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*Conference Report*

**Balance of Power Revisited:  
Theory and Practice in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century**

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*For: The International Security Research and Outreach Program (ISROP)*

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From May 17-18, 2002, a prominent group of international relations and comparative politics scholars from across both Canada and the United States met in Montreal to discuss the role of balance of power in international relations, both in theory and in practice, in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. The final goal of the conference was the production of an edited volume on balance of power by a major academic press, and as such was a preliminary discussion and debate on the content and direction the volume will take. Many of the questions raised by the conference participants will be answered in the coming months as the papers are revised for publication.

The conference was organized around seven sessions spanning over two days. The conference began with presentations on the present state of balance of power theory at the global level, and the participants subsequently narrowed down their focus to balance of power in different regional sub-systems - - from Latin America to the Middle East through Asia and Europe.

The conference was organized by three prominent international relations scholars - T.V. Paul from McGill University, James Wirtz from the Naval Post-Graduate School, and Michel Fortmann from the Université de Montréal. The conference was graciously co-sponsored by the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trades' (DFAIT) International Security Research and Outreach Program (ISROP), the McGill University/Université de Montréal Research Group in International Security (REGIS), Monterey Naval Post-Graduate School, and the Security and Defence Forum (SDF) of the Department of National Defence (DND). Without this support, the conference would not have been possible. We are especially grateful to Manon Tessier, who represented ISROP, for her help in preparing the conference.

After welcoming remarks by T.V. Paul, James Wirtz and Michel Fortmann, the first Friday session delved into a broad discussion of what balance of power is and how we understand it in today's world. Some of the main points discussed by T.V. Paul (McGill University) included:

- The need to broaden our understanding of balance of power from its traditional military usage.
- The need to respond to liberal critiques of balance of power by examining economic interdependence.
- The need to broaden our understanding of balance of power by looking at the different role played by hard balancing (traditional alliances and military build-up) and soft balancing (economics, new approaches to balancing).

Jack Levy (Rutgers University) offered a discussion on what great powers balance against and when, presenting a puzzle that throughout history, selected hegemonic countries or coalitions of countries have been balanced against,

- Louis XIV, Napoleon I, Germany in WWI and WWII, and the USSR post-1945.

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while other hegemonic states have not faced a coalition of balancers;

- The Dutch in the 17<sup>th</sup> Century, the United Kingdom in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, and the United States in the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> Centuries.

Several of the subsequent discussions, including the examination of maritime versus continental hegemony, dealt with this puzzle.

One of the main issues that was raised in this context was the fact that balancing or balance of power can be seen as two possible things; either as an outcome or as a selected policy choice by states in the international system.

After the two panel presentations were completed, the open discussion raised several issues that would remain central to debate over the course of the conference:

- In a partial response to Levy's puzzle, the difference between land based hegemony and naval based hegemony and their balancing efforts came into discussion, stating that geography mattered in balancing considerations.
- Definitional problems were also raised – many in the group suggested that there would be a need to set out clear definitions in order to examine balance of power in a unified manner.
- Can we take states as being rational, unitary, and sole actors in the international system, as realists do? Examining balance of power from a regional, and not systemic, point of view can have important effects on conceptions of the state and the level of anarchy needed to be considered.

After the lengthy discussion on concerns of methodology and definition, the second session examined balance of power from non-traditional approaches; power transitions theory and international political economy (IPE). Douglas Lemke (University of Michigan) presented the power transition approach to understanding balancing in the international system. To Lemke, hegemonic powers will structure relations in the international system to their benefit. Rising powers will challenge the systemic or regional hegemon (status quo power). This eventually will lead to conflict. In the present context, the United States is attempting to change domestic structures in states around the world so that they become satisfied with the relations as structured by itself. Thus the risk for war declines in the future.

Mark Brawley (McGill University) offered a response to the question of why the U.S. is not balanced, using an IPE approach. By focusing on international regimes, he argued that there is little balancing going on versus the U.S. due to both a normative and ideological consensus between states and international regimes and the U.S., as well as a consensus on economic development strategies and goals. International regimes help stabilize international relations by deepening this international consensus.

Some of the key points brought out during the open discussion included:

- By bringing in the international regime, economic interdependence argument, the point brought up in the first session on hard vs. soft balancing gained a deeper appreciation.
- But bringing in economic balancing also raised the question of when does the search for economic growth become a policy of balancing against a hegemonic economic power?
- One of the other issues brought up here focused on the definition of a status quo power – what does it mean to be a status quo power – is it institutional or something else?
- Due to the revolution in military affairs, where great powers can fight wars without suffering casualties, economic balancing will become even more central to our understanding of balance of power in the future.

Session III focused on the issue of new security challenges, especially from non-traditional sources, and the relevance of the concept of balance of power. Chris Layne (University of Miami) posited that terrorism, as we saw on September 11, is the “anti-hegemonic balancing of the weak.” The spread of weapons of mass destruction (ie. nuclear, chemical and biological) is the biggest threat to the traditional monopoly of power held by states since the Treaty of Westphalia. Why have states not challenged the position of the U.S. in the international system? Because the U.S. does not allow for challengers. But he concludes by stating that at some point, the U.S. will reach too far, and balancing by other states will be the final outcome.

James Wirtz (Naval Post-Graduate School) examined the paradox that, while almost no state in the international system can take on the hegemon, they do anyways. By looking at defence expenditures, the US is equal to the next 20-30 competitors combined in the international system. Yet states seem to be balancing it using asymmetrical means. This discussion of why weaker states attempt to balance also had regional implications, as smaller states many times challenge stronger ones in the regions.

Ed Rhodes looked at the breakdown of the relationship between the Clausewitzian trinity between society, the state, and the military in war making. While it used to be that militaries fought militaries in open conflicts, it is no longer the case, especially since September 11. Societies fight societies (Sept. 11), or militaries fight societies (Kosovo). The potential spread of nuclear weapons furthers the breakdown of this trinity. Thus, rather than balancing to allow their states to survive, they balance to keep the state system intact. Implications for the balance of power are:

- We need to balance threats, not power
- We need to be concerned with the preponderance of power, not the balance of power

Open discussion during session III focused on:

- Defining September 11 as balancing is false – Bin Laden did not want to balance the U.S., he wanted to destroy the U.S.
- Does the balance of power need to focus on the survival of the state system or is it to strive for the security of regimes?

Session IV began the lengthy discussion of regional subsystems and the balance of power. Robert Art (Brandeis University) examined the use of institutionalization in Western Europe to examine both economic and security balancing versus the United States. He argued that there has been significant balancing within Europe, both economically and in the security sphere, especially vs. Germany post-1989. He argues that both Maastricht (Economic and Monetary Union and European Political Union) were attempts by France to balance against potential German hegemony in Europe. He then argues that there has been little in the way of balancing against the U.S. on the security front, but that economically there has been some. This is due partly, and as it has been discussed before, to the fact that the hegemonic system, as designed by the United States, satisfies the demands of the Europeans, and as such does not elicit balancing. Secondly, on the military front, this is due to the fact that the Europeans do not see themselves as a global military power.

William C. Wohlforth (Dartmouth College) puzzles over why there has been no balancing between Russia and its former Soviet republics in Central Asia and Eastern Europe. He examines this question by looking at two different types of balancing – BOP1 and BOP2. BOP1 refers to the classical understanding of balancing actions (alliances, military spending, etc.) that are not really thinkable in a region with Russia as the hegemon. BOP2 balancing, on the otherhand, refers to subtle balancing (such as international diplomacy to balance the US), and as such can have a more important impact on analysing state actions in the region.

In the open discussion, two key points were raised:

- Can the Maastricht treaty on economic and political union be seen as balancing, when Germany ostensibly gave up power? Can we call a situation when a hegemon gives up power balancing?
- Is the use of BOP1 and BOP2 similar to T.V. Paul's distinction between hard a soft balancing, and as such a way to strengthen the use of the two types of balancing.

On Saturday, the sessions moved into full gear, discussing the regional evidence of the relevance of balance of power. Session V examined the regional implications of balance of power in the Middle East and East Asia. Benjamin Miller (Duke University) examined the validity of taking states as rational unitary actors when examining them at the regional/sub-systemic level. He argues that instead of using the traditional realist approach, states need to be examined through the lens of the relationship between the state and the nation. Where there is an imbalance between state and nation, there will be an automatic rise in the level of violence in a region. In the Middle East, the combination

of too few states, too many nations, and too many illegitimate states leads to heightened levels of violence.

Robert Ross (Boston College) examined the role of balance of power considerations in East Asia. He argued that there are two great powers in the region – the U.S. and China. Has this bipolar relationship fostered balancing and stability? The issue of maritime vs. land hegemony played itself out well in his discussion, as China is a land hegemon and the U.S. a maritime one. Thus, China is playing the role lost by the USSR in 1989 in the region. It is attempting to balance the U.S. in terms of military expenditures, but cannot match the U.S. power. It is only focusing on access denial – pushing the U.S. as far out to sea as possible. He concluded by arguing that this is a good balance of power – there is no risk for surprise attack by either hegemon, and intentions, while not clear, are definitely not feared.

Open discussions led to the following points being emphasized:

- How will the dependence of China on the US economy play out in its capabilities to balance the U.S.?
- Is Japan not a great power? Is not Russia? We need to look at impressions of their power versus the reality of their power.
- We need to look at two potential types of balancing – internal vs. external. Internal refers to domestic defence build-up, external deals with alliance formation. How does this relate to the hard vs. soft balancing discussed by T.V. Paul?

Session VI continued with the focus on Asia, looking at both South East Asia and South Asia. Brian Job (UBC) examined the southeast Asian case, arguing that three types of balancing are going on in the region:

- Localized balancing against other regional states (keep state/regime security)
- The region as a balance of power theatre (increase status of small states)
- A region with strategies of balancing to influence the great powers (gain from great powers)

The main states in the region use all three tools to make sure that they keep the U.S. in the region and that China remains a good regional power.

Raju Thomas focused his discussion on the uses of balance of power in South Asia, arguing that balance of power policies and outcomes, after 3500 years of history in the region, are a new phenomenon, and thus European in origin. In the modern context, how have states that are not used to the idea of balance of power used it? Thomas argues that prior to the Kosovo conflict of 1999, India, China, and Russia were using a policy of balancing against the U.S. through action, but in rhetoric were talking bandwagoning – working on the side of the U.S.. After Kosovo, and especially after September 11, this has changed, where India, China and Russia have overtly bandwagoned with the U.S., but

have shifted their rhetoric towards talking balancing. This came across as an interesting paradox that needs to be studied further.

Open discussion covered the following issues:

- Is the concept of balance of power a strictly European idea, and not applicable outside of the West? If it is, then it needs to be modified to take into account regional contexts.
- How does increasing your capabilities play into balance of power calculations. Is increasing defence spending balancing? Is increasing economic growth?

The final session focused on balance of power in Latin America. Harold Trinkunas (Naval Post-Graduate School) and Michael Barletta (Monterey Institute of International Studies) argued that in Latin America, balance of power was not applicable. The state system in the Western Hemisphere is institutionalized. Therefore, threats come from ideology, not from military or economic preponderance. According to these authors, balancing takes place between the forces of democracy and the forces of dictatorship. And in essence it is not balancing, but a quest to eliminate the threat of dictatorship. The goal of democrats is to make sure that democratic states remain stable. As the authors stated, it is better to have a militarily dominant democracy than a weak dictatorship. Regional history proves that once a state becomes a dictatorship, others in the region are automatically threatened.

The closing discussion focused on some of the main issues that needed to be worked out in order to narrow the scope of the papers and set up the direction of the proposed book. Key themes that came out in this discussion summarize the debates of the past two days;

- Is balance of power a strategy or an outcome?
- How does making the distinction between soft balancing and hard balancing affect our understanding of balance of power?
- How do issues such as globalization, economic interdependence, terrorism, and nuclear weapons affect or change our understanding of traditional tenants of balance of power?
- Are what we are seeing today indeed balancing outcomes, or are we simply seeing increased economic growth and as such increased military expenditures, separate from balancing policies?
- How do institutions, whether regional or international, affect the balance of power?

The conference presenters will now be reworking their papers, taking into consideration the comments presented to them here and after the conference by the organizers.

Appendix 1

**Canada and the Balance of Power:  
Bandwagoning on its own Terms**

**William Hogg**  
*McGill University*  
**June 2002**

The Cold War era saw Canada play an active role in the international arena. Often characterized as a middle-power, Canada was not a central actor in the balance of power politics that took place between the United States and the Soviet Union. But Canada fulfilled an important role. As a middle-power, in both the normative and physical sense of the term, Canada tried to foster better relations between the two main Cold War rivals so that the Cold War never went Hot. Canada also supported the construction of multilateral, rules-based trade and security regimes - - both as a way to secure its own liberal open society, and a way to secure its national interests abroad. Thus within the Cold War balance of power, Canada had a niche role to play, both within the Western Camp and as a balancer between the Cold War rivals.

With the end of the Cold War, the relevance of balance of power in international relations theory and in practice has been questioned. On May 17-18, 2002, in Montreal, scholars from across Canada and the United States met to discuss and debate the relevance of balance of power in international relations today.<sup>1</sup> The brief paper presented here examines some of the main issues raised during the discussion and debate, and their implications for Canada. As such, it is a work in progress. In brief, several points will need to be highlighted:

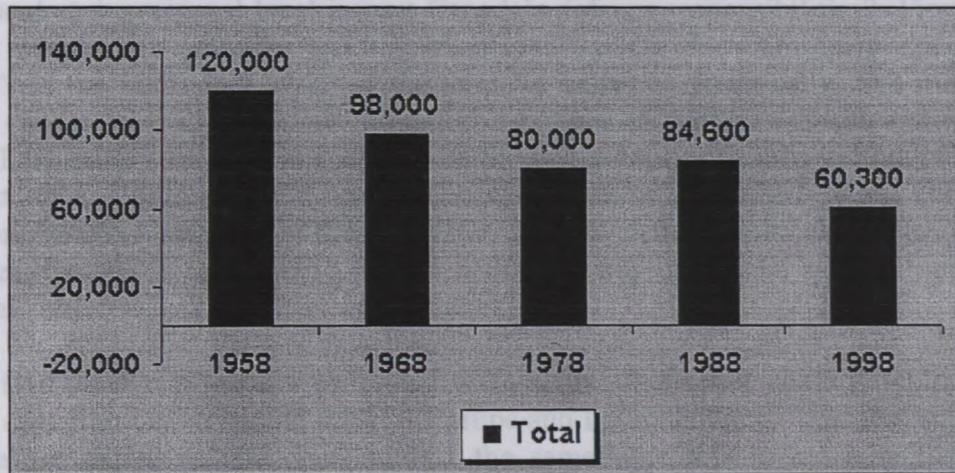
- Canada does not balance in the international system anymore, and may never have.
- In the security and economic arenas, Canada bandwagons, clearly on the side of the lone hegemon in the international system, the United States. This is not the best policy choice, if we examine Canada's situation from balance of power perspectives.
- While Canada does bandwagon, it does not do so passively. Canada attempts to structure its bandwagoning relationship to its greatest benefit.
- As such, Canada balances (through creative "rhetoric"), when in fact it is attempting to gain leverage (deepening the "substance") in its bandwagoning relationship with the United States.
- This Canadian approach to structuring relations between states is not new, and is a continuation of policies began as early the Pearson era.

To begin this discussion, we need to highlight some of the main conclusions that were drawn from the discussion on balance of power at the Montreal conference. First, when we discuss the issue of balance of power, we need to examine it from both a military/alliance standpoint, and second, from an economic standpoint. When a state balances, it can take one or the other, or both, as its policy choice. Second, states balance because they feel threatened - - either due to a major power threat to the international state system, or locally through threats to their domestic regime stability. Third, in a traditional balance of power, states balance in word and in deed. In the post-Cold War version of balance of power, states may balance rhetorically while bandwagoning in substance, or may balance in substance while bandwagoning rhetorically. These three conclusions are not an exhaustive summary of the conference findings, but are the ones that can be best used to examine Canada and the balance of power in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.

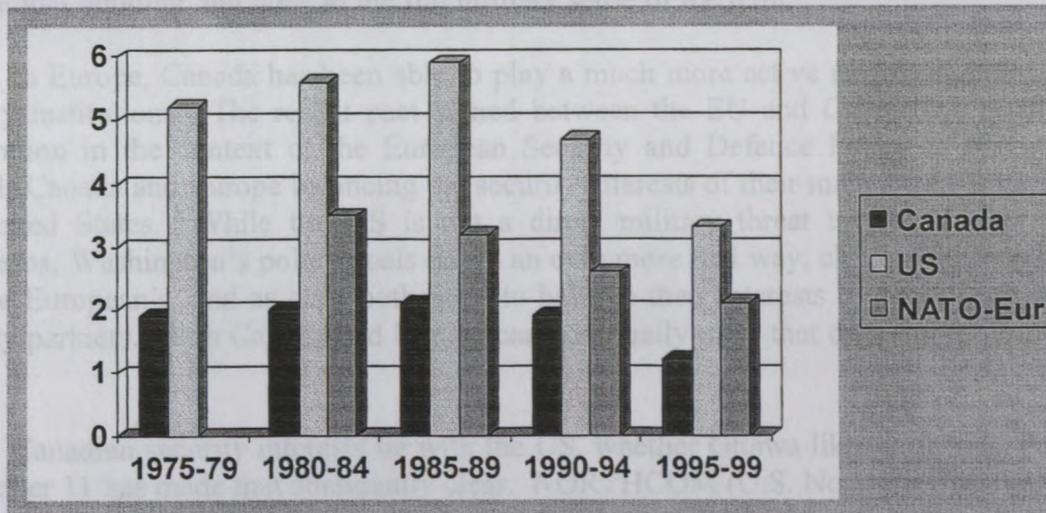
### Military vs. Economic Balancing: Rhetoric vs. Substance

Looking at both military and economic relations, does Canada balance or bandwagon? In military relations, since 1945, Canada has clearly bandwagoned with the United States. The rapid demobilization of the Canadian military establishment after the Second World War and the relative decline of military numbers (in the way of budget allocations and size of forces) during the Cold War gave proof to this reliance on the presence of US military forces both at home (but of course remaining firmly planted south of the border) and overseas to provide the first line of defence in any possible hot war.

Canadian Regular Force Size 1958-1998<sup>2</sup>



National Defence Expenditures 1975-1999  
(% of GDP)<sup>3</sup>



This continuing reliance on "others" to provide security was only heightened with the end of the Cold War and the superpower rivalry between the US and the USSR. The

“debate over the peace dividend” during the early post-Cold War years saw the rise in the belief that there were few direct military threats to Canada, and as such there was less a need for investment in the Canadian defence establishment. Even Canada’s main niche activity abroad, peacekeeping, was severely tested as a mainstay of Canadian foreign and defence policy by the 1994 Defence White Paper, which slashed military spending and force sizes across the board. Canada’s commitment to European defence, symbolized by troop placement overseas and through commitments to NATO, were questions during the mid-to-late 1990s, as the image of Canada as a “free-rider” grew. The 1.1% of GDP that Canada invests in defence expenditures places it just ahead of Luxembourg among the 19 NATO member states.

How does a potential return to balance of power politics in both the international system and at the regional level impact Canada’s defence responsibilities? First, with a defence community severely lacking resources, Canada does not have the military “power”, in the traditional sense of the term, to balance. Regionally, this means that Canada cannot have an important influence in regions of conflict – South Asia, and the Middle East mainly, but also in dealing with the rising power of China in South East Asia and East Asia. While the great powers (Russia, China or the United States) continue to have core national interests in these regions, and as such use their power to influence outcomes, Canada is relegated to the sidelines. As was mentioned several times at the Montreal conference, it takes power to balance.

Two other regions that were dealt with in the conference could potentially offer Canada opportunities to remain active – Europe and Latin America. US interests in Latin America are extensive and deep, and at the same time this is not a region that is preoccupied with military balancing. As discussion on Latin America during the conference pointed out, identity, either democratic or authoritarian, preoccupies security concerns in the region. As such, Canada does not have military balancing concerns in this region. It may have less traditional security roles to play, such as through regional institutional building, but none in the full military sense of the term.

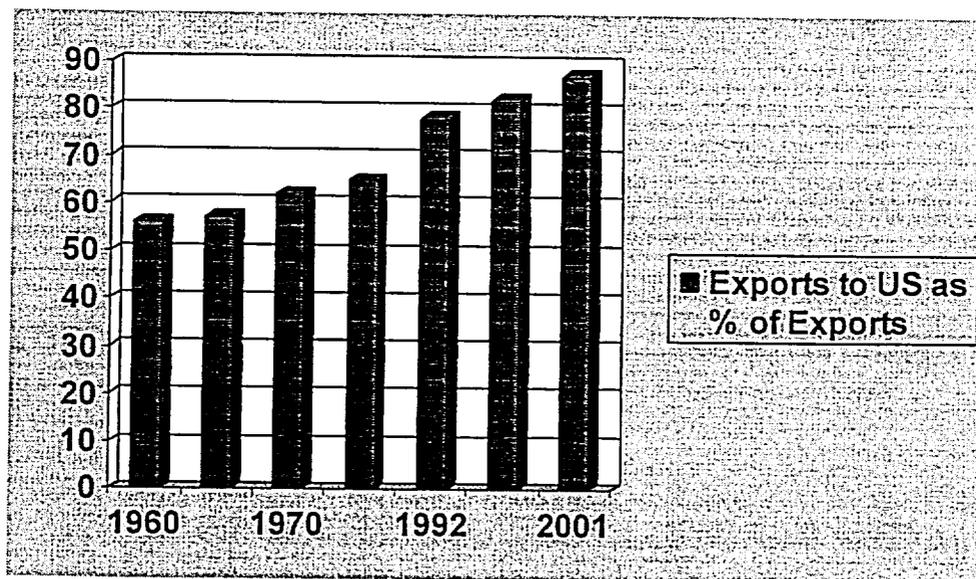
In Europe, Canada has been able to play a much more active role in maintaining security institutions. The recent pact signed between the EU and Canada on security cooperation in the context of the European Security and Defence Policy is first step towards Canada and Europe balancing the security interests of their main rival (threat<sup>4</sup>) – the United States. While the US is not a direct military threat to Canada nor the Europeans, Washington’s policy goals do, in an ever more real way, clash with Canada’s and the European’s, and as such both need to balance their interests by looking to new security partners. Both Canada and Europe can potentially offer that opportunity to each other.

Canadian security interests lie with the US, whether Ottawa likes it or not. Post-September 11 has made that abundantly clear. NORTHCOM (U.S. Northern Command), perimeter security and other policy directions taken by the Washington give Canada little choice but to follow the American lead. But as evidenced with our overtures to the Europeans on security issues, we attempt, at least at the diplomatic level, to keep our

options open - - closer cooperation with the EU, widening as well as deepening NATO, and institutional reform at the UN. While it is impossible to characterize this activity as balancing, Canada attempts to keep its options open. Building stronger international security institutions can help Canada, along with most other small and middle sized states, to gain leverage over U.S. decision making (as far as Washington is willing to abide by the decisions taken by these institutions). But Canada does not balance - it tries to bandwagon on its own terms. In the security sphere, we balance in rhetoric, but bandwagon in substance.

In the economic sphere, Canadian options should be much more extensive. It is much more difficult to balance security threats than economic threats. Where is Canada threatened in the economic sphere? Trade dominance by the US over Canada is at least a 50 year old problem. Previous governments have attempted, at least at the rhetorical level, to rectify the problem. Pierre Trudeau attempted the Third Option, attempting to reduce trade reliance on the US market. Jean Chretien began a policy of "Team Canada" missions abroad, in an attempt, partially, to reduce trade reliance on the US. But the outcomes have been much the same. Recent discussions with the EU focused on increasing trade with Canada. But since 1945, the percentage of overall exports that ends up in the US has continued to grow steadily, even with the attempts of governments to rectify the problem. And leaders such as Brian Mulroney (and even the present leader of the opposition Stephen Harper) have overtly courted the US as economic partners, deepening Canada's bandwagoning with its neighbours to the south.

Canadian Exports to the US 1960-2001<sup>5</sup>



Does Canada have any other options? If we look at the efforts of Canada to diversify in the past, these have had little overall effect on trade balances. During the era of the "Third Option", exports to the US grew by 3% as total of exports. The "Team Canada" era saw exports to the US grow by 7% as total of exports. And with the present day turmoil of South Asia and the Middle East, the preponderance of economic power in East Asia of Japan and, increasingly, China, plus the active role played by the US, there

is little room for non-traditional actors in those regions. Europe offers a more traditional hope for diversification, but the rhetoric of increased links between Canada and the EU leads rarely to concrete measures. Europe's future is in Europe. The Free Trade Areas of the Americas offers a potential avenue for economic diversification, but if justifications for, and trends from NAFTA are any indicator, the FTAA will offer Canada little in the way of new important markets. Since NAFTA came on line, exports to Mexico have increased from .5% of overall exports, to .67%. Hardly a viable option.

So, if this is the case, the US is the sole viable option for Canada in economic relations. How does one balance our interests then, when issues such as perimeter security, agricultural subsidies, and the infamous softwood lumber conflict threaten our economic security at home and abroad? Canada has traditionally looked to multilateral institutions, such as the GATT/WTO, NAFTA, and APEC in order to balance the overwhelming power that the US has over Canada. But Canada does not look to these institutions for the good of an open and liberal international trading regime, as was popular to argue in the post-war, Cold War era. Rather, we balance through multilateral institutions in order to gain leverage in our bandwagoning relationship with the US. NAFTA was a way to strengthen and protect our privileged access to the US. The GATT/WTO was and is used (and flaunted) when it benefits Canada's trading relationship with the US. The FTAA will be negotiated not to broaden Canada's trading horizons in Latin America and the Caribbean, but to protect Canada's privileged access to US markets. Again, in the economic sphere, as in the security sphere, Canada naturally bandwagons with the US in substance, but to either protect its market access or to gain leverage over US trade policy, balances in rhetoric, using multilateral trading organizations to strengthen its position vis-à-vis Washington. Canada bandwagons, but with every intention to do so on its own terms.

## Conclusion

Is bandwagoning Canada's best policy option? Should it not be more explicitly balancing the US in the international system? Are not states that are threatened supposed to balance? If we look at economic relations with the US, there is a direct threat to our economic security. Is not Canada's national security and sovereignty threatened by policies such as NORTHCOM and a focus on harmonizing perimeter security and immigration policies? Does not Canada's lack of military resources at home and alliance partners abroad (less so in the security sphere, more so economically) leave it exposed to the power of the US, both economically and militarily? Classical balance of power theory would argue that Canada needs to balance in a context such as this. But it doesn't. Canada bandwagons. Why? Because Canada thinks it can bandwagon on its own terms. Is this constructive? Does this work? It would seem that policy makers believe it does. Canada formulates its policies vis-à-vis the US believing that it can influence the US, and gain leverage, through balancing rhetoric and multilateralism. It has worked somewhat in the past. But is it the best long term goal, given the increasing challenge the US poses to Canadian security and sovereignty under the present regime in Washington?

Options for Canada then would seem to lie in:

- The continued focus on the development of multilateral institutions, both in the economic and security spheres.
- A new emphasis on working to affect domestic politics within the US.

The WTO, NAFTA, APEC and perhaps the FTAA can offer a counter-weight to US power in the economic sphere at the international level. But when you are as deeply linked to a country economically, as Canada is with the United States, there are events that cannot be managed through multilateralism. What does Canada do in such a weak situation? It has not balanced, and therefore cannot turn to alliance partners. A traditional approach of affecting domestic politics through lobbying in both Washington and in the rest of the states, has taken a more important role post-SLA. It remains to be seen if such an approach to managing the trading relationship can work.

A similar disturbing argument can be made with regards to military affairs. While Canada can rely on NATO as a forum where US interests can potentially be balanced, affairs in North America, post-September 11, could pose a serious threat to Canada's sovereignty in a more classical sense. And like in the economic sphere, we are on our own. But what is more troubling is the relative insulated nature of defence community in the US. It will be very hard for Canada to influence policy decisions such as NORTHCOM, either through multilateralism or domestic lobbying. The effects of this isolation will play an important role in the formation of both Canada's domestic and international policies in the near future.

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<sup>1</sup> *Balance of Power Revisted: Theory and Practice in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*. The conference was graciously co-sponsored by the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trades' (DFAIT) International Security Research and Outreach Program (ISROP), the McGill University/Université de Montréal Research Group in International Security (REGIS), Monterrey Naval Post-Graduate School, and the Security and Defence Forum (SDF) of the Department of National Defence (DND). Without this support, the conference would not have been possible. We are especially grateful to Manon Tessier, who represented ISROP, for her help in preparing the conference.

<sup>2</sup> International Institute of Security Studies, *Military Balance*, Washington, DC, 2000.

<sup>3</sup> NATO Parliamentary Assembly, Committee Report, *Draft General Report: Defence Budget Trends Within the Alliance*, NATO: Brussels, September 25, 2000.

<sup>4</sup> In the context of this article, a threat is a state or group of states that can have a controlling influence over another states sovereignty – the power to control actions and decisions within a fixed set of borders.

<sup>5</sup> Statistics Canada, 2002.

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