence fails, defeat the potential aggressor state in kinetic or non-kinetic military conflict.

Building off this strictly bounded definition, the remainder of this section proposes a two-step, broadly-applicable methodological framework to assess the degree to which a given state is engaging in practically significant efforts to enhance its military capabilities in response to a perceived external military threat. This framework is designed to enhance transparency and replicability through standardization, and to maximize empirical tests’ validity.

Central to this approach is an explicit list of practically significant--yet not always conspicuous--internal and external force development and employment measures leaders may adopt to enhance a state’s military capabilities. These metrics provide a useful complement to (or replacement for) the often underspecified, excessively restrictive and in some cases even potentially misleading metrics widely associated with the traditional categories internal and external balancing: superficial and typically easily quantifiable measures of “arms buildups” and new formal treaty alliances. While designed with the balancing literature in mind, the utility of this approach and associated metrics should be applicable to studies of various phenomena of interest to international security scholars.

The first step of the proposed framework is a comprehensive survey of measures the state in question could have adopted to enhance its military capabilities (below, *military capabilities enhancement*, or MCE). The objective is to identify *candidate* symptoms of balancing behavior by creating a map of observed changes to a state's military policies during a particular period of time. In contrast, limiting empirical surveys *a priori* to a few select, often conspicuous and easily quantifiable measures risks less obvious, but potentially equally or more practically significant qualitative and quantitative factors with direct implications for the state's effective military capabilities in a particular anticipated contingency being overlooked.

A candidate list of MCE measures appears in Table 2. While remaining faithful to the spirit of Waltz's original categorization, it replaces the problematic categories of internal and external balancing with new descriptive labels. The first MCE category, *force development*, captures internal and external measures to enhance general warfighting capabilities of a given state's military forces qualitatively and quantitatively. The second category, *force employment*, captures internal and external measures aimed at maximizing leaders' ability to utilize those forces expeditiously, effectively, and efficiently in a particular posited contingency. In addition to subsuming widely-used traditional metrics—e.g., defense spending and formal treaty alliances—these more inclusive categories are designed to draw scholars' attention to the important, yet often less conspicuous or more difficult to measure—and therefore often overlooked—force development and employment policies that leaders of 21st-century militaries may adopt in response to a perceived external threat. These more fine-grained metrics also facilitate identification of the specific threat and contingency against which the observed MCE are targeted. There are no explicit temporal or geographic scope conditions for these metrics. Yet they should be especially useful for contemporary cases. They are designed to reflect the rapidly changing nature of warfare in the information age. In an era of joint operations, precision guided missiles, data links, and the advent of new threat domains (e.g., cyber), actual military capabilities and effectiveness are increasingly determined by factors less conspicuous and amenable to quantification than, say, new mutual defense pacts or number of military personnel.

Table 2: Candidate metrics for measuring military capabilities enhancement (MCE) efforts

	<u>Internal Measures</u>	<u>External Measures</u>
<u>Force Development</u>	Changes to force structure; rationalizing national-security decision-making by creating or reforming new institutions; quantitative increases in defense budgets and/or weapons acquisitions; qualitative improvements to weapons systems and technologies; greater reliance on networks as ‘force-multipliers’; development of new capabilities in new domains (e.g., cyber, space), procurement of superior platforms and software from abroad, etc.	Establishing and/or deepening defense technology cooperation and joint development of weapons; various efforts to improve coordination and operational efficiencies and enhance interoperability, including selling advanced and more interoperable weaponry.
<u>Force Employment</u>	Changes to force posture, doctrinal revision, and/or innovation to more effectively prosecute a war given an expected contingency; enhancing joint operational capability; adopting rationalization and efficiency measures; prepositioning equipment	Forming new formal treaty alliances; establishing new security partnerships short of mutual defense pacts; tightening existing security relationships by taking on new mission responsibilities or burden sharing; integrating strategic objectives; establishing new bases; establishing joint command centers; co-locating forces; forward deploying forces; rotating forces through other states’ territory; improving interoperability; expanding intelligence sharing; engaging in joint contingency planning; expanding joint exercises and training; developing joint doctrine; minimizing redundancies in tactics; etc.

These MCE category labels offer two main advantages over the traditional categories of “internal balancing” and “external balancing.” First, they facilitate usage of more extensive and concrete lists of candidate MCE measures most relevant to balancing behavior in the 21st century. Second, by not incorporating the term “balancing” they avoid baking into the MCE category label an *a priori* causal claim that observation of any associated metric necessarily implies that balancing is occurring. Avoiding implied causality in the outcome variable label reduces the risk

of potentially invalid assumptions—i.e., that *any* manifestation of associated MCE (or lack thereof) is necessarily evidence of balancing (or lack thereof).

Indeed, valid judgments about the presence or absence of balancing should be based on extensive analysis of *both* observed outcomes and their causal drivers. Accordingly, the proposed framework's second step is designed to minimize unwarranted causal inferences. Before drawing conclusions about whether balancing behavior is present, scholars should confirm whether MCE outcomes observed during Step 1's empirical survey are attributable to the hypothesized causal mechanism: a desire to balance against a specific perceived state-based military threat. Bypassing this crucial step risks erroneously imputing a cause based solely on an observation of the dependent variable.

It is hoped that this analytical framework can enhance the validity and replicability of theory testing and development in contemporary contexts, in the process standardizing methodological approaches in the balancing literature.

IV: Empirical Analysis: Secondary State Responses to China's Rise

This section demonstrates the advantages of the proposed two-step framework through an original empirical survey of recent developments in the contemporary Asia-Pacific, specifically the military policy responses of key "secondary states" to China's rise. It reveals how traditional approaches have led several past studies to significantly understate, and in some cases inappropriately dismiss categorically, the extent to which they are engaging in balancing behavior against perceived threats from China—with and without U.S. support. It does so while explicitly avoiding "concept creep"—restricting its analytical lens consistent with the definition of balancing behavior introduced above: military force development or employment responses to perceived military threats to a state's security or material interests.

In keeping with the prescribed two-step protocol, the first step is to look for signs that secondary states are adopting internal or external force development or force employment measures aimed at enhancing military capabilities in practically significant ways. The second step is to assess whether these observed MCE are best attributed to the independent variable and causal mechanism of interest: a perception of China's rise or specific behaviors as threatening.

This section proceeds as follows. First, it offers a concise overview of relevant aspects of China's rise over the past two decades. This is followed by analyses of the military policy responses

of four secondary states: Australia, Japan, Singapore and Vietnam. In the interest of case selection diversity, the first two states maintain formal security treaties with the United States. The latter two do not. The analysis of this section reveals that, contrary to the findings of some recent studies on the topic, in most cases China's rise is eliciting significant, and accelerating, balancing behavior from key neighbors, both internally and externally. Perhaps most interestingly, as U.S. Defense Secretary Ashton Carter noted recently, China is "bringing countries in the region together in new ways."³⁹

IV.1 Rising China

For more than two decades, rapid increases to military spending have enabled Beijing to achieve remarkable and rapid improvements to its modern warfighting capabilities. Between 1990 and 2015, China's official defense budget increased by double-digits in nominal terms every year except 2010. China's official 1997 defense budget was \$10 billion – roughly the same as Taiwan's and one-fourth that of Japan. Today, Beijing's official defense budget – \$147 billion – is nearly four-times Japan's and 13 times that of Taiwan. Various exclusions from Beijing's official military budget mean actual spending is much higher.⁴⁰

Regardless of Beijing's intentions, the People's Liberation Army's (PLA) rapid modernization constitutes a potential threat to China's neighbors. Though far from achieving conventional "parity" with the globally-distributed U.S. military, the increasingly capable PLA has for years already posed severe asymmetric threats to even the region's most advanced militaries, including the U.S.⁴¹ Two cases-in-point are the PLA's robust conventional ballistic missile and cruise missile programs. Qualitatively, the modernity and capability of PLA operational systems (especially missile, naval, air, cyber, and space capabilities) has increased significantly.⁴² Of direct relevance to Beijing's coercive leverage in maritime disputes, China now possesses the world's largest coast guard fleet with more hulls than all its neighbors combined.⁴³

³⁹ U.S. Rebukes China on Efforts to Build Artificial Islands *New York Times*, May 28, 2015.

⁴⁰ Liff and Erickson, "Demystifying," pp. 809-812.

⁴¹ Thomas J. Christensen, "Posing Problems without Catching up: China's Rise and Challenges for U.S. Security Policy," *International Security* 25, no. 4 (Spring 2001), pp. 5–40.

⁴² Ronald O'Rourke, "China Naval Modernization," *Congressional Research Service*, March 31, 2016, pp. 5-6.

⁴³ Ryan D. Martinson, "China's Second Navy," *Proceedings Magazine*, April 2015.

Meanwhile, its coercive capabilities using cyber, space, and kinetic power projection are also growing significantly.⁴⁴

Beyond rapidly advancing capabilities, China's policies and rhetoric toward its neighbors are perceived overseas as increasingly and provocatively "assertive," even "aggressive."⁴⁵ This is especially true as it concerns Beijing's efforts to assert its sovereignty claims in the South and East China Seas. For its part, China's government and military frequently criticize U.S. "containment" (*ezhi*) and "encirclement" (*weidu*) efforts, place the blame entirely on the U.S. and its allies, and bemoan an alleged "China threat theory" (*zhongguo weixielun*) cynically promulgated for "ulterior motives" (*bieyouyongxin*).⁴⁶

In this context, correctly answering the question of how regional states are responding to China's rise becomes increasingly salient—for both theory and policy.

IV.2: Step 1 Empirical Survey

This section implements the first step of the methodological framework introduced in Section 2.2. It shows concretely how several recent studies relying on traditional metrics mischaracterize the balancing responses of regional states. Specific to this article, the objective is to determine whether four key Asia-Pacific secondary states are adopting internal or external force development or force employment policies (i.e., MCE) that could *potentially* constitute "hard" military balancing responses against China. In social-scientific terms, the objective is to determine whether the value of the dependent variable is "0" (i.e., the state in question shows no sign of efforts to significantly enhance its military capabilities) or "1" (i.e., the state in question shows clear signs of efforts to significantly enhance its military capabilities).⁴⁷ Cases appear in alphabetical order.

Australia

Under Labor Prime Minister Kevin Rudd (2007-2010), Australia's 2009 defense white paper called for a two-decade buildup during which defense budgets would increase every year. If

⁴⁴ Office of the Secretary of Defense, *Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China*, Annual Report to Congress (Office of the Secretary of Defense, 2015).

⁴⁵ For a critique of the 'assertiveness meme,' see Alastair Iain Johnston, "How New and Assertive Is China's New Assertiveness?," *International Security* 37, no. 4 (Spring 2013): 7–48.

⁴⁶ Adam P. Liff, "China and the U.S. Alliance System," working paper, Indiana University, 2016.

⁴⁷ If the observed realization of the dependent variable is "1," then step 2 will search for evidence that it is in fact driven by the causal mechanism of interest—a perceived threat from China.

implemented faithfully, it would be the largest buildup since 1945, entailing \$52 billion in procurement spending, with heavy investments in naval ships such as Aegis air warfare destroyers and Australia's largest-ever defense project, the next generation "Future Submarine," as well as airpower; most notably the F-35 Joint Strike Fighter.⁴⁸ In 2013 Rudd's successor confirmed most long-term acquisition plans and ramped up defense spending.⁴⁹ Tony Abbott's Liberal-National Party coalition continued on this basic course. In 2014, Canberra further boosted military spending by 6.1-percent *in real terms*, inked a US \$12 billion deal to procure 58 F-35A Joint Strike Fighters—its largest-ever military purchase and a significant upgrade over the jets currently in its air force's inventory, and pledged to allocate US \$115 billion to the military through June 2018. The Turnbull Administration's 2016 Defense White Paper's commits to ambitious procurements, increase defense spending to A\$195 billion over ten years, the "most ambitious plan to regenerate the Royal Australian Navy since [1945]," and calls a "strong and deep alliance" with Washington "the core of Australia's security and defense planning." It also stresses strengthened force posture in northern Australia.⁵⁰ In short, significant internal enhancements to Australia's military capabilities attract support across the political spectrum. Beyond these internal efforts to enhance military capabilities qualitatively and quantitatively, Canberra has simultaneously pursued significantly closer ties with its long-time U.S. ally. Australia continues to procure systems compatible with those of the U.S. military, and in 2010 called for a defense cooperation treaty.⁵¹ Canberra and Washington have expanded regular joint military exercises, and now conduct dozens each year. Both measures improve interoperability—effectively enhancing the allies' aggregate military power. Additional measures designed to update the alliance to operate more effectively in the 21st century include incorporating cyber defense into their defense treaty, as well as a joint communique in 2011 presaging greater interoperability, consultations on ballistic missile defense and force posture alignment.⁵² That same year, Australia's defense minister suggested that Australia may invite America to preposition equipment on Australian soil and have greater access

⁴⁸ "Australia's 20-year defence White Paper covers most of the bases," *Jane's Defence Weekly*, May 6, 2009.

⁴⁹ Mark Thomson, *Deciphering Australia's Defense Budget*, Asia Pacific Bulletin (East-West Center in Washington, May 23, 2013).

⁵⁰ "2016 Defence White Paper." [Http://www.defence.gov.au/](http://www.defence.gov.au/), 2016.

<http://www.defence.gov.au/whitepaper/Docs/2016-Defence-White-Paper.pdf>.

⁵¹ "Australia calls for stronger US ties to support modernisation," *Jane's Defence Weekly*, March 19, 2010.

⁵² "Cyber Attack Threats Added to U.S., Australia Defense Treaty," *Bloomberg*, September 15, 2011; "AUSMIN 2011 Joint Communiqué", n.d., <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2011/09/172517.htm>.

to and use of Australian test ranges, training grounds, bases, and ports.⁵³ U.S. President Barack Obama told the Australian Parliament that he had made a “deliberate and strategic decision” to increase U.S. military access to Australian airfields, further bolster joint exercise and training, and deploy more than 2000 U.S. Marines to an Australian base.⁵⁴ More recently, as part of the 2014 Force Posture Initiative to increase U.S. naval and air access to Australian bases, the allies are in discussions of possible rotations of and joint training with U.S. long-range strategic bombers and refueling aircraft.⁵⁵

Canberra has pursued additional external measures to bolster its effective military capabilities, including expanded effective training and exercises, and additional measures to deepen interoperability with other US security allies and partners, above all Japan. Since 2002, Australia has held five high-level (ministerial) Trilateral Strategic Dialogues with Washington and Japan, defended Japan’s Self-Defense Forces (JSDF) in Iraq, and signed a breakthrough Joint Declaration on Security Cooperation with Tokyo in 2007, the result of which has been a qualitative and quantitative expansion of defense links, annual meetings between foreign and defense ministers, and significantly deepened military cooperation.⁵⁶ The trend continues, and the AUSMIN 2011 Joint Communique called for increasing interoperability and training opportunities among the three countries, as well as trilateral policy coordination.⁵⁷ Canberra and Tokyo have established and expanded unprecedented levels of bilateral and multilateral joint military exercises, including their first-ever joint air operations and bilateral antisubmarine warfare exercises.⁵⁸

In early 2013, the Japan-Australia Acquisition and Cross-servicing Agreement and Information Security Agreement gave bilateral defense cooperation an unprecedented legal foundation. In 2014, Abbott and Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe signed several additional security deals, including on joint development of defense technology. During his visit to Tokyo that year, Abbott became the first foreign leader to attend a meeting of Japan’s National Security Council and called for enhanced interoperability, more exercises, and greater intelligence

⁵³ “US eyes base in state’s Outback,” *The Advertiser*, July 29, 2011.

⁵⁴ “Remarks By President Obama to the Australian Parliament,” November 17, 2011, <http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2011/11/17/remarks-president-obama-australian-parliament>.

⁵⁵ “US In Talks To Deploy B-1 Bombers,”

⁵⁶ Evan S. Medeiros et al., *Pacific Currents: The Responses of U.S. Allies and Security Partners in East Asia to China’s Rise* (Santa Monica, Calif: RAND Corporation, 2008), pp. 213–4.

⁵⁷ “AUSMIN 2011 Joint Communique.”

⁵⁸ “Australia and Japan conduct first joint air operations,” *Jane’s Defence Weekly*, July 28, 2011.

cooperation.⁵⁹ Canberra and Tokyo are currently negotiating their first-ever Status of Forces Agreement and in 2015 Japan sent forces to participate in the biannual U.S.-Australia Talisman Sabre exercises in Australia.⁶⁰ Though no decision has been made, Canberra may even turn to Japan for Australia's largest-ever defense contract—12 submarines—a decision constituting a significant upgrade of bilateral military ties and one which would deepen trilateral military interoperability, since the submarines would likely be fitted with U.S. weapons and combat systems. Experts warn the deal would be “laden with geopolitical consequences.”⁶¹ Most recently, Japan's government suggests that Australian forces reportedly would be foreign forces eligible for JSDF protection and logistic support under a July 2014 reinterpretation of Japan's constitution to allow limited exercise of collective self-defense.⁶² In a December 2015 joint statement, Turnbull and Abe expressed strong opposition to activities to alter the status quo in the South China Sea and “encouraged continued progress” toward measures to “facilitate joint [Australia-Japan] operations and exercises.”⁶³ Though not a formal treaty alliance, each afore-mentioned development is practically significant.

Japan

Despite domestic political, normative, and structural headwinds Tokyo has achieved significant improvements to its military capabilities by maximizing efficiencies. While Japan's recent (yet moderate) defense budget increases are what make global headlines, far less conspicuous but arguably more practically significant enhancements to military capabilities been underway for years. Under Abe, Japan's increasingly “proactive” approach to both national and regional security has accelerated significantly.

Internally, security-relevant reforms date two decades.⁶⁴ More recently, they include upgrading Japan's Defense Agency to a full-fledged ministry (2007), establishing its first-ever national security council and national security strategy (2013). JSDF doctrine has also undergone significant changes. Introduced in 2010 and updated to emphasize “jointness” in 2013, the

⁵⁹ “Australia Defends Security Deal with Japan,” *AFP*, April 8, 2014.

⁶⁰ “Japan moves to make Australia ‘quasi-ally’ in national security,” *Asahi Shimbun*, November 10, 2014.

⁶¹ “Submarines Purchase Bolsters Japan, US Ties — Shift Risks China Row,” *The Australian*, September 9, 2014.

⁶² Yusuke Ishihara. “The Case for Japan–Australia Defence Cooperation Guidelines.” *The Strategist*, May 6, 2015. <http://www.aspistrategist.org.au/the-case-for-japan-australia-defence-cooperation-guidelines/>

⁶³ “Abe, Turnbull affirm opposition to South China Sea buildup,” *Nikkei*, December 19, 2015.

⁶⁴ Liff, “Abe the Evolutionary.”

“Dynamic Defense Force” concept formalized an ongoing quiet, yet significant, shift of force posture toward Japan’s southwestern islands (i.e., those closest to China) and increased emphasis on highly-mobile forces capable of responding to contingencies running the gamut from peacetime to armed attack.⁶⁵ Tokyo has moved existing, highly capable platforms southwest, such as a squadron of F-15s recently relocated to Okinawa, and is shifting coastal defense units concomitantly. It has also constructed ballistic missile radar, signal intelligence facilities, and monitoring posts on remote southwest islands, and is now considering permanently deploying hundreds of troops there.⁶⁶ Meanwhile, Ground Self-defense Forces (GSDF) regional units based in Kyushu, in coordination with the Maritime Self-defense Forces (MSDF) and Air Self-defense Forces (ASDF), have initiated field training exercises focused on responding to an invasion of offshore islands.⁶⁷ Also largely under the radar, over the past decade Japan has significantly bolstered its robust Coast Guard.⁶⁸ Meanwhile, focus on military threats in cyber and space has accelerated.

These more subtle internal changes occur in concert with more traditional qualitative *and* quantitative improvements. Over the past decade, Tokyo has announced plans to expand its submarine fleet to 22 hulls, its largest size since 1945, double its Aegis destroyer fleet, and procure up to 70 P-1 maritime patrol aircraft to replace its aging P-3C fleet. It has commissioned two *Hyuga*-class helicopter destroyers to replace an inferior earlier class, which will soon be joined by two even larger and more capable *Izumo*-class helicopter destroyers. As of 2013, it plans to procure 28 top-of-the-line F-35 fighter jets and seven more capable destroyers. The Abe administration will stand up by 2018 a Japanese amphibious force for the first time since 1945 and announced

⁶⁵ Ministry of Defense (Japan), “Defense Activities,” accessed July 1, 2014, http://www.mod.go.jp/e/d_act/d_policy/national.html.

⁶⁶ “GSDF May Permanently Station Hundreds of Troops on Okinawan Island,” *Asahi Shimbun*, April 27, 2015.

⁶⁷ Ministry of Defense (Japan), *Defense Programs and Budget of Japan: Overview of FY2010 Budget*, <http://www.mod.go.jp/e/data/pdf/220416.pdf>, p. 6. In 2005, it was announced that the government had prepared a plan to defend Japan’s southwest from possible invasion by dispatching a joint JSDF force spearheaded by 55,000 JGSDF troops. “Defense plan prepared for remote islands,” *Japan Times*, January 16, 2005.

⁶⁸ Richard J. Samuels, “‘New Fighting Power!’ Japan’s Growing Maritime Capabilities and East Asian Security,” *International Security* 32, no. 3 (Winter 2007): 84–112; Yoko Masuda, “The Race to Beef Up Japan’s Coast Guard,” *Japan Real Time—WSJ*, October 27, 2012, <http://blogs.wsj.com/japanrealtime/2012/10/27/the-race-to-beef-up-japans-coast-guard/?mod=WSJBlogtab/print/>.

plans to purchase 17 Osprey tilt-rotor aircraft and 52 amphibious vehicles in support.⁶⁹ JASDF reportedly will also double the number of F-15s based in Okinawa.⁷⁰

Externally, Tokyo has significantly deepened military ties with the United States and Washington's Asia-Pacific security allies and partners to enhance deterrence and interoperability through bilateral and multilateral training and exercises, expanded defense equipment and technology cooperation, and capacity building. In 2012, Abe called for the creation of a "democratic security diamond" linking Japan, Australia, India, and the U.S. With Washington, ongoing measures to enhance interoperability include regular joint air and land exercises.⁷¹ The U.S. Navy and MSDF reportedly now hold over 100 bilateral joint exercises annually.⁷² The allies announced common strategic objectives in 2005 (including the Taiwan Strait) and in 2006 announced a "realignment roadmap" to further enhance interoperability. This effort includes co-locating bases in Japan and ramping up joint training and operations. Over the past decade, the U.S. and Japan have deepened cooperation on ballistic missile defense, including joint production of SM-3 Block-IIA interceptor missiles, cyber, and space.⁷³ The two militaries have deepened interoperability through regional and global operations, including the JSDF's refueling of coalition forces in the Indian Ocean during Operation Enduring Freedom; humanitarian assistance and disaster relief; anti-piracy in the Gulf of Aden; and airlifting personnel and supplies in Kuwait and Iraq. Most recently, the April 2015 Guidelines for U.S.-Japan Defense Cooperation build on two decades of gradual progress to launch bilateral cooperation into a new stage, opening new avenues for more robust, flexible, and effective defense cooperation in traditional and nontraditional security. Together with last year's Constitutional reinterpretation, they bolster deterrence by expanding the scope of bilateral and multilateral training and exercises and are designed to

⁶⁹ "Chuki Boeiryoku Seibi Keikaku (Heisei 26nendo~Heisei 30nendo) Ni Tsuite" [Concerning the Mid-term Defense Program (2014~2018)] (Tokyo: Japanese Ministry of Defense, 2013), December 17, 2013, http://www.mod.go.jp/j/approach/agenda/guideline/2014/pdf/chuki_seibi26-30.pdf,

⁷⁰ "Japan to Boost Defense in Response to PLA Drills in West Pacific," *Want China Times*, January 6, 2015, <http://www.wantchinatimes.com/news-subclass-cnt.aspx?cid=1101&MainCatID=11&id=20150106000012>.

⁷¹ "Japanese Troops Shore Up Skills," *Los Angeles Times*, January 13, 2006; "Exercise Cope North focuses enhances Japan, U.S. operations," *Andersen Air Force Base*, January 25, 2009, <http://www.andersen.af.mil/news/story.asp?id=123132615>; "U.S., Japanese Airmen train for Red Flag-Alaska," *U.S. Air Force*, May 20, 2010, <http://www.af.mil/news/story.asp?id=123205499>.

⁷² Emma Chanlett-Avery, *The U.S.-Japan Alliance*, CRS Report for Congress (Washington, D.C: Congressional Research Service, January 18, 2011), p. 12.

⁷³ "U.S., Japan Expand Missile-Defense Plan," *Washington Post*, June 23, 2006.

strengthen the alliance politically and operationally.⁷⁴ Institutionally, the alliance's new standing coordination and upgraded bilateral planning mechanisms will enhance interoperability, information sharing, inter-agency coordination, and crisis management.⁷⁵ Recognizing space and cyber as new domains evinces cooperation actively tailored to address 21st-century threats. Legislation passed in 2015 entails commitments to more active, integrated support of U.S. and other nations' armed forces logistically and, in cases where they are "engaged in activities that contribute to the defense of Japan," defensive kinetic force. Though less ambitious than Abe sought, enshrining in law an expanded menu of JSDF activities, including collective self-defense, will improve JSDF training, exercises, and readiness—independent of and together with other countries.⁷⁶

Tokyo is also actively pursuing tighter military ties with its neighbors, especially Australia, but also South Korea, India, and the Philippines, even Vietnam. Japan's evolving relationship with Australia was discussed earlier. Under the 2014 Three Principles on Transfer of Defense Equipment and Technology—which essentially lifted a decades-old arms export ban, international defense and industrial cooperation is expanding significantly. If Canberra does purchase Japan's *Soryu*-class submarines, the sale would constitute Tokyo's most significant post-war military technology transfer, and the first major export and joint development/production program beyond Washington. Tokyo has called Australia's possible selection of Japan's submarines of "significant strategic importance" and that it would "lead to operational cooperation" among the three militaries.⁷⁷ In 2011, Tokyo and Seoul called for a bilateral acquisition and cross-servicing agreement and a major intelligence sharing agreement.⁷⁸ That same year, Washington and Tokyo for the first time invited South Korea to observe their largest joint naval exercises.⁷⁹ In 2008 Japan

⁷⁴ Sheila A. Smith, "Reinterpreting Japan's Constitution," *Asia Unbound*, July 2, 2014, <http://blogs.cfr.org/asia/2014/07/02/reinterpreting-japans-constitution/>.

⁷⁵ Adam P. Liff, "Japan's Defense Policy: Abe the Evolutionary," *The Washington Quarterly* (2015), 38 no. 2 (2015), 79-99.

⁷⁶ "The Guidelines for U.S.-Japan Defense Cooperation" (Department of Defense, April 27, 2015), http://www.defense.gov/pubs/20150427_--_GUIDELINES_FOR_US-JAPAN_DEFENSE_COOPERATION_FINAL&CLEAN.pdf.

⁷⁷ "Japan links Australian Submarine Bid to Regional Security," *AFP*, November 22, 2015.

⁷⁸ "Nikkan Boeisho Kaidan No Gaiyo [Outline of Japan-ROK Defense Minister's Discussion]" (Ministry of Defense (Japan), June 4, 2011), <http://www.mod.go.jp/j/press/youjin/2011/06/04f.pdf>. As of this writing, political contretemps over history issues have prevented its fruition, however.

⁷⁹ "Largest joint US-Japan naval drills start," *Jane's Defence Weekly*, December 3, 2010. Recent political tensions over historical issues, however, have frozen progress.

and India proclaimed that their bilateral strategic partnership would become “an essential pillar for the future architecture of the region.”⁸⁰ In 2014 the relationship was upgraded to a “special strategic and global partnership,” entailing new agreements to hold regular joint naval exercises, discuss greater defense technical cooperation and consider establishing a new two-plus-two ministerial bilateral security dialogue.⁸¹ In March 2016, another round of trilateral Japan-U.S.-Indian naval exercises near the East and South China Seas were announced.⁸² Manila and Tokyo established bilateral defense dialogues and strategic partnerships in 2006 and 2009, and since 2015 have signed a Joint Declaration on security and Japan’s first-ever defense equipment transfer agreement with a Southeast Asian country, expanded bilateral and multilateral exercises, Japanese provision of defense assets beyond patrol vessels already being built, and—most remarkably—a possible Visiting Forces Agreement to allow JSDF to use Philippines’ bases rotationally, facilitating operations in the South China Sea.⁸³ In March 2016, Tokyo agreed to lease aircraft to help the Philippines patrol the South China Sea. In April, two MSDF destroyers and a submarine docked at Subic Bay. Meanwhile, Manila has green-lit the Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement to grant the U.S. military access to five Philippine bases, plans to reopen Subic Bay—the former U.S. naval facility—and is receiving significantly more military aid from Washington than in recent years.⁸⁴ In 2014 Canberra and Manila expressed support for Tokyo’s effort—achieved via a historic Cabinet Resolution on July 1—to “reinterpret” Japan’s constitution to enable it to exercise the U.N.-sanctioned right of collective self-defense.⁸⁵ Together with the the U.S.-Japan Defense Guidelines, Tokyo’s decision heralds a significant expansion of Tokyo’s defense cooperation and deepening interoperability with Washington, Canberra, and other regional states and further strengthening of Japan’s security policy posture in the Asia-Pacific. Tokyo is reportedly considering exercises and possibly even patrols in the South China Sea.⁸⁶

⁸⁰ “Joint Statement on the Advancement of the Strategic and Global Partnership between Japan and India,” *Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan*, October 22, 2008, http://www.mofa.go.jp/region/asia-paci/india/pmv0810/joint_s.html.

⁸¹ “Japan, India to up Economy, Security Ties,” *Yomiuri Shimbun*, September 3, 2014.

⁸² “U.S., India, Japan Plan Joint Naval Exercises Near South China Sea,” *Wall Street Journal*, March 3, 2016. <http://www.wsj.com/articles/u-s-india-japan-plan-joint-naval-exercises-near-south-china-sea-1457010828>

⁸³ MOFA(Japan), “Japan-Philippines Joint Declaration,” June 4, 2015. http://www.mofa.go.jp/s_sa/sea2/ph/page4e_000280.html

⁸⁴ “U.S. Set to Deploy Troops to Philippines in Rebalancing Act,” *Wall Street Journal*, March 20, 2016.

⁸⁵ “Philippine Leader Backs Larger Japan Military Role,” *Associated Press*, June 24, 2014.

⁸⁶ “Japan Says South China Sea Security Impacts National Interests,” *Reuters*, February 4, 2015, <http://uk.reuters.com/assets/print?aid=UKKBN0L80KJ20150204>.

Singapore

Distinct from Japan and Australia, Singapore had never been a formal U.S. treaty ally. Yet it has developed an extremely close military relationship with Washington because of concerns about possible regional instability.⁸⁷ As the Singaporean prime minister stated in 2000, “The US presence has been a determining reason for the peace and stability Asia enjoys today. It has helped turn an unstable region of tension and strife into a booming and dynamic Southeast Asia.”⁸⁸ Reflecting this assessment, ensuring the U.S. military remains engaged and forward-deployed in East Asia is a key Singaporean foreign policy objective.⁸⁹

As a small country of five million, there are practical limits to Singapore’s ability to internally enhance its military capabilities. Yet it allocates roughly one-fourth of national spending to defense, has the largest defense budget in Southeast Asia, and is the world’s fifth largest arms-importer.⁹⁰ Defense spending increased by 5.7-percent in 2015 to roughly US \$10 billion, building on a decade of annual increases averaging 4-percent.⁹¹ It has used these funds to enhance its naval and air power. For example, it purchased modern, air-independent propulsion Swedish Archer-class subs in 2005 and recently announcing plans to replace obsolescent boats with German Type-218SG attack submarines. In the air, since 2005, Singapore has further expanded its fleet of F-15SGs to 40⁹² and in 2014 announced a US \$2.4 billion agreement with Washington to upgrade its F-16C/Ds fleet—originally purchased between 1998 and 2004.⁹³ Going forward, it is widely expected to invest in more high-tech, networked platforms, including the most advanced fighter the U.S. currently manufactures: the F-35s Joint Strike Fighter.⁹⁴

⁸⁷ Robyn Klingler-Vidra, “The Pragmatic ‘Little Red Dot’: Singapore’s US Hedge against China,” 2012, pp. 67; 71–72.

⁸⁸ Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong, “ASEAN-US Relations: Challenges” (Speech presented at the Asia Society, Singapore, September 7, 2000), <http://asiasociety.org/asean-us-relations-challenges>.

⁸⁹ Medeiros et al., *Pacific Currents*, pp. 185–186.

⁹⁰ “Singapore: Small State, Big Weapons Buyer,” *Al Jazeera*, March 28, 2014, <http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/features/2014/03/singapore-small-state-big-arms-purchases-2014320922191312.html>.

⁹¹ Kelvin Wong, “Singapore Announces Latest Defence Acquisition Plans,” *Jane’s Defence Weekly* 52, no. 16 (March 4, 2015), <http://search.proquest.com/docview/1660995067/8D3E17349A044DEAPQ/52?accountid=13314>.

⁹² James Hardy and London Lindsay Peacock, “Singapore Quietly Expanding F-15 Fleet,” *Jane’s Defence Weekly* 51, no. 39 (August 20, 2014),

<http://search.proquest.com/docview/1555357668/8D3E17349A044DEAPQ/167?accountid=13314>.

⁹³ “Singapore Announces SGD12.56 Billion Defence Budget,” *Jane’s Defence Weekly*, February 25, 2014

⁹⁴ “Singapore: Small State, Big Weapons Buyer.”

Externally, Singapore is particularly focused on deepening military ties with Washington. For years the city-state has hosted America's Navy Logistic Group West Pacific and Air Force 497th Combat Training Squadron.⁹⁵ In 2001, at its own expense Singapore upgraded its Changi Naval Base to accommodate U.S. aircraft carriers.⁹⁶ Meanwhile, Singapore's military forces have access to training and bases in the United States.⁹⁷ Building on the 1990 Memorandum of Understanding granting the U.S. military access to Singapore's military facilities, in 2005 Singapore and the United States announced a "Strategic Framework Agreement" upgrading the bilateral defense relationship to that of "major security-cooperation partners." Singapore described the agreement as opening a "new chapter" in bilateral military ties. It called for expanded joint military exercises and training; increased policy dialogues; and enhanced cooperation in counterterrorism, defense technology, and counter proliferation.⁹⁸ Singapore's significant investments in developing an advanced military—particularly its air force—are designed to enhance interoperability with U.S. forces. Meanwhile, in 2011 the U.S. Navy committed to forward-deploying Littoral Combat Ships—a core component of the U.S. strategic "Rebalance" to the Asia-Pacific. The first LCS arrived in Singapore in 2013 to conduct patrols in the South China Sea, among other missions, and four LCS are scheduled for long-term rotational deployments by 2018.⁹⁹ In 2012 the U.S. 7th Fleet's Destroyer Squadron Seven was deployed to Singapore. To further deepen interoperability, both countries' navies now engage in joint training operations in air defense, anti-surface warfare, and anti-submarine warfare in the South China Sea.¹⁰⁰ In 2015, the two signed a joint enhanced defense cooperation agreement, and acknowledged the first-ever deployment of U.S. P-8 maritime surveillance aircraft to Singapore.¹⁰¹

⁹⁵ "Navy Region Center Singapore," *Embassy of the United States Singapore*, n.d., <http://singapore.usembassy.gov/nrcs.html>.

⁹⁶ Kelvin Wong, "CARAT Singapore 2014 Highlights Greater Interoperability between Singapore and US Navies," *Jane's Defence Weekly* 51, no. 36 (July 30, 2014).

⁹⁷ CPT Dexian Cai, "Hedging for Maximum Flexibility: Singapore's Pragmatic Approach to Security Relations with the US and China," *Pointer* 39, no. 2 (2013), 3.

⁹⁸ "Factsheet – The Strategic Framework Agreement," *MinDef Singapore*, July 12, 2005. http://www.mindef.gov.sg/imindef/press_room/official_releases/nr/2005/jul/12jul05_nr/12jul05_fs.html#.VCs9zvldWSo

⁹⁹ "USN LCS Patrolled South China Sea during Deployment," *Jane's Defence Weekly*, January 7, 2014; "US to base four warships in Singapore as China flexes military muscles," *AFP*, February 17, 2015.

¹⁰⁰ Wong, "CARAT Singapore 2014 Highlights Greater Interoperability between Singapore and US Navies."

¹⁰¹ "Singapore-US Agreement to Boost Defense Cooperation," *DefenseNews*, February 12, 2016. <http://www.defensenews.com/story/defense/policy-budget/leaders/2015/12/08/singapore-us-agreement-boost-defense-cooperation/76980618/>

Vietnam

Albeit from a low base given its relatively small economy, Vietnam is adopting significant and accelerating measures to enhance its military capabilities, especially to confront maritime and aerial threats. Internally, Hanoi is ramping up defense spending—SIPRI estimates 2015 levels, inflation-adjusted, at 2.5-times those of 2005.¹⁰²—In the 2011-2015 period, it moved from the world's 43rd- to eighth-largest arms importer, purchasing significant firepower from Moscow, including six advanced, ultra-quiet *Kilo*-class submarines, six *Gepard*-class guided missile stealth frigates, three-dozen advanced fighter aircraft (Su-30MK2), patrol boats and missile fast attack ships, advanced anti-ship and land-attack cruise missiles, and coastal defense and missile systems.¹⁰³ To enhance its ability to carry out maritime missions, in mid-2013 Vietnam stood up a combined air force and navy brigade and is upgrading maritime law enforcement capabilities.¹⁰⁴ In January 2016, its *Kilo*-class submarines began patrolling the South China Sea.¹⁰⁵

Concomitant with these internal efforts, Vietnam is deepening links with the U.S.—a recent adversary with which it fought a brutal war—and regional militaries. The pace of progress is remarkable. Hanoi and Washington recently conducted their first “navy-to-navy training engagement” since the Vietnam War.¹⁰⁶ By 2015, earlier commitments to deepening military ties were expanded to include, inter alia, operational cooperation in a joint vision statement.¹⁰⁷ In response to Hanoi's overtures Washington has since offered funds to enhance Vietnam's maritime capabilities, including fast patrol boats and training. Following Washington's 2014 easing of a 1975 ban on the provision of lethal arms to Vietnam, Hanoi has reportedly held talks with U.S. and European contractors to buy fighter jets and other equipment.¹⁰⁸ Not coincidentally, the change applies to systems useful in a maritime domain and may allow Hanoi to acquire surplus U.S. patrol

¹⁰² SIPRI Military Expenditure Database, http://www.sipri.org/research/armaments/milex/milex_database. Accessed April 8, 2016.

¹⁰³ “Vietnam Adds Military Muscle,” *Wall Street Journal*, February 21, 2016.

¹⁰⁴ Murray Hiebert and Phuong Nguyen, “Vietnam Ramps Up Defense Spending, But Its Challenges Remain,” *Asia Maritime Transparency Initiative*, March 18, 2015, <http://amti.csis.org/vietnam-ramps-up-defense-spending-but-its-challenges-remain/>. Gareth Jennings, “Vietnam Stands up New Air Force-Navy Brigade,” *Jane's Defence Weekly* 50, no. 32 (July 10, 2013).

¹⁰⁵ “South China Sea dispute: Vietnamese subs deployed as deterrent to China,” *Sydney Morning Herald*, January 7, 2016. <http://www.smh.com.au/world/vietnamese-subs-deployed-to-south-china-sea-20160107-gm0z6a.html#ixzz45FafNday>

¹⁰⁶ Vice Adm. Scott Van Buskirk, “Remarks at Asia Society Hong Kong”, February 21, 2011, <http://www.c7f.navy.mil/news/2011/02-february/030.htm>.

¹⁰⁷ Prashanth Parameswaran, “US, Vietnam Deepen Defense Ties,” *The Diplomat*, June 5, 2015.

¹⁰⁸ “Vietnam wants Western warplanes to counter China,” *Reuters*, June 4, 2015.

and anti-submarine-warfare aircraft.¹⁰⁹ Washington has even organized roadshows of U.S. defense contractors to Vietnam. More generally, Vietnam has opened its deep-water port in Cam Ranh Bay to foreign navies.¹¹⁰

Vietnam appears to be particularly earnest about deepening engagement with U.S. allies. In 2010 Hanoi and Canberra signed a “Memorandum of Understanding on Defence Cooperation.”¹¹¹ Building off a similar 2011 memorandum signed with Tokyo that created defense attaché offices in both countries and established formal Defense Policy Dialogue, in 2014 Japan and Vietnam upgraded their eight year-old “strategic partnership” to that of an “extensive strategic partnership” designed to enhance bilateral defense cooperation, including high-level defense talks.¹¹² They also agreed to enhance maritime security cooperation, including Tokyo’s unprecedented provision of patrol boats to Hanoi.¹¹³ MHanoi has issued various joint statements with regional neighbors (including Japan and Australia) calling for freedom of navigation and overflight and prohibitions on threats or use of force in the South and East China Seas and deepened naval ties with neighbors sharing territorial disputes with China, including assistance modernizing its navy from India.¹¹⁴ Manila and Hanoi have also rapidly deepened defense cooperation, including Vietnam’s first-ever defense policy dialogue with and port call by its two most powerful warships to the Philippines. In November 2015 a joint statement focused on deepening maritime cooperation and defense and trade ties elevated their relationship to a “strategic partnership.”¹¹⁵

And the U.S. will soon begin implementing a Southeast Asia Maritime Security Initiative involving the Philippines, Vietnam and others

¹⁰⁹ “US State Dept. Issues Language To Allow Defense Exports to Vietnam,” *Defense News*, November 10, 2014, <http://www.defensenews.com/article/20141110/DEFREG02/311100021/US-State-Dept-Issues-Language-Allow-Defense-Exports-Vietnam>.

¹¹⁰ “Asia’s New Arms Race,” *Wall Street Journal*, February 12, 2011

¹¹¹ “Australia, Vietnam Signal Closer Defence Ties,” *Jane’s Defence Weekly* 50, no. 16 (March 20, 2013).

¹¹² Jon Grevatt, “Japan, Vietnam Pave Way for Further Defence Collaboration,” *Jane’s Defence Weekly* 51, no. 17.

¹¹³ “Japan, Vietnam Criticize China for Instability in South China Sea,” *Kyodo News*, May 22, 2014.

¹¹⁴ “India to Supply Vietnam with Naval Vessels amid China Disputes,” *Reuters*, October 26, 2014.

¹¹⁵ “Vietnam Warships Visit Philippines Amid South China Sea Dispute,” *Reuters*, November 25, 2014; Ridzwan Rahmat, “Philippines, Vietnam Hold First Defence Policy Dialogue,” *Jane’s Defence Weekly* 52, no. 22 (April 15, 2015); “Phl, Vietnam to Hold Naval Drills, Scientific Research in South China Sea,” *Philippine Star*, April 23, 2015. “Philippines, Vietnam Affirm United Front on S. China Sea,” *VoA*, November 17, 2015.

IV.3: Step 2 Examining Underlying Causal Mechanisms

This section implements the second step of the proposed methodological framework, the objective of which is to judge whether the observed military policy outcomes uncovered in Step 1 are attributable to a perceived threat posed by China. The goal is to test for a link between the observed dependent variable outcome and the posited independent variable and causal mechanism. The analysis demonstrates that the MCE efforts of China's neighbors delineated in Section 3.2.a appear to be driven significantly by deepening insecurity vis-à-vis China's growing military power and lack of transparency, as well as concrete concerns about specific policies and rhetoric, especially concerning disputed territory and waters. Practically significant balancing behavior is evident in all four cases; albeit to varying degrees.

Australia

Prime ministerial statements, intelligence assessments, and government publications suggest strongly that deepening concern about China's growing military capabilities, uncertainty about its intentions, and maritime and territorial disputes are major drivers of internal and external enhance to bolster Australia's military capabilities and deepen its U.S. alliance. Asked about the "greatest threat to global security" in a 2015 interview, Turnbull referred to "the rise of China" and publicly called for both "careful diplomacy" and "balancing."¹¹⁶ Beijing has caught on, reportedly criticizing Australia's top diplomat during a spring 2012 China trip for deepening military ties with the United States and expressing "serious concern" about the 2016 white paper.¹¹⁷ Canberra's expanding defense ties with Tokyo appear similarly driven by "the China factor."¹¹⁸

Although the security policy shifts discussed above have accelerated in recent years, they are not new. In fact, in 2007 Australia's Defense Update expressed concern about "the pace and scope of [China's] military modernization, particularly the development of new and disruptive capabilities such as the antisatellite (ASAT) missile (tested in January 2007)."¹¹⁹ When the 2009 defense white paper was announced, Rudd told journalists that "a significant military and naval

¹¹⁶ "Malcolm Turnbull changes direction on foreign policy," *The Age*, September 24, 2015.

¹¹⁷ "Carr: China Concerned by Australia-US Military Ties," *BBC News*, May 15, 2012. "China angered by Australia military spending boost," *BBC*, February 25, 2016.

¹¹⁸ Ishihara, "Japan-Australia," p. 122.

¹¹⁹ *Australia's National Security: A Defence Update 2007* (Australian Government: Department of Defence, 2007), p. 19.

build-up across the Asia-Pacific region” needed to be a focus of Australia’s defense planning. Meanwhile, the white paper itself expressed concern about the “pace, scope, and structure of China’s military modernization.”¹²⁰ Meanwhile, a government intelligence assessment leaked in 2011 reportedly shows that Australia’s Office of National Assessments, the Defence Intelligence Organisation, and the Defence and Foreign Affairs departments reached a consensus that China’s military modernization “already poses a credible threat to modern militaries operating in the region” and will pose “an even more formidable challenge” in the future. It warns that China’s policies are “already altering the balance of power in Asia and could be a destabilizing influence.”¹²¹ Its 2016 White Paper calls on China to be “more transparent about its defense policies,” expresses opposition to China’s behavior in the South and East China Seas and, in thinly-veiled criticism of Beijing refers to challenges to the “rules-based global order” by “newly powerful countries.”¹²² Meanwhile, military leaders have advocated Australian freedom-of-navigation operations there.¹²³

Japan

While in the 1990s a perceived threat posed by North Korea’s nuclear weapons and missile programs loomed larger than China, Japan’s leaders responded with trepidation to Chinese nuclear tests and the 1995-1996 Taiwan Strait Crisis. Both concerns were reflected in a 1997 revision of U.S.-Japan Guidelines for Defense Cooperation that expanded the alliance’s mandate to “areas surrounding Japan.” In the new millennium, deepening concerns about China among policymakers and the public manifest increasingly. The objective reality of China’s growing material power and lack of transparency are important drivers. Yet Beijing’s specific policies and rhetoric—especially vis-à-vis its claims to the Senkaku/Diaoyudao Islands administered by Japan, are equally, if not more significant causes of worsening threat perceptions vis-à-vis China today.¹²⁴

Deepening concern is reflected in government documents and leader rhetoric over the past decade. The 2005 Defense White Paper expressed concern over China’s military force levels, naval activities, and transparency, while its Foreign Minister called China a “considerable threat.”

¹²⁰ “Australia must be strong in Asia-Pacific—Rudd,” *AAP*, May 2, 2009; *Defending Australia in the Asia Pacific Century: Force 2030 (Defence White Article 2009)* (Australian Government: Department of Defence, 2009), 34.

¹²¹ “Chinese expansion fears revealed,” *The Sydney Morning Herald*, January 7, 2011.

¹²² “2016 Defence White Paper,” p. 42, 45, 61.

¹²³ “US In Talks To Deploy B-1 Bombers,” *IBT*, March 9, 2016. <http://www.ibtimes.com/us-talks-deploy-b-1-bombers-expand-b-52-missions-australia-amid-growing-tensions-2332981>

¹²⁴ James J. Przystup, *The U.S.-Japan Alliance: Review of the Guidelines for Defense Cooperation*, Strategic Perspectives (Washington, D.C.: Institute for National Strategic Studies, March 2015), 13–15.

Additional statements followed in subsequent years.¹²⁵ More recently, defense white papers express concern about China's "assertive" behavior and "dangerous acts" (esp. provocative policies in the East China Sea, such as air interdictions in Beijing's newly declared Air Defense Identification Zone), as well as its low military transparency, surging military spending, and the pace and scale of its military modernization.¹²⁶ The 2010 NDPG identifies these factors as a "matter of concern for the region and the international community"¹²⁷ and calls for force posture to be shifted away from the northern island of Hokkaido (i.e., defense against a Soviet invasion) toward Japan's southwestern islands to ameliorate the JSDF's "deployment vacuum" (*jieitai haibi no kuhaku chiiki*) there.¹²⁸ The 2013 NDPG similarly calls for Japan to bolster its future defense capabilities "to place priority on ensuring maritime and air superiority, which is the prerequisite for effective deterrence and response in various situations, including the defense posture buildup in the southwestern region."¹²⁹ Shifting JSDF force posture southwest and prioritizing air and maritime assets is designed to bolster deterrence and, if necessary, reduce reaction time—especially in a possible East China Sea contingency.

Tokyo clearly sees China's recent policies and weapons procurement trends as directly threatening. In a country whose main political opposition was staunchly opposed to efforts to enhance Japan's military capabilities for much of the post-1945 period, the fact that this perception is increasingly held across the political spectrum is significant. This emerging consensus manifest most powerfully during the latter half of the Democratic Party of Japan's three years in power (2009-2012). DPJ leaders repeatedly expressed concerns about specific Chinese capabilities (e.g., its aircraft carrier program,) and an increasingly "uncertain" security situation for Japan given, inter alia, repeated and frequent maritime activities of China in the seas around Japan."¹³⁰ In late

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*

¹²⁶ "Defense of Japan" Ministry of Defense, 2011. http://www.mod.go.jp/e/publ/w_paper/2011.html; "Defense of Japan." Ministry of Defense, 2014. http://www.mod.go.jp/e/publ/w_paper/2014.html.

¹²⁷ "Heisei 23 Nendo Iko Ni Kakawaru Boei Keikaku No Taiko Ni Tsuite" [About the Post-2011 NDPG], *Ministry of Defense (Japan)*, December 17, 2010, <http://www.mod.go.jp/j/approach/agenda/guideline/2011/taikou.html>.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*

¹²⁹ Ministry of Defense (Japan), "National Defense Program Guidelines for FY 2014 and Beyond (Summary)," December 17, 2013, http://www.mod.go.jp/j/approach/agenda/guideline/2014/pdf/20131217_e.pdf.

¹³⁰ "Japan calls for China to explain aircraft carrier," *AFP*, August 12, 2011; "Address by Prime Minister Yoshihiko Noda at the 2011 Air Review", *Prime Minister of Japan and His Cabinet*, October 16, 2011, http://www.kantei.go.jp/foreign/noda/statement/201110/16kunji_e.html.

2012, Defense Minister Satoshi Morimoto linked his call for the (since announced) revision of the 1997 U.S.-Japan Guidelines for Defense Cooperation to a perceived Chinese threat.¹³¹

The conservative Liberal Democratic Party's (LDP) return to power in December 2012, together with efforts by Beijing since September 2012 to assert its territorial claims on its maritime periphery widely seen in Japan as unprecedentedly provocative, appear to have caused a rapid deepening of threat perceptions and a significant uptick in concrete MCE efforts aimed at enhancing Japan's deterrence and warfighting capabilities. Leaders in both parties have linked key aspects of Japan's changing security policy directly to China's rise. The writing was on the wall during the 2012 intra-LDP election for party president, before its landslide general election victory that fall. For the first time, all five candidates took a hard line against China.¹³² Measures adopted since Abe's victory demonstrate that as Japan's concerns about China deepen internal and external MCE continue apace. The most recent (2015) White Paper reiterates longstanding Japanese security concerns, including China's "military activities," "lack of transparency in its military and security issues," "military development," "coercive attempts at changing the status quo," and expresses concern about "dangerous acts" that could trigger a conflict.¹³³

Singapore

In recent years, primary strategic concerns of Singaporean leaders are China's long-term strategic intentions and the state of U.S.-China relations. Pursuit of closer military ties with Washington as a hedge against regional instability is driven largely by concerns about China's rise and rapid military modernization.¹³⁴ More recently, concerns about freedom of navigation, over-flight, and China's land reclamation in the South China Sea appear to be deepening, reflected in the deployment of U.S. LCS and the first-ever P-8 to Singapore. In a major 2015 speech, Prime Minister Lee Hsien long welcomed the U.S. regional role as "benign," identified the South China Sea as "a vital lifeline," and expressed concern about a "shifting" strategic balance, criticizing

¹³¹ "Japan Aims to Revise Security Pact With U.S.," *NYT*, November 9, 2012.

¹³² "LDP candidates take tough line against China," *Kyodo*, September 18, 2012.

¹³³ Ministry of Defense, "Defense of Japan 2015," Section 3 "China," pp. 33-56.
http://www.mod.go.jp/e/publ/w_paper/pdf/2015/DOJ2015_1-1-3_web.pdf

¹³⁴ Robyn Klingler-Vidra, "The Pragmatic 'Little Red Dot': Singapore's US Hedge against China," 2012, pp. 67; 71-72.

Chinese activities as “unilateral assertions of sovereignty.”¹³⁵ As a 2008 RAND Corporation study argued, Singapore sees Washington as the “principal stabilizer” in East Asia and the “only realistic counterweight to potential Chinese external assertiveness.”¹³⁶

While pursuing engagement with Beijing and reluctant to explicitly call China a “threat” in public discourse, Singaporean leaders remain uncertain about China’s intentions.¹³⁷ In the event of a conflict, despite internal MCE efforts Singapore could not deter China singlehandedly. Consequently, it combines proactive economic engagement of Beijing and efforts to deepen military ties with third parties, in particular America, but also Japan, Britain, and others, as a hedge against uncertainty.¹³⁸ Its goal is to maintain a regional balance of power to support stability and Singapore and region-wide economic development.¹³⁹

Vietnam

Severe frictions between Vietnam and China over conflicting claims to territory and resources in the South China Sea increasingly make global headlines. Although the disputes are longstanding—in fact, bloody military clashes occurred between Hanoi and Beijing in the 1970s and 1980s—circumstances appear increasingly volatile. Vietnam’s leaders are reducing ground force personnel and reallocating funds to support costly investments in more effective deterrents: expensive, technologically advanced air and naval platforms. Hanoi’s rapidly growing defense budget, its procurements of *Kilo*-class submarines, advanced fighters, and other capabilities from Russia specifically to enhance its ability to fight in contested maritime and air domains, together with efforts to establish and consolidate closer military ties with major powers within and outside the region appears to be driven primarily by a perceived threat from an increasingly powerful China. China’s provocative towing in May 2014 of a massive oil rig in waters Vietnam considers part of its exclusive economic zone catalyzed anti-China riots and unprecedented outreach to Washington. There were reportedly calls for a Central Committee meeting to discuss a formal alliance with Washington. Though this did not happen, Hanoi did invite the top Asia expert at

¹³⁵ Lee, Hsien Loong. “Keynote Address.” presented at the Shangri-la Dialogue, Singapore, May 29, 2015. <https://www.iiss.org/en/events/shangri%20la%20dialogue/archive/shangri-la-dialogue-2015-862b/opening-remarks-and-keynote-address-6729/keynote-address-a51f>.

¹³⁶ Medeiros et al., *Pacific Currents*, pp. 185–186.

¹³⁷ Cai, “Hedging,” p. 3.

¹³⁸ Medeiros et al., *Pacific Currents*, pp. 185–186; Klingler-Vidra, “Pragmatic ‘Little Red Dot,’” pp. 67; 70–72; Cai, “Hedging.”

¹³⁹ Medeiros et al., *Pacific Currents*, pp. 185–186.

Obama's National Security Council to Vietnam in July. In 2015, half of Vietnam's Politburo visited Washington, while six U.S. Cabinet-level officials visited Hanoi.¹⁴⁰

Hanoi's aforementioned MCE efforts have focused on modernizing naval and air power to enhance sea-denial capabilities, counter-intervention capabilities. They appear driven largely by China's growing power and its policies toward the disputed Spratly and Paracel Islands, and the threat those policies pose to what leaders in Hanoi identify as Vietnamese sovereignty and interests.¹⁴¹ These efforts have accelerated in recent years. Vietnam's 2011 maritime strategy identified protection of maritime sovereignty a key national security pillar.¹⁴² In a major shift and investment in deterrence and beyond a focus on anti-ship capabilities, Vietnam is arming its submarine fleet with Russian-made precision land-attack missiles capable of hitting China's coastal cities.¹⁴³ Hanoi's concerns appear to be shared by other regional states, many of which are deepening ties with Vietnam. Indeed, in 2014 leaders from Vietnam, the United States, Japan, the Philippines and several other countries publicly criticized China for its recent policies vis-à-vis territorial disputes in the South China Sea.¹⁴⁴ President Truong Tan Sang's stated objectives for opening Cam Ranh, a strategic port, in March 2016 to foreign militaries (including the U.S. and Japan) was "stabilizing regional peace."¹⁴⁵ He identifies deepening ties with other neighbors (e.g. Philippines) as driven by common concern about China.¹⁴⁶

V: Discussion

The preceding analysis demonstrates how different methodologies lead scholars to categorically different conclusions about the presence of balancing behavior in a given strategic context. Contrary to the studies discussed in Section 2.2., application to the contemporary Asia-Pacific of the analytical framework introduced in Section 3 reveals balancing behavior among secondary states on China's periphery. This finding is based on extensive consideration of

¹⁴⁰ "China's assertiveness pushes Vietnam toward an old foe, the United States" *Washington Post*, December 28, 2015.

¹⁴¹ "Vietnam Adds Military Muscle,"

¹⁴² Hiebert and Nguyen, "Vietnam Ramps Up Defense Spending."

¹⁴³ "Vietnam Buys Submarine-Launched Land Attack Missiles to Deter China," *Reuters*, April 30, 2015.

¹⁴⁴ "Japan, Vietnam Criticize China for Instability in South China Sea," *Kyodo News*, May 22, 2014; "Vietnam Edges Closer to Old US Foe as Maritime Dispute with China Heats up," *South China Morning Post*, May 30, 2014.

¹⁴⁵ "In Vietnam, Calls for US-Led Naval Initiative in South China Sea." *VOA*, March 9, 2016.

<http://www.voanews.com/content/calls-naval-initiative-south-china-sea-support-vietnam/3227908.html>.

¹⁴⁶ "Philippines, Vietnam Affirm United Front on S. China Sea"

measures states are adopting to enhance effective military capabilities internally and externally in response to perceived threats; strategic context; and the causal mechanisms actually driving observable policy changes. The pace and scale of balancing varies across countries, but in all cases it appears to be practically significant, and accelerating. To be sure, some of these efforts start from a low base, and may confront domestic political and economic headwinds going forward. But they are nevertheless practically important in terms of both diplomatic signaling and operational significance—both factors affecting deterrence.

Beyond the traditional, largely quantitative metrics of defense spending, number of personnel/platforms, and new treaty alliance formation the empirical survey reveals manifold additional internal and external force development and employment measures—some conspicuous, others less so—that states today adopt to significantly enhance military capabilities. For example, qualitative improvements to force structure or doctrine, and shifts in force posture to deter or confront changing threats more effectively, efficiently, and expeditiously can be significant symptoms of what has traditionally been labeled internal balancing. Paradoxically, even *decreases* in certain types of personnel or platforms can, too. The key factor is strategic context—specifically, the *nature* of the perceived threat (e.g., land vs. maritime domain). Given rapid changes to military technology and the Asia-Pacific being a largely maritime theater, force development and employment metrics introduced in Table 2 appear to be far more consequential for a state’s ability to effectively balance against China than, say, building a massive but technologically backward land army. To be sure, traditional metrics for measuring internal balancing, such as defense spending trends, can be important measures of MCE. But as with any metrics, they are best employed critically, and never in isolation.

As for external balancing, this study’s findings suggest that selective treatment of a few conspicuous, quantitative measures (e.g., permanently-stationed U.S. military personnel or *new* mutual defense pact formation) as necessary, much less sufficient, conditions is problematic. These metrics offer at best an incomplete picture of practically significant, 21st-century-relevant external MCE. Indeed, specific to the contemporary Asia-Pacific it is precisely in response to China’s changing force structure that in cooperation with its regional allies the U.S. military increasingly focuses on “places, not bases.” And the region’s advanced economies most capable of confronting China (e.g., Australia, Japan) *already* enjoy longstanding security alliances with Washington. Incorporating MCE typically overlooked by traditional approaches, however, reveals significant

military balancing and diplomatic signaling. Regional states are actively deepening military ties with Washington to enhance deterrence, crisis management, and, if necessary interoperability in an actual conflict. Meanwhile, various states—U.S. allies and non-allies—are expanding informal and formal security ties both with the U.S. and among one another. Such MCE are practically significant manifestations of balancing behavior.

VI: Conclusion

Even when taken back to its “hardest” military roots, balancing theory remains a useful concept through which to understand contemporary international relations. This holds even in a globalized world characterized by extensive economic and security interdependence.

This article highlights several methodological issues prevalent in the balancing literature, including employment of vague, often inconsistent definitions and “concept creep;” a tendency to analytical privilege one or a few of the most conspicuous, often easily quantifiable metrics while overlooking other practically significant MCE efforts relevant for a given strategic context; and conclusions drawn from a survey of outcomes without clear evidence of causal links between posited cause (perceived threats) and observed outcome. In an effort to ameliorate these issues, it calls for a methodological reset and standardization of disparate associated approaches. It proposes an alternative, easily replicable analytical framework through which to refine and empirically test balancing theory more effectively. Though focused on balancing theory specifically, this basic approach, and its MCE metrics in particular, should be generally applicable to related phenomena in international security studies.

To the extent that recent critiques of the balancing literature contend that developments post-Cold War reveal flaws in structurally-deterministic strands of Realist balance-of-power theory, they will find no major pushback here. Furthermore, observations that regional states seek to maintain positive political and economic relations with Beijing in self-interest; the degree of balancing behavior in the Asia-Pacific today varies across cases; and that military competition at present pales in comparison to more extreme forms from, say, the arms races of a century ago, are valid and significant--in both theoretical and practical terms.¹⁴⁷ Nevertheless, the available

¹⁴⁷ For related arguments, see Evelyn Goh, “Great Powers and Hierarchical Order in Southeast Asia,” *International Security* 32 No. 3 (2008): 113-157; Darren J. Lim, and Zack Cooper. “Reassessing Hedging.” *Security Studies* 24, no. 4 (2015): 696–727; Adam P. Liff and G. John Ikenberry, “Racing toward Tragedy?: China’s Rise, Military Competition in the Asia Pacific, and the Security Dilemma,” *International Security* 39, no. 2 (2014): 52–91.

evidence supports neither the idea that balancing theory is irrelevant for 21st century international relations, nor case-specific claims that key Asia-Pacific states are accommodating, much less bandwagoning with China. Rather, they are adopting operationally significant military policy shifts in response to perceived threats. One does not need to engage in “concept stretching” to uncover internal and external military balancing against Beijing. Indeed, core concepts employed in this study—both balancing itself and the descriptive categories of internal and external force development and employment—remain faithful to the spirit of “hard” balancing as originally conceived: *military* policy responses to perceived external military threats. They also avoid baking into MCE category labels an assumption that *any* manifestation of associated metrics is necessarily evidence of balancing behavior. Indeed, without extensive examination of underlying causal mechanisms, such claims would be premature.

To say that key Asia-Pacific states are engaging in balancing behavior is *not* to say that they are attempting to “contain China’s peaceful rise”—a meme pervading Chinese government and popular discourse on other states’ rhetoric and military policies toward Beijing.¹⁴⁸ Indeed, since 1978 the two other most materially powerful regional players—the U.S. and Japan—have done more to facilitate China’s development and integration into the international order than any others. But in response to China’s growing power and, increasingly, specific policies widely seen as provocative in Washington, Tokyo and across the region, they are still balancing against perceived threats—both concrete and abstract. These measures constitute balancing, *not containment*. MCE adopted in an effort to balance against China appear to be contingent; reactions to specific policies and rhetoric seen as threatening, coupled with significant uncertainty surrounding China’s future course. Both factors are exacerbated by Beijing’s opaque decision-making process and relatively low military transparency, and the extent to which a security dilemma is at play is heavily debated.¹⁴⁹ Yet the contingent nature of these MCE suggests that the scope and pace of secondary state balancing is not structurally determined. Whether sufficient interest or political will exists to significantly mitigate the drivers of its neighbors deepening concerns, however, remains to be seen.

¹⁴⁸ An authoritative PLA textbook claims Japan’s recent policies are aimed at “active containment” (*zhudong ezhi*), see *Zhanluexue [The Science of Military Strategy]* (Beijing: AMS Press, 2013), 62. See also *Guojia Anquan Lanpishu [Blue Book on National Security]* (Beijing: Social Sciences Academic Press, 2014), 1-2.

¹⁴⁹ Liff and Ikenberry, “Racing toward Tragedy?”