To the Editors:

In their thoughtful and provocative article, Stephen Brooks and William Wohlforth examine four cases of purported “soft balancing” by some major states to constrain the exercise of U.S. power. They conclude that this concept does not explain the actions of these states, and, instead, argue that other factors—the economic interests of these powers, their regional security concerns, their policy disputes with the United States, and their domestic political incentives—better explain these actions. From their analysis, I infer that they do not put much stock in the explanatory power of soft balancing and that they see little or no balancing against the United States, whether soft or hard.

I do not deal with Brooks and Wohlforth’s overall critique of soft balancing because I think the case for soft balancing is well made by Robert Pape, T.V. Paul, and Stephen Walt, and I am in general accord with their views. Instead, I contest Brooks and Wohlforth’s treatment of two cases and, more generally, their conception of what balancing means. I also take issue with the roughly analogous points made by Keir Lieber and Gerard Alexander on these matters.

First, I argue that two balancing efforts by major powers against the United States are currently under way. One is by China, and it is...
a case of balancing through internal efforts. The other is by the European Union (EU) through the European Security and Defense Policy (ESDP), and it is a case of balancing largely through external alignment. Second, I argue that the Brooks and Wohlforth conception of balancing is too narrowly conceived and that a somewhat broader understanding of balancing behavior is required to appreciate the balancing actions taken by some states against the United States today.

THE CHINA CASE
The Brooks-Wohlforth treatment of China comes in the context of their analysis of Russia’s arms sales to the Chinese military. Their core argument is that these arms sales are motivated not by a Russian desire to balance the United States, but by Russia’s need to deal with the massive excess capacity of its defense industry through foreign sales so as to keep that industry alive (p. 87). Indeed, this may be so, and they make a strong case to that effect. Still, I would not discount any balancing motive whatsoever. After all, Russia is aware of the effects of its arms sales on China’s military capability, and it knows about U.S.-China differences over Taiwan.

The issue here, however, is not Russian motives for arms sales to China, but China’s motives for purchasing Russian arms. Here is what Brooks and Wohlforth say about those motives: “To be sure, China’s demand for Russian military hardware is partly a response to U.S. military support for Taiwan, but China’s desire to enhance its bargaining position over the Taiwan Strait has been a constant since 1949 and hence is not causally related to the advent of unipolarity after 1991 or recent U.S. security behavior” (ibid.).

This is a curious way to treat a clear case of hard military balancing against the United States. It makes no sense to dismiss China’s balancing motives in purchasing Russian arms by arguing that these motives predate unipolarity and that they are unrelated to recent U.S. security behavior. The first assertion is irrelevant; the second, just plain wrong. After all, if one state upgrades its military capability to be better able to deal with another state’s military capability and the threats it poses, that is hard balancing regardless of when it started, what provoked it, or whether it is intended to knock that power off its global superpower perch or not.

China’s defense reform and modernization efforts began in the 1980s with Deng Xiaoping’s rise to power. These efforts were designed to redress China’s overall military weakness, but they accelerated in the 1990s after the advent of unipolarity, after China’s economic reforms began to bear fruit, and, in particular, after the 1996 Taiwan Strait crisis with the United States. Since 1990, China’s defense budget, at least the part


4. Lieber and Alexander take roughly the same position: “The growth in Chinese conventional capabilities is primarily driven by the Taiwan problem. . . . But China’s defense buildup is not new, nor is it as ambitious and assertive as it should be if the United States posed a direct threat that required internal balancing. Lieber and Alexander, “Waiting for Balancing,” pp. 121–122.

China’s drive to upgrade its military capability is directed in the short term principally, although not exclusively, against the United States because no country, except the United States, can challenge China over Taiwan. For example, China’s Kilo-class submarines are designed to keep the U.S. Seventh Fleet away from the Taiwan theater; its Su-27 and Su-30 aircraft are designed both to provide for coastal defense against U.S. aircraft and to threaten Taiwan. Armed purchases from Russia have been a primary means to upgrade China’s capability. The 2005 Pentagon report documents that “Russia has supplied 85\% of all of China’s arms imports since the early 1990s and has been a significant enabler of China’s military modernization.”\footnote{6}{Office of the Secretary of Defense, \textit{The Military Power of the People’s Republic of China}, 2005, p. 23.} China is particularly interested in acquiring what it calls “leap ahead” technologies and “informationalized” capabilities, its terms for the U.S. revolution in military affairs. China’s 2004 Defense White Paper confirms that the “technological gap resulting from the revolution in military affairs” is having a “major impact on China’s security.”\footnote{7}{The 2004 Defense White Paper, in ibid., p. 17.} As the Pentagon report puts it: “China observes closely foreign military campaigns and defense modernization initiatives. The United States factors heavily in these observations as a model of how a modern military engages in modern warfare.”\footnote{8}{Ibid.} Currently, China’s military modernization is specifically designed both to deter Taiwan from declaring independence and to improve China’s performance should it find itself in a shooting war with the United States over Taiwan. Thus, the United States presents a clear security threat in China’s eyes. Otherwise, why would it be upgrading its armed forces in ways designed to counter the United States’ military advantages and to defend itself against a U.S. attack?\footnote{9}{For the argument that China is enhancing its military capabilities vis-à-vis the United States across the military spectrum, see Robert S. Ross, “Bipolarity and Balancing in East Asia,” in Paul, Wirtz, and Fortmann, \textit{Balance of Power}, pp. 267–304.}

Moreover, it is wrong to dismiss China’s military balancing against the United States on the grounds that it should be much greater than it is if the United States actually posed a direct threat, as Lieber and Alexander argue (p. 122). Although China is devot-
ing a growing percentage of its gross domestic product to its military, it makes little sense to engage in a full-court military press against the United States at the current moment. For now, China needs access to the U.S. market and to U.S. direct foreign investment if it is to continue its rapid economic growth. Diverting huge sums to defense so as to whittle the U.S. military advantage down to a manageable size would undercut its “peaceful rise” strategy and harm the economic growth that will enable it one day, should it so choose, to contest the United States’ global military might. China is balancing enough to complicate the United States’ defense of Taiwan should a war occur and to be better able to defend its own territory in such a war, and it can be expected to continue to do so as long as the Taiwan issue remains unresolved. For the longer term, China will continue to improve its military position vis-à-vis the United States in preparation for the eventuality that other conflictual issues will arise between them.

China’s mixed behavior—balancing against, and cooperating with, the United States—is not a historical anomaly. Britain, for example, pursued such a policy toward Germany in the mid-to-late 1930s, reaching a naval arms accord with it in 1935 and appeasing it until March 1939, all the while increasing its military armaments against the German threat. Thus, China can engage in hard balancing against the United States without presently contesting its unipolar position, while cooperating in areas of mutual gain.

Finally, even if one were to take the position that China’s military modernization in the short term is not directed principally against the United States, a position I do not take, that would not change the overall result. If China is engaged merely in a general increase in its military capabilities, with no specific adversary in mind, and if these changes result in enhanced Chinese military power in East Asia at the expense of the United States, then China is offsetting and thereby balancing U.S. power, even if it did not explicitly design its efforts to do so. Increases in a state’s power relative to other states have consequences for the balance of power among them, irrespective of the state’s intentions. In a balance of power system, the consequences of behavior ultimately override the intentions behind the behavior.

THE EU AND ESDP

The European Security and Defense Policy is a more complex and nuanced case, and the Europeans are at an earlier stage of balancing against the United States than China.

10. Chinese leaders became concerned in the mid-1990s about other states’ perceptions of a “China threat” and took steps to dampen those perceptions. See Avery Goldstein, Rising to the Challenge: China’s Grand Strategy and International Security (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2005), especially chaps. 4, 6, 7.
12. The Pentagon report also suggests that China is generating military power that goes beyond the Taiwan scenario to pursue what it calls an “active offshore defense” that involves the ability to advance its territorial claims, maritime interests, and critical sea line of communications. If successful, these efforts will have major consequences for U.S. military power in East Asia. See Office of the Secretary of Defense, The Military Power of the People’s Republic of China, 2005, pp. 12–14.
and have less to show for it. Brooks and Wohlforth argue that regional security concerns, not balancing motives, are driving Europe’s desire to have a more effective and weighty military force. By “regional security concerns,” I believe they mean that Europeans are worried the United States might not come to their defense the next time a serious security issue arises within Europe or on its periphery and, therefore, that they had better generate the military capability to act on their own (pp. 91–93). For their part, Lieber and Alexander argue that ESDP has currently amounted to little and has suffered a major setback with the French and Dutch rejections of the proposed EU constitution (p. 124).

Both arguments are not persuasive. Brooks and Wohlforth wrongly dismiss the balancing motives in Europe’s initial launch of ESDP, and both sets of authors ignore the balancing consequences of ESDP if the European Union achieves its stated objectives with this enterprise.

It is the case that regional security concerns partly drove the formation of ESDP. The 1999 Kosovo war was the catalyst for its creation. For the Europeans, that war had three faces. First, planning for intervention to deal with Slobodan Milošević’s depredations against the Kosovar Albanians drove home to the British in particular how dependent Europe was upon the United States in dealing with Milošević. Second, moreover, in European eyes the United States came uncomfortably close to not intervening, and they were clearly worried that it might not be willing to intervene in the next European security crisis. Finally, the conduct of the war demonstrated to the Europeans the large gap that had opened up between their military forces and those of the United States. These three facets of the Kosovo war launched ESDP, and the British played the key role. They scrapped their support of the Western European Union, which they had used to prevent a distinct European defense entity from emerging; initiated talks with France; and agreed with the French at Saint-Malo, France, in December 1998, before the war had started, to build a more effective European defense capability within the European Union, an objective the Europeans had written into the Maastricht Treaty but had made little progress in achieving.13

Regional security concerns were not the only driving factor behind ESDP, however. Although the British did insist that ESDP be NATO friendly and that NATO had to handle any really big military operations, they had another objective in mind: they wanted Europe to enhance its military capability so that it could better influence the United States. If Europe brought more assets to the NATO table, they reasoned, it would have more say in the outcomes of the deliberations. The French had a long-standing goal of making Europe more autonomous of the United States. Germany was caught in the middle between the two, as usual, but supported the initiative and eventually became a

strong proponent of ESDP. The motives of the European big three may have differed to a degree, but they overlapped on the desire to have more power and influence vis-à-vis the United States.

The “influence motive” for ESDP is clearly a case of balancing. It is wrong to argue that the Europeans are not balancing against the United States because they have not dramatically increased their defense budgets. Instead, they are balancing through external alignment: they are working steadily and deliberately to pool and integrate their resources and to fashion a more effective Europe-wide military force. They have created a military staff at the EU and have earmarked national military headquarters to conduct independent operations; they are developing indigenous European airlift, satellite reconnaissance and navigation systems, and precision-guided munitions capabilities; they have created a European defense agency to rationalize military procurement; and since the end of the Cold War and the advent of unipolarity, they have made the most dramatic strides in a generation to build what Seth Jones terms “an increasingly integrated and technologically-advanced defense industry” on a Europe-wide basis.

If the Europeans succeed fully in standing up their EU rapid reaction force (ERRF), they will be able to deploy 60,000 troops in the field within a month and sustain them for a year. This is in fact a commitment to build a force that could total up to 100,000 troops when air and sea assets and rotation of forces are taken into account. The ERRF is not a trivial force; by comparison, the United States has had 130,000–150,000 troops deployed in Iraq. Finally these forces are not intended merely for humanitarian and rescue missions and peacekeeping, but also for peacemaking (waging war). Thus, when assessing the EU’s efforts toward achieving greater defense autonomy, do not look for increases in military budgets; look instead for a more integrated, coordinated, and pooled use of current resources.

Not only do Brooks and Wohlforth wrongly dismiss the balancing motive in ESDP, they also ignore its balancing consequences. A European Union that can act autonomously in its own region and that can provide for its own security is an EU that will be less under the United States’ thumb and more capable of influencing Washington across a certain range of issues. At the minimum, such an EU will, in Barry Posen’s words, “have an agenda setting power in NATO. The U.S. is not going to like this.” At

15. Brooks and Wohlforth agree that one reason the EU wants enhanced military capabilities is to better influence the United States, but they dismiss this as balancing behavior and instead call it “policy bargaining.” I address this point in the last section of this response.
17. The EU declared in mid-2003 that the ERRF had achieved operational capability, but that it had deficiencies in deployment times and the more demanding “high end” (war-waging) missions. In June 2004, the EU adopted the 2010 Headline Goal, in which it committed itself to rapid deployment and redress of the qualitative deficiencies in the ERRF. Emphasis was also put on fielding rapid intervention forces in the form of 1,500-member battle groups, and thirteen are currently planned. See Council of the European Union, “Headline Goal 2010,” May 4, 2004, http://register.consilium.eu.int/pdf/en04/st06/st06-re06/en04.pdf.
the maximum, such an EU will have the power, in Christopher Layne’s words, “[to] constrain the U.S. . . . and gain bargaining leverage vis-à-vis the United States.”18 In short, an EU that can provide for its own security will not be dependent on the United States for it, and that alone will decrease U.S. influence over the EU.

Finally, it is too pessimistic to conclude that ESDP is woefully off track because the European constitution may be dead. The former was proceeding ahead before the latter was conceived; it can continue to do so if there is the political will. So far, there seems to be. Britain and France have been the drivers of ESDP, and they have managed to insulate it from their disputes over the 2003 Iraq war and the constitution’s failure.19 The ESDP enterprise is likely to make continued progress because it is rooted in two factors: a great power imbalance between the United States and Europe, and the declining relevance of Europe to U.S. foreign policy compared to the Cold War years. I judge that ESDP will materialize, and if the EU’s efforts continue on track, Posen estimates that “a militarily autonomous Europe will appear viable within a bit less than a decade.”20 Thus, what we see in the ESDP case are the early signs of balancing behavior that predate the transatlantic brouhaha over the Iraq war, but which have been made stronger by it.

WHAT IS BALANCING BEHAVIOR?
Both the China and ESDP cases should cause one to reject Brooks and Wohlforth’s conception of balancing behavior as far too narrow. They define balancing this way: “Balancing, whether hard or soft, is about protection from the security threat emanating directly from a potential hegemon” (p. 105). I infer that this definition arises from their laudable effort to distinguish balancing behavior from what they term “policy bargaining” and what Lieber and Alexander call “normal diplomatic friction” (p. 109). I agree that it is important not to equate balancing with policy bargaining and normal diplomatic friction; that would make balancing include much more than it should and thereby empty it of any utility. Although I agree with the Brooks and Wohlforth’s injunction, I do not agree with the solution. By defining balancing in such a restricted way, they miss—and so will others if they adopt this definition—a lot of balancing behavior in international politics.

My solution to this conundrum is to distinguish balancing from policy bargaining and normal diplomatic friction in the following fashion. “Policy bargaining” refers to behavior designed to obtain the best outcome for a state on a given issue or set of issues by deploying in the most effective manner the power assets that the state currently possesses. “Balancing” refers to behavior designed to create a better range of outcomes for a state vis-à-vis another state or coalition of states by adding to the power assets at its

disposal, in an attempt to offset or diminish the advantages enjoyed by that other state or coalition. These assets include military forces, economic power and leverage, formal alliances, informal alignments, and voting and veto power in international organizations. The first three can be conceived of as hard assets; the last two, as soft assets. Use of any of the first three is hard balancing; of the last two, soft balancing. So, policy bargaining is the attempt to produce favorable outcomes with current assets, whereas balancing behavior is the attempt to augment assets so as to produce better outcomes the next time.

This definition does not restrict balancing behavior solely to protection from a would-be hegemon’s direct security threat, nor does it necessarily require that balancing behavior be directed at all at a would-be hegemon. All the definition does is restrict balancing behavior to attempts by a state to increase its power assets so as to diminish or offset the decided advantages of another state or coalition, but without reference to the specific purpose to which those assets are put. This definition does not exclude the goal of adding power assets to counter a direct security threat, but it does not restrict balancing to that. Neither does it conflate balancing behavior with policy bargaining or normal diplomatic friction. What it does is illuminate the efforts states make to increase their power resources, hard or soft, relative to other states. As I have written elsewhere, defining balancing behavior in this fashion “sensitizes us to state actions motivated by relative power considerations,” which is important because concern for relative power is one of the fundamental tenets of structural realism.21

If balancing behavior is defined in this fashion, four consequences ensue. First, a balance between opposing forces need not be achieved for balancing behavior to be taking place. Intention (the desire to balance) must not be conflated with the result (a balance of forces). Balance of power is a systemic outcome; balancing behavior is a state strategy. Thus, China’s and the EU’s balancing efforts must not be dismissed simply because they have not established a genuine offset yet against U.S. power.

Second, balancing behavior need not be directed against a would-be hegemon to qualify as balancing. This would dismiss, wrongly in my view, a lot of balancing behavior among great powers with roughly the same capabilities. It will also cause us to miss a lot of regional balancing behavior among medium and small powers.

Third, the security threat from a hegemon need not be direct to provoke balancing behavior by other states. The indirect effects of the would-be hegemon’s (or very powerful state’s) exercise of its power can be deleterious to the security of other states. Thus, the unilateral exercise of U.S. power to wage war against Iraq in 2003 increased the terrorism threats that the Europeans faced, which is one of the reasons why France’s president, Jacques Chirac, in particular opposed the war. Brooks and Wohlforth argue that this indirect “blowback” effect provided ample EU incentive to enhance its capabilities vis-à-vis the United States and that while this incentive “concerns security and is directly connected to U.S. policy, it has nothing to do with balancing” (p. 105). This makes no sense. Direct or indirect, if a powerful state’s actions adversely affect the se-

curity of other states, they will act to do something about it by trying to offset that state’s power. Indirect effects may not hurt as much as direct effects (when the powerful state goes to war against those states), but they still hurt.

Fourth, balancing is as much about preserving a state’s autonomy, independence, and ability to influence international outcomes vis-à-vis a powerful state or group of states as it is about dealing with threats of direct attack from them. Concern for position is one of the central tenets of structural realism. As Kenneth Waltz says, “A state also worries lest it become dependent on others through cooperative endeavors and exchanges of goods and services.”22 The French leader Charles de Gaulle, after all, did not fear a direct attack by the United States, but he did fear the consequences of U.S. power and dependence on it and tried in various ways to lessen the United States’ grip. The EU today is in much the same position as de Gaulle was then. Look, for example, at how it justifies the acquisition of Galileo, Europe’s global navigation satellite system: “Satellite navigation users in Europe today have no alternative other than to take their positions from U.S. GPS or Russian GLONASS satellites. Yet the military operators of both systems give no guarantee to maintain an uninterrupted service. . . . European independence is the chief reason for taking this step [of building Galileo].”23 The default position of states, especially when it comes to military matters, is not dependence, but autonomy and independence, if they can achieve it.

A final word is in order. Hard balancing against the United States, on the one hand, and the United States’ unipolar position (particularly its unipolar military position), on the other, can coexist for a considerable period of time. After all, superpowers are not dislodged overnight, especially when all-out war is highly unlikely between nuclear-armed states. Balancing has to begin somewhere over something, and balancing takes time, especially when the state against which it is directed has generally been viewed as a benign force and when its edge is so great. Gross imbalances of power in international politics do not last indefinitely, however. Overweening power ultimately provides its own threat, usually because very powerful states, even well-intentioned ones, eventually manage to act in ways that frighten other states, even if those other states do not worry about being directly attacked. The current imbalance in the United States’ favor will pass, too. How long it takes depends on many factors, one of which is the United States’ own actions. Although Brooks, Wohlforth, Lieber, Alexander, and I believe that the United States’ unbridled unilateralism is not in the country’s long-term interest, I worry, apparently more than they do, that it will accelerate the hard balancing against the United States that has already started.

—Robert J. Art
Waltham, Massachusetts

Robert Art’s response to our article is arguably the boldest and most forthright attempt to do what so many scholars have tried to do over the past decade: to revise balance of power theory to make it relevant to the great power politics of today’s unipolar world. Even in his hands, however, the effort fails—a result that substantially reinforces our argument that scholars seeking to explain contemporary great-power politics should resist the temptation to revise a theory so thoroughly enmeshed in the experience of past systems. Our reply highlights three points: everyone involved in the debate agrees on aspects of current international behavior that all call into question the relevance of balance of power theory; Art’s treatment of the cases of the European Union (EU) and China actually reinforces this assessment; and Art’s revision of “balancing” to make it relevant would render balance of power theory an inherently unfalsifiable catch-all description of international relations writ large.

AGREED: WHY THESE ARE HARD TIMES FOR BALANCE OF POWER THEORY
All of the participants in the debate on balancing in International Security—including Art—concur on three important issues. First, we all agree on what constituted balancing in the bipolar and multipolar systems of the past. Balancing was what France did when it allied with its ideological opponent Russia to contain Germany in the late nineteenth century, and in so doing risked being dragged into war with Germany over St. Petersburg’s imperial aims in the Balkans. It was what France and Britain refused to do in the 1930s when they sought to avoid the fearsome costs of domestic rearmament and alliance with Stalin’s Soviet Union. It was what the United States did after 1945, when President Harry Truman reluctantly bore the heavy political and economic burdens of keeping U.S. troops in Europe against the hopes and expectations of his war-weary people. It was what France did when it gave up hope of neutrality and independent great-power status by allying with its bitter foe Germany and the United States to balance Soviet power. It was what Japan did when it bound itself to the United States and accepted U.S. forces on its territory, thereby placing itself high on the target list of the Soviet Union’s strategic rocket forces. And it was what leaders in Moscow did when they devoted more than 25 percent of the Soviet Union’s economy to building up the capabilities to balance the United States, a heavy burden that contributed to their country’s decline and dissolution.

Second, we all agree that nothing remotely resembling this kind of costly and consequential behavior is happening now or is imminent. Art’s response makes this clear. In neither of the two cases that he regards as “hard balancing” does he see now or expect to see soon any costly effort to counterbalance U.S. power. If all goes well for Brussels, Art expects, in a decade or so the world will see a more independent EU that does not need to rely as much on the United States for its core security. Of course, the European Security and Defense Policy (ESDP) faces many obstacles, as European analysts recognize; and even the emergence of a less dependent EU, important as that is, would not be comparable to the major counterbalancing efforts of the past. It is likely only because the status quo is heavy European dependence on the United States that the ESDP is touted as such a major foreign policy departure.

Art also shares the consensus view among China analysts that Beijing is not now, nor is it soon going to be, prepared to make a costly effort to counterbalance U.S. power. China’s increased defense outlays are significant, but at 4 percent of gross domestic product, they represent roughly the same level of effort as that of the United States, with its massive lead in overall military power and much larger and more advanced economy. That level of commitment reflects the reality, Art agrees, that China is not seeking to “whittle the U.S. military advantage down to a manageable size.” Nor is it likely to try any time soon, because, as Art notes, this would “undercut its ‘peaceful rise’ strategy and harm [its] economic growth” (p. 180).

Third, all participants in this debate agree that standard balance of power theory cannot account for the kinds of policies that China, the EU, and other major players are following. Because they recognize that balance of power theory cannot explain contemporary major power politics, analysts such as Robert Pape and T.V. Paul propose amending the theory to encompass “soft balancing.” Our article tested this amended balancing proposition. We showed that for the soft-balancing argument to have the predictive and explanatory punch its proponents advertise, it must be minimally consistent with the foundational theoretical works on balance of power theory. That is, soft balancing is the dependent variable (the predicted behavior) of a theory whose key independent variable is concentrated power (or hegemony), and whose core assumption is security maximization (that states act to reduce threats to their long-term survival as sovereign units). We also held that, like any proposition in social science, soft balancing had to be falsifiable. To determine whether soft balancing was really in play, we noted that the relevant state actions had to be significant—to the point of requiring gov-

3. In 2003, the United States spent 3.7 percent of its gross domestic product on defense while China spent 3.9 percent. International Institute for Strategic Studies, The Military Balance, 2004–05 (London: IISS, 2004). It should be noted that the IISS estimate of Chinese defense spending is based on a purchasing-power-parity formula that dramatically increases its estimated spending over official figures.
ernments to face trade-offs between balancing and other objectives. We did not impose these standards to make a fetish of theoretical consistency, but because it is the only way to address the real question at issue: whether there are reasons grounded in scholarship and empirical research to expect a counterbalancing constraint on the United States.

We found no evidence for soft balancing. Put differently, the attempt to connect the basic propositions of balance of power theory to the subtler policies of today’s major powers via the soft-balancing amendment failed empirically. Analysts may continue to expect counterbalancing to occur, but there is no factual basis for doing so. Our finding is unsettling to many who advocate restraint in U.S. foreign policy, but Art’s response again demonstrates the analytical costs of challenging it by broadening and thereby loosening balance of power theory. Art reviews the cases of China and the EU and does not outline any evidence that they accord with the expectations of existing balance of power theory. What he proposes instead is to revise the theory to encompass the evidence concerning those cases. The debate, therefore, is not really about the evidence regarding the cases themselves but rather the wisdom of redefining “balancing” to encompass them.

DO THE ESDP AND CHINA CASES FIT BALANCE OF POWER THEORY?
Although much of Art’s response questions aspects of our treatment of the ESDP and China, it serves only to reinforce our main finding. To be sure, we do part company with Art on important aspects of both cases. Because our analysis is sensitive to governments’ willingness to accept trade-offs between acquiring power and other objectives, we find that the evidence does not support Art’s bullishness on the ESDP’s prospects. To date, we still have no concrete indicator of European governments’ willingness to sacrifice other objectives—welfare, prosperity, even state sovereignty (the ESDP remains entirely intergovernmental, not supranational)—in the interests of developing a genuine counterweight to U.S. power. The case for balancing remains a matter of faith that someday, somehow, the EU will become an autonomous power. Tellingly, Art’s discussion of the ESDP is focused on possible futures, not current accomplishments.

We also are more sensitive than Art to the many reasons for increases in Chinese defense outlays. Art argues that “China’s drive to upgrade its military capability is directed in the short term principally, although not exclusively, against the United States because no country, except the United States, can challenge China over Taiwan” (p. 179). That is true only technically. Although it is not generally recognized as a country, Taiwan can challenge China on Taiwan. Art neglects that a substantial proportion of China’s efforts are directed at that island’s bargaining strategies and its autonomous military capabilities, which have also been augmented in recent years in ways that help

7. Since our article was published, a number of significant analyses have been produced that coincide with our overall assessment of the ESDP. See, for example, Center for Strategic and International Studies, European Defense Integration: Bridging the Gap between Strategy and Capabilities (Washington, D.C.: CSIS, 2005).
to maintain Taiwan’s long-standing defensive advantages. Moreover, China has had a number of other pressing needs to increase military spending that have nothing to do with U.S. military power, such as rising inflation against a backdrop of low pay in the military.

Overall, however, we and Art agree: these two cases are not consistent with existing balance of power theory. He shares our assessment—which is that of all Europe experts—that the ESDP is not a response to a security threat posed by concentrated U.S. power, and, moreover, that it is partly a reaction to current and anticipated withdrawal of U.S. power from the security affairs of the region. He agrees with us that the Sino-Russian strategic partnership is not a counterbalancing alliance, and that China’s defense increases are not aimed at counterbalancing the United States in general. He shares our view—which is the consensus among China experts—that China realized the need in the mid-1990s to choose a peaceful rise strategy because, as Avery Goldstein stresses, “it recognizes just how weak it is relative to the U.S. and its allies.” We agree, furthermore, that China’s increased defense outlays are aimed not at creating a comprehensive check on U.S. power but more specifically at improving Beijing’s bargaining leverage over what it regards as the breakaway province of Taiwan. As Art puts it, “China’s military modernization is specifically designed both to deter Taiwan from declaring independence and to improve China’s performance should it find itself in a shooting war with the United States over Taiwan” (p. 179).

THE COSTS OF BROADENING “BALANCING”
The fundamental question Art raises is whether to expand the definition of balancing to encompass actions the EU takes to reduce its security dependence on the United States

9. Avery Goldstein, “China’s Grand Strategy and U.S. Foreign Policy,” Foreign Policy Research Institute, November 27, 2005. As Goldstein notes, after the mid-1990s there was a clear recognition in China that “contrary to the belief when the Cold War ended, the world was not quickly going to become multipolar. Instead, unipolarity would last for decades, with the U.S. remaining the world’s sole superpower. . . . Although China’s economic and military capabilities were growing as a result of the reform program in place since 1979, it still lagged far behind the world’s leading states, especially the U.S. Perhaps most significantly, China’s leaders . . . more clearly recognized just how far they had to go before their armed forces were in the same league as those of the U.S. and its allies.” See the related analysis in Avery Goldstein, Rising to the Challenge: China’s Grand Strategy and International Security (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2005). Peter Gries’s review of recent Chinese analysts’ writings on the United States reaches the same finding: “While many Chinese have convinced themselves that U.S. power predominance cannot last, they do grudgingly acknowledge the world’s current unipolar nature. This view represents a dramatic shift from the early 1990s, when many Chinese held out hope for a multipolar international system. . . . While some elements of resistance remain, Chinese strategy today has largely shifted away from balancing and towards bandwagoning.” See Gries, “China Eyes the Hegemon,” Orbis, Vol. 49, No. 3 (Summer 2005), p. 406.
and actions China takes to recover Taiwan. At first, this conceptual broadening seems tempting, given that these are important developments in security affairs, but it comes at an unacceptable price: stripping balance of power theory of every attribute that commands attention from scholars and policymakers.

First, there is a debate about the balance of power because it is a scholarly theory that supposedly generates falsifiable predictions and explanations of state behavior. Art defines balancing as “behavior designed to create a better range of outcomes for a state vis-à-vis another state or coalition of states by adding to the power assets at its disposal, in an attempt to offset or diminish the advantages enjoyed by that other state or coalition” (pp. 183–184 [emphasis in original]). The United States is, of course, building up its capabilities to “create a better range of outcomes,” so it is balancing, too, by Art’s definition. Who isn’t? Art does not show—nor is it clear how he could show—how his broadened conception of balance of power theory could ever be wrong. By his definition, any state’s acquisition of any level of capabilities of any kind (including non-military) that enhances in any way its bargaining position vis-à-vis any other state in any policy area (including those unrelated to security affairs) constitutes balancing.

According to Art, by playing a “key role” in the ESDP, the United Kingdom is balancing the United States. This doubtless would come as a surprise to British Prime Minister Tony Blair in light of his strenuous efforts to ensure that European defense coordination is compatible with NATO and the withering domestic criticism he has endured for being President George W. Bush’s “poodle.” If Japan builds up its naval capabilities and offers to help control piracy in the Pacific in return for the United States’ importing more Japanese cars, it would also be balancing by Art’s definition. Indeed, if Canada builds ice-breakers and promises to clear more ice in the Arctic to promote shipping in return for the United States’ importing more Canadian lumber, this too is balancing according to Art. Moreover, Art’s formulation cannot distinguish actions that prevent hegemony from those that advance it; if the United States were to build up its capabilities to conquer and subdue the EU and China, it would be balancing, according to Art. It is difficult to see the analytical utility of a definition of balancing that cannot exclude such cases. International politics is competitive. States not surprisingly would prefer to have greater rather than fewer capabilities, and when they disagree, they try to influence each other. In Art’s formulation, only if states were to stop seeking additional capabilities and cease bargaining would balance of power theory ever be wrong.

Second, there is a debate about the balance of power because it is arguably the oldest and most influential theoretical proposition in international relations—one that addresses a recognizable and a recognizably important subset of state behavior. Art makes no effort to ground his definition within the centuries of theoretical writings on the balance of power, arguing simply that analysts should adopt a broader conception of balancing to make the theory relevant today. The result is a definition of balancing so expansive as to lose its long-standing theoretical meaning.

Third, there is a debate about the balance of power because the specific forecast it makes today—that unless the United States practices self-restraint, it will face costly counterbalancing—has such portentous policy implications. Unambiguous evidence that counterbalancing was imminent would be a powerful warning to policymakers. Ironically, Art’s effort to make balance of power theory relevant actually undermines its
applicability to the current debate on U.S. foreign policy. If we were to follow his suggestion and transform balancing into a routine feature of international politics, it is hard to see why U.S. policymakers should be especially responsive to scholarly assessments that it is occurring. By decoupling the theory from the issue of hegemony, moreover, Art’s formulation severs the connection between balancing and any argument about U.S. self-restraint. After all, a U.S. withdrawal from world politics could well create incentives for many states to acquire more capabilities for bargaining, meaning that U.S. restraint might easily generate more rather than less of the “balancing” behavior that Art writes about.

CONCLUSION
At issue in this debate is whether it is useful to amend balance of power theory, not whether the United States faces constraints on its power (it does) or whether other states are taking actions that further complicate U.S. foreign policymaking (they are). Our article showed that the soft-balancing amendment is empirically unfounded. Robert Art’s analogous effort to stretch the definition of “hard balancing” to encompass recent great-power policies is counterproductive principally because it is inherently unfalsifiable. In the end, there is no escaping that unipolarity is poor terrain for balance of power theory. For any theory to be of any use, it must be capable of being proved wrong at least sometimes. For balance of power theory, now is such a time.

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Lieber and Alexander Reply:

We welcome the opportunity to respond to Robert Art’s letter to the editors in regard to our article “Waiting for Balancing: Why the World Is Not Pushing Back.” Our article makes three arguments. First, we counter the claim that the United States’ grand strategy following the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, particularly the U.S.-led invasion of Iraq in 2003, was so threatening to other major powers that they began to balance against U.S. power. The evidence shows that the United States’ nearest rivals

have not responded to its policies by ramping up defense spending, nor have they sought to pool their efforts or resources for counterbalancing. Second, we demonstrate that the new idea of “soft balancing”—that is, behavior that falls short of classic balancing but that somehow seeks to undermine and restrain a dominant power—has little utility for understanding international relations. The concept is difficult to define or operationalize; the behavior typically identified by it seems indistinguishable from normal diplomatic friction; and regardless, the empirical evidence invalidates the specific predictions suggested by those advancing the concept. Third, we propose that the current lack of balancing stems from the fact that the United States is plausibly threatening to only a very limited number of states and terrorist groups. Most other major powers either share the U.S. interest in countering these regimes and groups or do not have a direct stake in the U.S.-led campaign against nuclear proliferators or the war on terrorism. In sum, dire warnings of a global backlash are misplaced because other major powers lack an underlying motivation to compete strategically with the United States under current conditions. The search for balancing will continue.

Robert Art takes issue with several of our arguments, but ultimately his analysis powerfully illustrates the problems that arise when, in the course of that search, traditional definitions of balancing and clear standards for identifying such behavior are relaxed. Since the necessity of using rigorous and consistent criteria for judging balancing was a central theme of our article, it is fitting that our response to Art centers on these problems in his analysis of balancing.

Art asserts that major power balancing against the United States is under way. Although we found little credible evidence of such balancing based on traditional measures, Art contends that “a somewhat broader understanding of balancing behavior is required to appreciate the actions taken by some states against the United States today” (p. 178). Like proponents of soft balancing (with whom Art states he is in general accord), Art relies on vague criteria for detecting balancing in international relations. He so broadens the concept of balancing that it potentially can include state concerns about relative power (pp. 183–184); state behavior not intended to balance another power (p. 180); state behavior aimed at gaining influence, regardless of what a state wishes to influence (p. 181); state pursuit of economic power and leverage (p. 184); and state voting and veto power in international organizations (ibid.).

We believe that the label “great power balancing” should be reserved to describe situations where states commit themselves to containing a perceived threat from a dominant state (or coalition). Balancing does not require the fear of an imminent attack, of course, but it must be motivated by some perception of threat and should represent something more concrete than the general desire for influence or the pursuit of power. Stretching the concept of balancing to cover the kinds of behaviors discussed by Art leads to several problems.

First, consider Art’s suggestion that intentions are irrelevant for classifying balancing
behavior. Art writes, “If China is engaged merely in a general increase in its military capabilities, with no specific adversary in mind, and if these changes result in enhanced Chinese military power in East Asia at the expense of the United States, then China is offsetting and thereby balancing U.S. power, even if it did not explicitly design its efforts to do so” (p. 180). The most basic problem with this intentions-free theory of balancing is that it ignores the debate that we addressed in our article—that is, whether U.S. actions in recent years have made other major powers feel threatened enough to respond with new counterbalancing efforts. It is also unclear whether Art truly believes that intentions do not matter for balancing because, soon after, he explicitly incorporates intentionality: “’Balancing’ refers to behavior designed to create a better range of outcomes for a state vis-à-vis another state or coalition of states by adding to the power assets at its disposal, in an attempt to offset or diminish the advantages enjoyed by that other state or coalition” (pp. 183–184 [emphasis in original]).

This last definition still encompasses too broad a range of behavior to be helpful in explaining the dynamics and incentives for balancing. Such conceptual stretching invites observers to code as “balancing behavior” actions that hardly signify a desire to counter perceived threats and can easily generate analytic inconsistencies.

For example, shifting standards permit observers to identify as balancing an internal defense buildup aimed not at deterring a threat but at mounting one. Art provides an example of this. He believes that China’s current military modernization program constitutes a clear case of internal balancing against the United States. To be sure, we write in our article that “China . . . is engaged in a strategic military buildup” and that it “may well have a long-term strategy to balance U.S. power in the future.” Our argument, however, is that the current growth in Chinese capabilities is primarily driven not by Chinese fears of some new threat, specifically by a fear of attack by an increasingly assertive United States. Instead, China’s buildup is motivated principally by the short-term aim of deterring Taiwan from declaring independence and the medium-term goal of compelling Taiwan’s unification with the mainland. The main concern of China vis-à-vis the United States is with deterring, delaying, or disrupting U.S. intervention in a crisis over the Taiwan Strait. Indeed, Art appears to agree: “China’s military modernization is specifically designed both to deter Taiwan from declaring independence and to improve China’s performance should it find itself in a shooting war with the United States over Taiwan” (p. 189). But two sentences later, he asserts that China is upgrading its military capabilities “to defend itself against a U.S. attack” (p. 179). These are two very different possible reasons for China’s buildup, and there are no good analytical reasons for conflating state actions intended to facilitate regional revisionist goals with serious steps to contain or defend against another threatening state. Moreover, in this case empirical evidence can help to decipher Chinese intentions.

3. In fact, Art believes that China’s actions are directed against the United States, but we use the quotation to illustrate his idea that intentions are not a necessary component of balancing.
If China had embarked on a serious effort to defend itself against a feared U.S. attack, it would be investing its resources in military capabilities such as a survivable nuclear capability. That Beijing is not doing this and, indeed, is pursuing stable and nonconfrontational relations with Washington suggests that real balancing is not under way. In sum, although we expect that China will eventually balance against the United States if the Chinese economy continues to expand, its behavior has not discernibly shifted in that direction in response to the United States’ post-September 11 grand strategy or the 2003 U.S.-led invasion of Iraq.

Shifting standards also permit observers to identify as balancing behavior actions aimed not at deterring intervention but at inviting it. Art contends that an important motive behind the European Security and Defense Policy (ESDP) is to enhance European military capabilities to better influence the United States. He does not specify what Europeans want to do with this influence, other than to have more agenda-setting power and “more say in the outcomes of deliberations” (pp. 180–183, at p. 181). But his own description of the origins of ESDP, which lie in the wake of Europe’s tepid response to the 1999 Kosovo war, indicates that the Europeans worry that the United States “might not be willing to intervene in the next European security crisis” (p. 181).6 We believe there is something wrong with coding as balancing against the United States actions driven both by the fear of U.S. intervention (as in the case of China over Taiwan) and by fear of U.S. nonintervention (as in this case of Europe and the ESDP).

Indeed, loose standards permit an observer to code as balancing against a certain power action that is clearly not directed at that power. On the one hand, Art apparently agrees with our analysis that the Europeans have not increased their defense spending appreciably since September 11 and the Iraq war. In fact, most West European states have trimmed military spending as a percentage of gross domestic product since 2001. Art believes, however, that we should perceive balancing here in a different form, through external alignment rather than internal military buildups: the Europeans “are working steadily and deliberately to pool and integrate their resources and to fashion a more effective Europe-wide military force” (p. 182). In one sense, this is pooling and integrating of declining relative capabilities. But Art sees plans to deploy a non-NATO European rapid reaction force (ERRF) of 60,000 troops as a nontrivial development, comparing the eventual force size favorably with the roughly 140,000 U.S. troops deployed in Iraq and emphasizing that the force is “not intended merely for humanitarian and rescue missions and peacekeeping, but also for peacemaking (waging war)” (ibid.). If by this we are to imagine the ERRF as the vanguard of a counterweight to U.S. military power, then the United States can rest easy. Although European Union members made an initial commitment in November 2004 to form thirteen small battle groups (each with about 1,500 troops), only one such group was operational in 2005. More important, the ERRF is envisioned as a lightly armed force designed specifically

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6. As Art writes elsewhere, “ESDP was meant to enhance Europe’s influence within the NATO alliance; to enable Europe to act in those instances when the United States chose to sit out a European crisis that required military action, instances that the Europeans hoped would be rare; and to appear to do more burden sharing so as to keep U.S. forces in Europe.” Robert J. Art, “Europe Hedges Its Security Bets,” in Paul, Wirtz, and Fortmann, Balance of Power, pp. 179–213, at p. 199.
for quick deployment to local-conflict zones (such as the Balkans and Africa) in response to a request from the United Nations. It is in no way designed or directed against U.S. power. Moreover, as Art acknowledges, the force has fallen far short of deployment-time goals and war-waging capabilities. We interpret this as a lack of will and motivation. Although Art offers his own judgment that the broader ESDP “will materialize” and claims (without further discussion or evidence) that tensions in the lead-up to the Iraq war reinforced European motivations to balance the United States (p. 183), we stand by our argument that the French and Dutch decisive rejections of the proposed EU constitution in the spring of 2005 were a major setback for the European common defense vision. The addition of Germany’s indecisive election results in the fall of 2005, following on the heels of its prior cutbacks in participation in several joint European weapons programs, and France’s domestic politics make us even less confident that an effective autonomous European military force will emerge anytime soon.

A distinct problem is posed by Art’s identification of balancing with states’ general concern for relative power (pp. 183–184) and his explicit definition of balancing as “behavior designed to create a better range of outcomes for a state vis-à-vis another state or coalition of states by adding to the power assets at its disposal, in an attempt to offset or diminish the advantages enjoyed by that other state or coalition” (ibid. [emphasis in original]). It is a central tenet of realism—and Kenneth Waltz’s essential prediction—that balances of power will tend to form. But equating relative gains concerns with the notion of balancing empties the latter concept of any utility and hinders serious scholarship on this topic. Specifically, Art’s approach leaves us unable to make distinctions in behavior that the term “balancing” was created to make. It would, for example, force us to categorize as balancing virtually any state’s deliberate increase in power, done for any reason whatsoever. Balancing against the United States would now have to include, say, coordination among developing countries to increase their leverage in trade negotiations with developed countries, and not only France’s but also Britain’s acquisition of an independent nuclear deterrent. Indeed, by this standard the United States has been balanced against by most countries in the world virtually since its inception. And it has been balanced against by all of them since its emergence as a superpower in the 1940s, since which time all countries have had one reason or another to “create a better range of outcomes” in their multifaceted dealings with the United States.

When balancing becomes coterminous with a concern for relative power, then it becomes a constant feature of—and not a variable in—international politics, at least from a realist perspective. Not only do we question the analytic utility of this use of the term “balancing,” but we also note that it further muddies the debate over soft balancing. The debate about balancing in the post–Cold War world has turned in large part on

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whether changes in relative power have proved worrisome enough to non-U.S. great powers that these states would be willing to mobilize precious resources or coordinate their efforts to constrain U.S. power. The main position of soft-balancing proponents is that U.S. behavior after the September 11 terrorist attacks induced a change of substantial historical magnitude. Consistent with this, they assert that little balancing against the United States occurred before these attacks, but that since then there has been an important shift to balancing, especially since the lead-up to the Iraq war.

Art says that he is in general accord with proponents of soft-balancing claims. But to be consistent, he cannot agree with either of their core claims. His definition necessarily implies that there has always been balancing against the United States—at least since it has possessed substantial “advantages” in power terms—and that therefore there cannot have been a major shift since the Iraq war. Consistent with this, he asserts that China has been building up its military capabilities since at least the 1980s; he does not even claim that China’s policy has been different since 2003. From this perspective, there can be nothing special about balancing behavior against the United States since 2001 (or 2003) because there was no “before” when the United States was not being balanced against. In sum, if one uses Art’s most explicit definition of balancing, one finds little evidence of resurgent balancing in the wake of September 11 and the Iraq war.

We reiterate our article’s argument that U.S. grand strategy since September 11 has not, so far, inspired other major powers to commit themselves to containing U.S. power, precisely because they do not perceive the United States as a threat. Finding balancing behavior by relaxing definitions harms the debate over this crucial subject instead of advancing it.

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