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Soft Balancing Efforts at the United Nations General Assembly:
A Study of Second-Tier Nations’ Voting Patterns for Important Votes

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A Thesis in the Field of International Relations
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Abstract

The post-Cold War system of power is a unipolar system, in which the U.S is the sole superpower. For years, scholars have grappled with the issue of balancing, and have attempted to explain the behavior of nations, for the United States keeps being the exception to the rule that states balance against superior power. Soft balancing is a concept that has been used to answer the question of why second-tier nations are not balancing against the power of the United States. Mainly developed by Robert Pape and T.V Paul, the theory of soft balancing seeks to explain the less threatening measures that have been used by nations to delay, interfere with, or oppose U.S interests, particularly at international organizations.

The United Nations General Assembly is one of the most important platforms for international collaboration. I believe the UNGA is also an apparatus for soft balancing. I hypothesize that there is soft balancing behavior happening at the UNGA, and that second-tier nations are using this forum of collaboration to identify issues that are important to the U.S, as well as, identify other states to form balancing coalitions with. The data sources used for this study are the Voting at the UN reports from 2000 to 2017. After analyzing the data, the results show that there is indication of balancing behavior happening at the UNGA.
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Country specific resolutions/country survival resolutions are the most important and the ones the U.S pays more attention to.

Israel-Palestine issues pose a challenge to U.S power at the UNGA, and are the ones that can mainly be used by second-tier nations to soft-balance.

The U.S knows that there are some countries that are never going to support its interests, and other countries that will almost always support them; therefore, it tries to win the support of the ones in the middle.

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Chapter I.
Introduction

The United States has long been regarded as a beacon of democracy. The position that the U.S has in the world right now was established when the U.S was the only power to come out richer and stronger from WWII. The world we live in was designed with U.S ideals in mind, and countries that share those ideals and values have relied on the U.S to maintain a world that is safe for democracy. The strength of the United States has not only been found in its geographic location, or its powerful military but also in the ability it has had to maintain a superpower status, since the distinct quality of a unipolar system is that no other single state is powerful enough to balance against the unipole.

The Cold War era was characterized by an all-encompassing conflict between the two superpowers of the time, the Soviet Union and the United States. The two nations were competing against each other in every way possible, including the race to space and building a nuclear arsenal. Throughout their antagonistic relationship, the United States and the Soviet Union kept surprising each other in every turning point; however, they both knew that they could completely destroy each other, and that there was nothing that one could do without getting a balancing reaction from the other. The collapse of the Soviet Union positioned the United States as the lone superpower of the post-Cold War era. There are several schools of thought that have tried to explain the behavior of the international system after the collapse of the Soviet Union. Many scholars believed that a balancing power was going to quickly rise to balance against the United States\(^1\). As the

\(^1\) Charles Krauthammer (1990, 2002) with his notion of the unipolar moment, and Charles Layne’s unipolar illusion idea (1993, 2006). These theories suggested that
years passed, many tried to explain why balancing was not happening by saying that it was just a matter of time. An explanation is still in the process of being found. In other words, the United States has long been an exception to the rule that states balance against a superior power. In order to explain the lack of hard balancing, that is balancing through economic or military measures, which has been characteristic of the post-Cold War era, scholars have developed the concept of soft balancing. According to Robert Pape, soft balancing is an alternative to hard balancing that “does not directly challenge a unipolar leader’s military preponderance”, but that seeks to “delay, complicate, or increase the costs of using that extraordinary power” (Pape, 2005, p.17). The soft balancing theory suggests that “nonmilitary tools, such as international institutions, economic statecraft, and strict interpretations of neutrality” are most effective when balancing against a superpower, because any measures taken can have “a real but indirect, effect on the military prospects of a unipolar leader” (Pape, p.17).

The United Nations General Assembly can be a platform for the U.S to advance its interests. It can also be, however, an apparatus for second-tier nations to identify issues that are important to the U.S, which could be used to balance against it.

unipolarity would be a short-lived period, and that nations would eventually rise to balance against the U.S.

2 Kenneth Waltz’s balance-of-power theory has been an important part of the realist tradition, for it has served as a foundation for theories that seek to explain/predict the rise of countries to bring American power into balance; however, it has not fully been able to explain the behavior of nations. Stephen Walt’s balance-of-treat theory fills in the gaps in explaining why states balance or not balance against a super power.

3 The United States is the only super power. The theory of soft balancing is developed to explain the way other nations will interact with the super power, since any hard-balancing interaction, whether military or economic, may be too costly for second – tier nations to bear.
Additionally, at the UNGA, second-tier nations can also study the behavior of other nations and identify the ones that can be useful to form balancing coalitions with, in order to balance against the unipole. I hypothesize that there is soft balancing behavior happening at the UNGA from second-tier nations, and that issues that can be used to soft balance against the U.S as a unipole are being identified. The data used to test my hypothesis will be the Voting Practices in the United Nations reports from 2000 to 2017; a report that is published and presented to Congress every year. By studying data from 2000 to 2017, I am taking into consideration the perception of the U.S as a superpower in the last year of the presidency of Bill Clinton, the full presidency of George W. Bush and Barack Obama, and the first year of the Donald Trump administration.

The problem that I am posing is significant because, if soft balancing against the U.S is actually happening at the UNGA, then the concepts of unipolarity and balancing can be understood in a new light. Furthermore, this problem is relevant because unipolarity is still a relatively new system, and any attempt to understand it is valuable. Additionally, by studying the characteristics of soft balancing, and identifying what a soft balancing coalition entails, a better understanding of U.S power can be developed, which will allow the international community to better understand the role of the U.S as the superpower.

This study is a qualitative research project that is composed of four chapters, in addition to this introduction. In Chapter II, I will provide a thorough overview of the existing literature on the topics of unipolarity, balancing, and soft balancing. I present the authors that initially tried to explain the post-Cold war era, and I review the different additions and modifications that were made to their initial theories, since the U.S
continues to be the exception to the balancing rule. Also in Chapter II, the soft balancing theory, mainly proposed by Robert Pape and T.V Paul, is presented in depth; as well as the arguments of those that have criticized it.

In Chapter III, I explain the data and research methods that have been chosen for this study, and the research limitations that were identified. I recognize that my research findings are mainly about the UNGA, and that there may be other factors that can play a role in how, and if, second-tier nations soft balance against the U.S. An explanation of the methodology, and the way the countries that were chosen to be studied for this paper were identified is also provided in Chapter III.

Chapter IV offers a detailed account of my research findings. This study is a qualitative research project; however, the Voting at the UN reports did offer quantitative data. Therefore, in Chapter IV, I have attempted to present the findings in a summary form, alongside my interpretation of the data. All of the data presented in Chapter IV may be obtained upon request from the author of this study.

In Chapter V, I present my concluding thoughts and I suggest how the soft balancing theory proposed by Robert Pape and T.V Paul was partially supported by the research findings. I discuss the process through which I arrived at the following findings: (1) country specific resolutions/country survival resolutions are the most important and the ones the U.S pays more attention to; (2) Israel-Palestine issues pose a challenge to U.S power at the UNGA, and are the ones that can mainly be used by second-tier nations to soft-balance; (3) the U.S knows that there are some countries that are never going to support its interests, and other countries that will almost always support them; therefore, it tries to win the support of the ones in the middle; (4) seemingly evident coalitions
occur from time to time\textsuperscript{4}; (5) voting coincidence percentages alter, enough to be noticeable, from president to president. Furthermore, I provide a few questions for further research, since the topic of soft balancing in a unipolar system has enormous potential for additional research.

\footnote{This is explained by looking at the voting coincidence percentages.}
The end of the Cold War marked both, the end of an era characterized by bipolarity and the beginning of one characterized by unipolarity. Whether the United States actively sought after superpower status or it was bestowed upon it after the end of WWII, the current system is one where the United States is the sole power which, up to this point, has remained unrivaled. The strength of the United States has not only been found in its geographic location, or its powerful military but also in the ability it has had to maintain a superpower status with no other single state powerful enough to balance against it. The United States is “the only country with the military, diplomatic, political and economic assets to be a decisive player in any conflict in whatever part of the world it chooses to involve itself” (Krauthammer, 1990, p.24).

Scholars have grappled with the post-Cold war era unipolar structure of the international system and have attempted to answer the question: how long will it last? For some, unipolarity is only a short-lived, non-sustainable instance; for some others, it is an ideal system that provides peace and accountability. Charles Krauthammer first described unipolarity as a moment. For him, there was no doubt that “multipolarity will come in time”, and that “in perhaps another generation or so, there will be great powers coequal with the United States, and the world will, in structure, resemble the pre-World War I era” (Krauthammer, 1990, p.24). However, this was said more than two decades ago, and not much change has been seen. We are not at the point of bipolarity or multipolarity yet,
and although there is “no lack of second-rank powers”, unipolarity still prevails (Krauthammer, 1990, p.24). Another question then has been added to the list. In addition to ‘how long will it last?’, scholars are attempting to answer ‘why is balancing not happening?’

Charles Krauthammer revisited his idea of the unipolar moment a few years later, attempting to provide a deeper analysis to find the reasons as to why no other nations have been balancing against the United States. In his initial estimate, he had expected that the rise of second-rank nations to balance against the United States was going to happen in a matter of decades. These nations were expected to behave this way based on the notion that all nations seek a balance of power. The lesson learned from the world wars and the Cold war was that when one country attempts to gather unfathomable control, other stronger nations must seek to balance against it. According to Krauthammer, “our experience with hegemony historically is that it inevitably creates a counterbalancing coalition of weaker powers, most recently against Napoleonic France and Germany (twice) in the 20th century”; however, there was no such counterbalancing “during the first decade of American unipolarity” (Krauthammer, 2008, p.8). In fact, the behavior seemed to go against what was expected, especially after September 11, 2001, when “great powers lined up behind the United States” to show support in its fight against terrorism (Krauthammer, 2008, p.8).

In 1993, Christopher Layne referred to unipolarity as an illusion by proposing the simple premise that “states balance against hegemons, even those like the United States that seek to maintain their preeminence by employing strategies based more on benevolence than coercion” (Layne, 1993, p.7). In his attempt to explain why new great
powers rise, Layne suggested that the reason states balance is “to correct a skewed
distribution of relative power in the international system” (Layne, 1993, p.12). In other
words, balancing is bound to happen because the international system is not supposed to
be out of balance. Therefore, unipolarity is an illusion that cannot rule the grand strategy
of the United States because unipolarity will “stimulate the emergence of eligible states
as great powers”, and will eventually “cause other states to balance against the United
States” (Layne, 1993, p.51). Whether unipolarity is looked at as a moment or an illusion,
realists have tried to understand what the structure of the international system looks like,
and determine what it would take for other countries to start balancing, and to eventually
get to a bipolar or multipolar system characterized by “traditional patterns of great power
competition” (Layne, 1993, p.51).

Why Do States Balance?

As an attempt to understand what causes states to balance, Kenneth Waltz’s
balance-of-power theory has been an important part of the realist tradition because it has
led some scholars “to predict that other countries, alone or in concert, will try to bring
American power into balance” (Waltz, 1993, p.53). The balance-of-power theory
suggests that second-tier nations “seek to balance power, and thus the preponderance of
power in the hands of a single state will stimulate the rise of new great powers, and
possibly coalitions, determined to balance the dominant state” (Mastanduno, 1997, p.54).
Through balance-of-power, realists believe, “states maintain security and stability” (Paul,
2005, p.50). For Waltz, unbalanced power is to be perceived as dangerous by any state
other than the one that wields it, which leads “states to try to increase their own strength
or ally with others to bring the international distribution of power into balance” (Waltz, 2000, p.28). This premise suggests that the fact that one state has unbalanced power is enough to encourage other states to balance against it. Having the power, regardless of how it is used and “aside from specific threats it may pose”, is enough to “leave states feeling uneasy” and cause a balancing reaction (Waltz, 2000, p.29). Waltz’ definition of the international system as a “self-help” system is relevant to explain that, overall, states care about their survival, which in relation to the balance-of-power theory means that states have the “strong tendency to resort to balancing when they have to”, mainly as a “strategy for survival, and a way of attempting to maintain an autonomous way of life” (Waltz, 2000, p.37). In other words, “balancing is simply a means to an end” (Mowle & Sacko, 2007, p.40). Some other realists believe that “balancing is an intentional act rather than an effect”, and that what is going to cause the unipolar system to endure is whether or not the dominant power manages to not decay on its own” (Mowle & Sacko, 2007, p.32).

However, balance-of-power theory has not been able to fully explain the behavior of second-tier powers in the post-Cold War era. The fact that China, Russia, France or India have not responded with significant force to balance against U.S power may mean that they do not feel U.S power is a threat to their integrity as a sovereign nation, at least just yet. However, although second-tier nations are not necessarily showing their concern about the unipolar power of the United States through hard balancing, second-tier nations have turned to “less threatening balancing measures to achieve their objective of constraining the power of the United States without unnecessarily provoking retribution” (Brooks, 2008, p.60).
These less threatening balancing measures are grounded in the balance-of-threat theory proposed by Stephen Walt, which was developed to explain the characteristics of balancing in a unipolar system that were not fully explained by the balance-of-power theory. Balance-of-threat theory is “a second important realist approach that predicts that states will balance against threats” and that threats, in turn, “are a function of power, proximity, offensive capabilities, and aggressive intentions” (Walt, 2002, p.133). Walt proposes that states do not balance against power alone, as much as they do against threats, which are “the combination of raw power and perceived aggressive intent” (Pape, 2005 p.19). Therefore, “the extent to which states appear as threatening to others depends on a variety of factors” and is usually left to the interpretation of the second-tier country. For Walt, “states that are viewed as aggressive are likely to provoke others to balance against them” (Mastanduno, 1997, p.59). Therefore, when it comes to the United States, and according to the balance-of-threat theory, the nature of its foreign policy behavior will determine whether or not states rise to balance against it; and, “if balance of threat theory is correct, then the duration of the unipolar moment will depend not only on the relative distribution of capabilities but also on the effectiveness of U.S diplomacy” (Mastanduno, 1997, p.86).

According to Robert Pape, there are three main answers to the question of why other nations are not balancing, thus, allowing the U.S to maintain unipolarity for way longer than expected. The first answer is that “states balance against superior power, but the process is uneven and slow” (Pape, 2005, p.20). This could explain the behavior of revisionist states such as China, Russia, North Korea or Iran. The second answer “stresses the U.S reputation for benign intentions” (Pape, 2005, p.20). For the most part, the U.S
has been a benevolent super power. Its foreign policy has not relied on expansion or very aggressive measures. In other words, when compared to powers like Germany in WWII or the Soviet Union, the U.S “has generally manifested nonaggressive intentions”, which explains why no one has balanced against it, “despite the enormous potential threat posed by its power” (Pape, 2005, p.20). The third answer focuses on U.S grand strategy, and how the U.S avoids giving other nations reasons to balance.

These answers, however, are based on the idea that the U.S is too good to be balanced against, and do not necessarily take into consideration the fact that other nations may actually have incentives to balance against a sole power, but lack the means. The question then is not whether other nations want to balance against the U.S, but if “they can do so, and how” (Pape, 2005, p.15). For Pape, balancing is about “equalizing the odds in a contest between the strong and the weak” (Pape, p.36). States balance when “they take action intended to make it hard for strong states to use their military advantage against others” (Pape, p.36). In reality, hard balancing, that is through military and economic efforts, is not a possibility for any major power that cares about its well-being. The military might of the U.S is powerful enough to deter any country, especially non-nuclear powers, to engage in full-out war with it. Nuclear powers may be a bit less risk-averse in considering the possibility of engaging in any kind of kinetic warfare with the U.S; however, the intense outcome that a war with the U.S would be, far exceeds any justification of an attempt to balance. Then how can second-rank countries balance against a powerful unipole? Through soft balancing. According to Robert Pape, soft balancing is an alternative to hard balancing that “does not directly challenge a unipolar leader’s military preponderance”, but that seeks to “delay, complicate, or increase the
costs of using that extraordinary power” (Pape, 2005, p.17). The soft balancing theory suggests that “nonmilitary tools, such as international institutions, economic statecraft, and strict interpretations of neutrality” are most effective when balancing against a superpower, because any measures taken can have “a real but indirect, effect on the military prospects of a unipolar leader” (Pape, 2005, p.17). The mechanisms used by second-tier nations to soft balance include “territorial denial, entangling diplomacy, economic strengthening, and signaling of resolve to participate in a balancing coalition” (Pape, 2005, p.36). T.V Paul added to the theory of soft balancing by explaining that soft balancing seeks to accomplish one or more of the following:

(1) To impede the target’s ability to profit from bad behavior (for example, through the imposition of economic sanctions); (2) to increase the marginal cost to the target state of carrying out its plans (for example, access denial via institutional frameworks); (3) to delegitimize the target’s behavior in the eyes of third parties; (4) to signal that continued noncompliance by the target may trigger hard balancing. (Paul, 2018, p.23)

Instead of attempting to balance by using strategies such as “banding together by developing specific military options” or by blackmailing to “extract concessions from Washington by threatening with undesirable consequences”, or even simply “ignoring or refusing U.S demands”, states are “beginning to join forces in subtler ways” (Walt 1, 2005, p.113). Rather than developing military capabilities, resorting to terrorism, or attempting to obtain weapons of mass destruction, states are “soft-balancing” by “coordinating their diplomatic positions to oppose U.S policy and obtain more influence together” (Walt 1, 2005, p.113). For Walt, the difference between hard balancing and soft balancing is that “soft balancing does not seek or expect to alter the overall distribution of capabilities” but instead, it “accepts the current balance of power but seeks to obtain
better outcomes within it” (Walt 2, 2005, p.126). Overall, “the goal of soft balancing for second-ranking powers is to deprive the powerful actor of the legitimacy it needs to maintain its authority, especially in the institutions it uses to justify coercive military actions” (Paul, 2018, p.30).

When Would States Balance?

According to Kenneth Waltz, to be a great power, “a state needs to excel not in one area but across a range of attributes” (Mastanduno, 1997, p.53). The title of great power “depends on how states score on a combination of attributes – size of population, resource endowment, economic capability, military strength, and political stability and competence” (Mastanduno, 1997, p.54). Only the United States currently excels in “military power and preparedness, economic and technological capacity, size of population and territory, political stability and soft power attributes such as ideology” (Mastanduno, 1997, p.54). Thus, it is safe to infer that the structure and characteristics of a unipolar system then “will obviously depend on how the unipolar state behaves” (Ikenberry, Mastanduno, Wohlfforth, 2009, p.10). In addition to Waltz’s attributes, a factor that has been relevant to the United States’ status as a great power is image. The image of benevolence, or at least non-aggression, that the U.S has been able to portray has been key in its ability to maintain the status of superpower. Without having to give up “its position of primacy and while still embracing its beneficial geographic location”, the United States still can and should “pay close attention to how others perceive its intentions” (Walt 2, 2005, p.132). Image is not only about tenure, but also about motivations and the perception that other nations have of them. Since the unipolar leader holds unmatched power, “even a modest change in how others perceive the
aggressiveness of its intentions can significantly increase the fear that it would make a bid for global hegemony” (Pape, 2005, p.15). This change in perception is the beginning of soft balancing behavior because it signals other nations that the approach to unilateral power by the superpower is changing. That is to say, “if the United States acts in ways that fuel global concerns about U.S power”, and if other nations start to fear that it will be used to harm them, “then the number of potential soft balancers will grow” (Walt 2, 2005, p.131).

Based on this, as long as the U.S is not perceived as a threat, other countries won’t feel the need to react against its power, but “soft balancing is likely to become more intense if the United States continues to pursue an aggressively unilateralist national security policy” (Pape, 2005, p.15). It is not enough for the U.S to have good intentions, if they are not perceived as benign by the rest of the world. And these intentions are likely to be perceived differently by revisionist nations than by status-quo nations, which creates the interesting dynamic in a unipolar system, because “the stability of any international system depends significantly on the degree to which the major powers are satisfied with the status quo” (Ikenberry, Mastanduno, Wohlforth, 2009, p.12). What this may mean for the United States then is that even if “more capabilities relative to others ought to translate into more power and influence”, what ends up happening is that the United States has the need to “develop self-restraint to keep its capabilities in check instead of openly using its power and influence” (Ikenberry, Mastanduno, Wohlforth, 2009, p.15).
How Do States Balance?

According to Robert Pape, soft-balancing behavior occurs under the following conditions:

(1) the hegemon’s power position and military behavior are of growing concern but do not yet pose a serious challenge to the sovereignty of second-tier powers; (2) the dominant state is a major source of public goods in both the economic and security areas that cannot simply be replaced; and (3) the dominant state cannot easily retaliate either because the balancing efforts of others are not overt or because they do not directly challenge its power position with military means. While pursuing soft balancing, second-tier states could engage the hegemon and develop institutional links with it to ward off possible retaliatory actions (Paul, 2005, p.59).

In 2018, T.V Paul developed the theory of soft balancing a bit further. Paul suggested that if one or more of the following conditions are present, then nations are more likely to soft balance:

(1) In the aftermath of major wars or enduring great-powers rivalries, when the perceived costs of unilateral rearmament or the formation of “tight” alliances with similarly positioned states are too high; (2) when the great power’s actions do not directly threaten the territorial integrity or the core security interests of status quo great powers; (3) when the power differentials between threatening great powers and others attempting to restrain their behavior appear to make the costs of hard balancing prohibitive. (T.V Paul, 2018, p.168)

Based on these conditions, it can be said then that developing institutional links, alliances, and entangling diplomacy are the main strategies of soft balancing. The use of any non-military tools to balance against and indirectly challenge U.S power is done mainly through “economic statecraft and diplomatic arrangements” at international institutions (Pape, p.10). According to T.V Paul, second-tier states pursuing soft-balancing strategies often develop limited diplomatic coalitions, or ententes, to balance a powerful, rising or threatening state” (Paul, 2018, p.21). Although these coalitions can be
recognized if one studies the behavior of the second-tier nations involved, “these coalitions do not have official structures, permanent institutions, or coordinated military planning beyond a minimal level” (Paul, 2018, p.21). For the purpose of this study, I will focus on the United Nations, specifically the United Nations General Assembly, as an international organization and an apparatus for soft balancing.

As an international organization, the United Nations has four purposes: “to maintain international peace and security; to develop friendly relations among nations; to cooperate in solving international problems and in promoting respect for human rights; and to be a center for harmonizing the actions of nations” (un.org). Within the UN, the United Nations General Assembly is probably the most apt platform for multilateral collaboration. As “one of the six main organs of the United Nations, and the only one in which all member states have equal representation: one nation, one vote”, the UN General Assembly embodies what multilateralism is. All 193 Member States of the United Nations are represented to discuss and work together on a wide array of international issues “such as development, peace and security, international law, etc. (un.org)”. The Assembly meets once a year in September at the General Assembly Hall in New York City, and the plenary is usually addressed by the U.S President, since the U.S is the host country. The General Assembly is “the main deliberative, policymaking and representative organ of the UN” (un.org).

Every year, the UNGA votes on a wide array of resolutions that vary on topic. These resolutions are passed by simple majority of votes. The UNGA also votes on important resolutions, usually between ten or twenty by plenary, and the decisions on these important questions, such as those on peace and security, require a two-thirds
majority. Because of the variety of the topics addressed within the resolutions, and the fact that all member countries have the right to one vote, the General Assembly provides a unique forum for multilateral discussion of the full spectrum of international issues; as opposed to the UN Security Council, which consists of ten elected members and five permanent members (China, United States, France, United Kingdom, and the Russian Federation), with the primary responsibility of “maintaining international peace and security” (un.org, Security Council).

The United Nations serves as a platform for collaboration. It is also, however, a platform for nations to show their support/disapproval for causes that they may not otherwise engage with in a different setting. Using an international organization to assess other nation’s positions on key issues that could be useful to form a coalition to balance against a super power is something that second-tier powers are likely to do. The policies that are discussed in each resolution at the General Assembly may have an impact on “how other states view U.S intentions and the purposes behind U.S power”, and may “put at risk the United States’ long-enjoyed reputation for benign intent” (Pape, 2005, p.22).

The United States plays an important role in the United Nations. From being the host to its headquarters, to being a charter member, to being one of the five permanent members of the Security Council, to also being the biggest contributor of financial aid; the U.S plays a key role in maintaining the UN as the head organization for international cooperation. Nonetheless, even the U.S in all of its power “does not have complete freedom to ignore the rules and procedures of important international organizations or accepted diplomatic practices without losing substantial support for their objectives” (Pape, 2005, p.36). In other words, the U.S, as a superpower, is somehow still held
accountable by organizations like the UN and must adhere to whatever resolutions the
UN moves to approve. The UN General Assembly is then the perfect platform to exercise
soft balancing because second-tier states “may use international institutions and ad-hoc
diplomatic maneuvers to delay a superior state’s plan”, all while “demonstrating resolve
in a manner that signals a commitment”—to the U.S and to other nations— “to resist the
superpower’s future ambitions” (Pape, 2005, p.36). By doing this, second-tier nations can
build coalitions at an international organization level to balance against a superpower;
measuring success not by “whether or not the sole superpower abandons specific policies,
but also whether more states join the soft-balancing coalition against the unipolar leader”
(Pape, p.36). When second-tier nations are “faced with a sole superpower that holds a
strategy of primacy, and whose actions on the international stage have been unpopular”,
they may choose to engage in soft balancing to “deny American policies legitimacy and
legality, and undermine American attempts to forge cooperation on its terms” (Stedman,
2007, p.942).

For the most part, the United States has understood the importance of a story; the
fact that “a strong narrative is a source of power” and that appealing to attractiveness and
cooperation is an effective way of conducting foreign policy (Nye, 2018, n.p). In the past,
this idea has been crucial when conducting foreign policy and has helped establish the
image of the U.S as a benevolent superpower. The United States, as “a dominant state
that is seeking, in unipolar setting, to convince other states to cooperate with it rather than
to balance against it”, is aware of the dynamics that move the United Nations, and that
“multilateral decision-making processes help to exercise its dominant power with
legitimacy” (Mastanduno, 1997, p.73).
Then, if the U.S knows that international organizations are prone to facilitate soft balancing, and “if unipolarity is the preferred world for the United States”, we could anticipate that U.S officials, in this case, U.S representatives at the United Nations “will seek to pursue policies aimed at dissuading other states from rising to great power status and, singly or in combination, balancing against the United States” (Mastanduno, 1997, p.60). This explains the resolutions deemed as important votes that the U.S lobbies for at the UN, which are votes on issues that directly affect United States’ interests. An important basis for identifying these issues is their consistency with the State Department’s Strategic Goals.

At the UN, the United States attempts to balance “the tension between their economic and security strategies, and through policies of engagement and reassurance, dissuade or at least delay other states from challenging US. hegemony and balancing against the United States” (Mastanduno, 1997, p.86). However, in order for this to be successful, the United States needs to manage its image and manage what Mastanduno calls “the arrogance of power”, which is that any “efforts to impose values or to preach to other states can create resentment and over time can prompt the balancing behavior U.S. officials hope to forestall” (Mastanduno, 1997, p.88). With this in mind, the United States would almost have to make use of what Joseph Nye described as “soft-power” because “the behavior of the unipole matters” since a unipole “may discourage peer competition by reassuring states already inclined toward the status quo and by providing the benefits of system integration to those with ambivalent intentions” (Ikenberry, Mastanduno, Wohlfforth, 2009, p.24). If it is assumed that the U.S truly understands the way an international organization is likely to work under unipolarity, then through its behavior, it
could “encourage would-be challengers to accept subordinate but beneficial roles”; as opposed to using its behavior to “heighten the insecurity of other states and prompt them to contemplate individual or collective challenges to its dominance” (Ikenberry, Mastanduno, Wohlforth, 2009, p.24).

The game here then is a game between interests, motivations, intentions, and perceptions of the superpower as one player, and the rest of the international community, especially the countries that actually have a chance of balancing against the U.S, as the other player. At international organization, intentions matter, and second-tier nations’ “tacit strategies should be directly related to reducing the effects of the target state’s threatening behavior” (Paul, 2018, p.21). According to Mastanduno, in a unipolar system, the players—countries other than the sole great power—“can be divided into two categories: the first category comprises major powers, which, even though their power-projection capabilities are inferior to those of the unipolar, possess sufficient capabilities to deter any state in the system”; and the secondary category that “is composed of states that lack sufficient capabilities to deter the unipolar, or so-called minor powers” (Monteiro, 2011, p.14). In an international organization like the UN, where all countries are represented and have one vote at the General Assembly, “the logic of balancing against a sole power is about coordinating expectations of collective action among a number of second-ranked states” (Pape, 2005, p.17). Paying attention to any basic or minor effort to soft-balance is important because “even if observable balancing behavior reminiscent of bipolarity or multipolarity never occurs, any structurally induced tendency of the middle-ranked great powers to withhold cooperating may sap the unipole’s...
effective power” (Ikenberry, Mastanduno, Wohlfforth, 2009, p.16). Just the simple attempt to balance may have significant impact on the structure of the system.

However, coordinating a balancing coalition against a superpower is, as expected, not that easy. The coordination of efforts for any attempt of balancing is a challenge encountered by powers that attempt to establish some kind of resistance against U.S power. Although the U.S maintains the image of a, at least, semi-benevolent power, second-ranked powers know that any attempt to coordinate would not go unnoticed by the U.S, and the U.S has already won the reputation of not hesitating to use preventive war. Therefore, second-ranked countries that attempt to balance against the U.S must know that they cannot do it alone, but that “it can only be done by several second-ranked states acting collectively” (Pape, 2005, p.16). However, collective failure is a huge risk associated with any attempt of coordination, and is sometimes too difficult for countries to accept. The failure of one is detrimental to the effort of balancing against a super power but not absolutely harmful to the cause, but the failure of many second-ranked countries sets back the attempt of balancing and severely delays any accomplishment. To coordinate, “each country’s decision to balance depends on the expectation that others will also balance, which in turn depends on the others’ expectations of its balancing behavior” (Pape, 2005, p.16). Taking the risk of balancing into consideration, “soft balancing is the conscious coordination of diplomatic action in order to obtain outcomes contrary to U.S preferences-- outcomes that could not be gained if the balancers did not give each other some degree of mutual support” (Walt 2, 2005, p.126). One key aspect of soft balancing is the support and accountability that each country in the balancing coalition offers each other. An alignment of interests and goals is paramount to the
success of any soft-balancing coalition and “states must coordinate their actions with this aim explicitly in mind” (Walt 2, 2005, p.127). This is particularly interesting in an international organization setting because nations must either trust that their expectations align, or have to clearly state their intentions, which makes the effort of coordinating harder. Confidence in each other’s “steadfastness” is the spark that lights up the desire to both hard and soft balance, and this confidence even transcends the limits of international organizations (Walt 2, 2005, p.129). Therefore, unlike a hard-balancing coalition, which is likely to occur abruptly, “a soft balancing coalition can incrementally happen, adding members over time” (Pape, 2005, p.17).

Critics of Soft Balancing

With every year that passes with unapparent change in the international system structure, realists that support soft-balancing try to update their initial theories, and critics provide their reasons to account for the behavior of states as well. William Wohlforth and Stephen Brooks agree with the idea that “states do periodically undertake actions that end up constraining the United States,” but they disagree with the notion that soft-balancing is what explains that behavior (Brooks & Wohlforth, 2005, p.74). For Wohlforth & Brooks, the fact that some states occasionally oppose the actions of the United States at international institutions is not “an empirical basis for the soft-balancing argument” nor an explanation for the balance of power theory (Brooks & Wohlforth, 2005, p.107). Furthermore, for these critics, there is only so much logic in the fact that states would accept the risks that come with forming a balancing coalition against a unipole to just perform actions “that are expected to only frustrate U.S. policies without affecting the
real capability of the United States to threaten the security of other major powers” (Brooks & Wohlforth, 2005, p.79).

Why It Matters

This research is relevant for several reasons. Unipolarity is still relatively new, and any attempt to understand it moves us towards the direction of peace, regardless of whether or not unipolarity is by nature a peaceful system. For some, unipolarity is an anarchical system that “takes away the principal tool through which minor powers in bipolar and multipolar systems deal with uncertainty about great power intentions: alliances with other great powers” (Monteiro, 2012, p.24). Looking at state behavior through the lenses of soft balancing serves to understand how the dynamics of alliance and alignment are changing. In the same way states may choose to form a balancing coalition against the unipole, there are some states that may choose to align themselves with the unipole “either to shield themselves from its capabilities, to seek to influence its policies, to shield themselves from its capabilities, or to seek to influence its policies” (Ikenberry, Mastanduno, Wohlforth, 2009, p.20).

Since forming coalitions to hard balance against a unipole is dangerous, is soft-balancing the means to deal with the uncertain nature of unipolarity? This is an important question to ask because soft balancing “could also lay the groundwork for more fundamental challenges to U.S power” (Walt 2, 2005, p.129). Any effort currently being made by second-tier nations to balance cannot be ignored because “states that coordinate positions on minor issues may become more comfortable with each other and better able to collaborate on larger issues” (Walt 2, 2005, p.129). All in all, Ikenberry, Mastanduno & Wohlforth explained it best:
The international relations under conditions of unipolarity force us to rethink conventional and received understandings about the operation of the balance of power, the meaning of alliance partnerships, the logic of international economic cooperation, the relationship between power and legitimacy, and the behavior of satisfied revisionist states. (Ikenberry, Mastanduno, Wohlforth, 2009, p.4).

At this point in time, any effort to understand balancing behavior under unipolarity is relevant because it will answer questions about a system that we have yet to figure out. Furthermore, identifying the evolving role of the United States as a unipole is of utmost importance because “while the consensus opinion is that U.S. power is eroding, the legitimacy of the United States’ international order and authority to rule have not, to this point, been seriously undermined” (Schweller, 2011, p.32). In order for other states to gather what is needed to effectively balance against U.S power, “states must put forward an alternative idea of order that appeals to other powerful states” if they are seeking “to restore global balance-of-power dynamics” (Schweller, 2011, p.32).

Furthermore, the study of soft balancing will shed light on the overall study of the relevance/reach of international institutions, if the theory of soft balancing were to be true. If countries are really using international organizations to soft balance against the U.S, then a new understanding of the role of such organizations may be reach, in this case specifically, the United Nations General Assembly. As T.V Paul pointed out on his latest work on soft balancing, “rising powers could view institutions and their use by established powers as illegitimate acts to restrain their power, ambition, and interests”, which matters because, “established powers can view institutions as legitimate tools and believe that their policies are also legitimate given that they have institutional backing” (Paul, 2018, p.171). Analyzing if/how soft balancing is happening in international organizations is important because “the creative use of international institutions and the
preservation of their legitimacy are necessary to prevent them becoming irrelevant to rising power behavior” (Paul, 2018, p.171). International institutions are important players in the international community, and studying how their legitimacy is perceived, and the uses that they have is necessary. The way international organizations are perceived matters for soft balancing because “if targeted great powers perceive the international order as illegitimate, they may disregard the norms inherent in its institutions (Paul, 2018, p.31). If this were to happen, and if the U.S started to perceive organizations like the UN as irrelevant, not only any effort of soft balancing would be harmed, but also, the use of institutions “as part of soft balancing may even trigger nationalism and aggressive behavior by the targeted power” (Paul, 2018, p.31).

The truth is, to study how U.S power may or may not be balanced against is paramount to understanding the overall unipolar system. Besides, doing so by looking specifically at soft-balancing is an interesting approach since the current unipolar system is quite paradoxical; meaning that, for an unipole, “more relative power does not necessarily lead to greater influence and a better ability to convert capabilities into favorable outcomes peacefully”, which may mean that, for the United States, “unparalleled relative power may require unequaled self-restraint” (Monteiro, 2012, p.40). I attempt to find out if this is something that can be observed at the international institution level, specifically at the United Nations General Assembly.
Chapter III.
Research Methods and Limitations

The purpose of this paper is to study if nations have been attempting to soft balance against the U.S in last year of the Clinton administration, the administration of George W. Bush, the Obama administration, and the first year of the Trump administration at the United Nations General Assembly. The source of data that I will analyze is the Voting Practices in the UN report from 2000-2017. The Voting Practices in the UN report is published and presented to Congress every year. The report “reviews voting practices in the UN Security Council and UN General Assembly in each calendar year and presents data in a variety of formats” (Voting Report 2017, p.3). The reports present the statistical measure of the overall voting of UN member states at the General Assembly in comparison with the U.S voting record. Additionally, the report highlights the resolutions selected as important to U.S interests. By carefully analyzing the reports, I will attempt to identify the major, second-tier nations that have led the balancing coalitions against the U.S, if any, as well as identify what are the issues that have been used to balance against the U.S.

By focusing on the voting patterns of states on the important votes, I attempt to provide a framework of analysis that is relevant to the study of the United States as a unipole, since the resolutions deemed as “important” are relevant to U.S interests. I expect to find that if states were to attempt to balance against the U.S, they would do so by opposing the important resolutions. Using the concepts presented in this review of
literature, I will study motivations and intentions, coordination efforts, and issues that are vital for U.S. interests but that are being interfered with by second-tier nations in an attempt to balance against U.S power.

I have chosen to study the four different administrations (Clinton, Bush, Obama, and Trump) mainly because these presidents have had very different approaches to foreign policy, and by doing it the way I decided to do it, I get one year of a democrat president, a full administration of a republican president, a full administration of a democrat president, and one year of a republican president. I believe that the variety of their foreign policy styles can provide a wide range of opportunity to identify if there have been balancing coalitions that have formed throughout the years. Furthermore, the depiction of U.S interests and intentions has been widely different in each administration, which I hope would help prove whether or not the intentions, behavior and perceptions of the unipole matter.

Looking at each important resolution, I will process the information qualitatively by analyzing what the purpose of the resolution was, the voting results, and the voting patterns. I will group relevant second-tier nations (those that are recognized as great powers) and will keep track of each of their voting coincidence percentages. Furthermore, I will analyze what types of resolutions received opposition and sparked balancing behavior. Then, I will provide a qualitative analysis by applying the concepts described on this review of literature.

I am limiting this study to second-tier nations (great powers) for several reasons. Firstly, looking at the list of all nations and attempting to analyze the behavior of each one of them is not an effective way to answer my research question. The basic
understanding of balancing explains that balancing coalitions are likely to be led by second-tier nations; that is to say, great powers that could resemble the U.S in at least one or more of the characteristics of a great power. Therefore, in order to better utilize my efforts and to use a method that aligns with my research question, I am limiting the number of nations that I am going to study.

To better identify the second-tier nations that could eventually be leaders of a balancing coalition, I decided to look at the countries that have major advanced economies, which are the members of the G7 group. Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, and the United Kingdom, as well as the United States. Additionally, I also took into consideration other advanced economies, as indicated by the World Economic Outlook provided by the International Monetary Fund such as Australia, Israel and Korea. Furthermore, I decided to add China and Russia, which are countries that possess nuclear weapons and that are key players in the international system. Having added China and Russia means that I will take into consideration all permanent members of the UN Security Council. Also, India and Iran play an important role in the international system, and have already challenged the U.S in one of several ways, including cybersecurity.

After looking at all of the countries mentioned above, and considering the different reasons as to why I chose to study them, I arrived at the conclusion that studying the G20 group plus Israel and Iran, allowed me to study all of the nations that are considered to be great powers, for one reason or another.

Furthermore, I am choosing to study just the important resolutions because, like mentioned above, those are the ones that align directly with U.S interests and are the ones the U.S is more likely to lobby for. The United States puts a lot of effort into making
some of the important resolutions pass; therefore, it is through those that balancing states could actually limit U.S power if they so intended. Additionally, by focusing on the important resolutions, I can better attempt to identify what kind of issues are the ones that balancing states focus on.

There are some aspects that relate to unipolarity and soft-balancing that I will not be covering during this research. I do not attempt to show the possible causes of soft-balancing, neither attempt to claim the specific reasons behind it. The study that I will perform on the important resolutions is not supposed to establish a causal inference. I acknowledge that there are external factors, even beyond the scope of what happens at the UNGA as an international institution, that can have an impact on whether or not states balance. These factors could be but are not limited to domestic politics, economy, presidential rhetoric, etc. Because the United Nations acts on so many diverse issues, “the voting record of a UN member during the General Assembly (193 members)” may provide insight into a country’s orientation in world arenas: “where it stands, with whom it stands (at least in a UN context), and for what purpose”. However, “voting coincidence data refers only to the UN context and does not take account of support for U.S. policy in other contexts” (2017 Voting Practices Report, p. 3). The research I will conduct for this project will just attempt to identify whether or not there is indication of soft-balancing behavior at the UNGA, based on the characteristics outlined in the review of literature. This project is a qualitative research project that seeks to gain an understanding of how the concept of soft-balancing may be manifested at the UNGA. My hope is for this research to become the foundation of potential quantitative research that could provide findings of a more explanatory nature.
Chapter IV.

Data and Research Findings

The data that I studied for this paper came from the Voting Practices in the UN reports from 2000 through 2017. The reports offer a comprehensive summary of all the important votes that were voted on each year. It also offers the voting information for each vote in a numeric format with the first digits being those who voted yes, the middle digits those who voted no, and last digits those who abstained. Furthermore, the report also indicates what position the U.S took for each vote, and the voting coincidence percentage for each country in comparison to the U.S.

Before presenting my findings about the information found in the reports, I would like to present some research findings about the structure of the reports themselves. The Voting Practices at the UN report was first presented to congress in 1984. By having studied 18 of the 33 reports that have ever been presented, I am confident in the observations that I was able to gather about the reports. Firstly, I was able to notice that “the overall voting correlation between countries is highly dependent on the types of resolutions that come to a vote” (2017 Voting Practices Report, p. 3). This is particularly noticeable with all Israel-Palestine issues, which can skew the voting coincidence percentages for the countries that oppose these resolutions, because they usually “account for approximately one-quarter of resolutions that are adopted with a vote” (2017 Voting Practices Report, p.3). I will go into more detail on the importance of Israel-Palestine
related resolutions, but this was particularly noticeable from the very moment I started analyzing the data.

Furthermore, one minor setback I had during my initial analysis of the data was the fact that in 2017, “the Department of State updated its methodology to ensure that abstentions are reflected and to emphasize the votes taken on final resolutions over those taken on preliminary texts” (2017 Report). For all of the previous years, votes in which countries abstained were omitted from the voting coincidence percentage. This was problematic because abstentions could be a balancing method used by countries that do not want to express support, but do not necessarily want to oppose either. As a matter of fact, abstentions can be a key part of determining soft balancing efforts, and considering them allows for “a more comprehensive review and a better way of measuring the shifting support of countries” (2017 Report). By updating the methodology, the purpose was to “capture more accurately the voting conduct of UN member states” (2017 Voting Practices Report, p. 4). The new methodology continues to exclude absences “given that the reasons for a country’s absence can vary from political, purposely skipping, to situational, a representative being unable to attend” (2017 Voting Practices Report, p.4). In order to have a uniform set of data, I had to go back to each report from 2000 to 2016 and update the methodology myself. This information is available from the author and may be obtained upon request. The methodology was updated as instructed on the 2017 report:

The methodology for obtaining the “voting coincidence” is comparing how the United States and the listed country voted. Votes are placed into one of four categories: same; opposite; partial; and absent. “Same” is the total number of times the United States and the listed country voted together. “Opposite” is the total number of times the United States and the listed country voted counter to each other. “Partial” is the number of times
the United States and the listed country were partially aligned (one country, but not both, abstained on a resolution). “Absent” is the number of times the listed country did not vote. The “Voting Coincidence” with the United States is calculated by adding one (1) point for every ‘same’ vote, zero (0) points for every ‘opposite’ vote, and a half (1/2) point for every ‘partial’ vote. The total number of points is then divided by the total number of votes excluding absences. (2017 Voting Practices Report, p.4)

After I got the methodology sorted, I started to analyze the reports one by one, taking notes of each important resolution and identifying the respective voting information. Given that the research for this paper is mainly going to be qualitative, the first step was to analyze the resolutions and recognize if there were patterns, in order to identify what issues are the ones being used to soft-balance against the U.S, if any. While reading the reports, I quickly came to realize that there were resolutions that came up year after year, and that the patterns in voting behaviors could better be observed by comparing these resolutions. To better understand each issue in particular, and to attempt to gather an understanding on what type of issues are the most relevant when it comes to soft-balancing, I decided to provide a brief summary of each issue, and a summary of the voting results for each one of them. I have grouped the resolutions by common themes, and by the consecutive years in which the resolution came up.

Israel-Palestine Related Issues

As mentioned above, Israeli-Palestine resolutions account for approximately one-quarter of resolutions that are adopted with a vote. Some sort of Israeli-Palestine related issue was addressed with one or more resolutions every year from 2000 to 2017.
Israeli Actions in Occupied Territories

In 2000 and 2001, this resolution condemned the violent Israeli actions in occupied territories “in September 28, 2000 and the following days at Al-Haram Al-Sharif and other holy places” (2000 Report). The resolution condemned the “excessive use of force by Israeli forces against Palestinian civilians”, and reiterated the notion that “Israeli settlements in the occupied Palestinian territory, including Jerusalem, are illegal and an obstacle to peace” (2000 Report). The resolution also referred to Israel as the “occupying power” and requested Israel to abide to the settlements of the Fourth Geneva Convention of 1949, and other international agreements. Overall, the resolution condemned all disproportionate acts of violence and retaliation; encouraged all concerned parties to establish a monitoring mechanism; and called for the resumption of the negotiations between Israel and Palestine. The United States opposed the resolution because it considered it to be biased in its support towards Palestine. It disagreed with the rhetoric used to describe Israel, and it disagreed with the fact that the acts of terror directed towards Israel were not mentioned. The overall voting results for 2000 and 2001 for this resolution were 92-6(US)-46 and 124-6(US)-25 respectively. In 2000, out of the second-tier nations studied for this research, 12 nations voted against the U.S (yes), those being Argentina, Brazil China, France, India, Indonesia, Iran, Republic of Korea, Mexico, Russia, Saudi Arabia and Turkey. The following six nations abstained from voting: Australia, Canada, Germany, Italy, Japan, and the United Kingdom. Israel voted yes with the United States. In 2001, Germany and Italy changed their vote to yes, voting against the U.S.
Peaceful Settlement of the Question of Palestine

In 2001 and 2017, this resolution called for the achievement of a peaceful settlement of the question of Palestine, the core of the Arab–Israeli conflict. It offered its support for the peace process, and called for the implementation of agreements, specially the recommendations under the Mitchell Committee. This resolution once again stressed the desire of the international community for the withdrawal of Israel from the Palestinian territory. The United States, although it agreed with some of the provisions of the resolution, opposed this resolution because, once again, it deemed it unfair to Israel. The U.S disagrees with the omission of attacks committed by Palestine against Israel, and believes that negotiations between Israel and Palestine need to be conducted between the two parties. In 2001 and 2017, the overall voting results for this resolution were 131-6(US)-20 and 157-7(US)-8 respectively. In 2001, Argentina, Brazil, China, France, India, Indonesia, Italy, Japan, Republic of Korea, Mexico, Russia, Saudi Arabia, and Turkey voted against the U.S (yes). Australia, Canada, Germany, and the United Kingdom abstained; Iran was absent. In 2017, Argentina, Brazil, China, France, Germany, India, Indonesia, Iran, Italy, Japan, Republic of Korea, Mexico, Russia, Saudi Arabia, Turkey and the United Kingdom voted against the U.S (yes). Canada and Israel voted with the U.S (no). Australia abstained. The Department of State and U.S representatives at the U.N “advocate globally, requesting that other UN member states oppose this kind of unproductive and wasteful resolutions” (2017 Report, p.40). Resolutions like this one are the kind of resolutions that the U.S heavily lobbies against
Work of the Special Committee to Investigate Israel

The Special Committee to investigate Israeli practices affecting the human rights of the Palestinian people and other Arabs of the occupied territories was established by the General Assembly in 1968 “by Resolution 2443” (2007 Report). The purpose of the committee is to investigate Israeli practices that violate the human rights of the people of Palestine. Based on this investigation, the committee presents the findings to the General Assembly, which “commends its efforts in performing the tasks assigned to it” (2007 Report, p.124). The resolution calls for the General Assembly to provide all necessary tools for the committee to keep doing its work. The United States voted against this resolution every year from 2002 to 2017 because “it believes that this committee embodies institutional discrimination against Israel, and that it should be abolished” (2016, p.35). Throughout the years, the U.S only got the support of a few countries, more than seven but less than eleven, when voting for this resolution; Australia, Canada and Israel being the only ones from the group of countries studied for this paper. Argentina, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, Republic of Korea, Mexico, and Russia abstained every year, and the United Kingdom went back and forth between abstaining and voting yes. Brazil, China, India, Indonesia, Iran, Saudi Arabia and Turkey voted against the U.S (yes) every single year. The U.S “actively lobbied other countries to withdraw their support for the annual resolution that renews the Committee’s mandate” (2016, p.35); however, the evidence seems to indicate that the lobbying efforts were not that successful.
Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People

Similar to the one above, this resolution “requests the Committee to continue to exert all efforts to promote the realization of the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people and to support the Middle East peace process” (2003 Report). It also authorizes the committee to make any changes that it deems necessary to make sure the purpose of the committee is fulfilled. The United States, naturally, opposed this resolution. The voting patterns for this one were extremely similar to the ones for the resolution mentioned above. Australia, Canada and Israel remained being the only ones to vote in agreement with the U.S. Argentina, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, Republic of Korea, Mexico, and Russia abstained every year, except for Japan that voted no in 2010; the United Kingdom went back and forth between abstaining and voting yes. Brazil, China, India, Indonesia, Iran, Saudi Arabia and Turkey voted against the U.S (yes) every single year.

Division for Palestinian Rights of the Secretariat

This resolution works under the guidance of the Committee mentioned above and “requests the Secretary-General to continue to provide the Division with the necessary resources” (2004 Report) to keep its initiatives going. It also calls for the organization of an “annual exhibit on Palestinian rights or a cultural event”, and to maintain the “observance of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People” (2004 Report). This resolution seeks to advocate for the rights of the Palestinian people by providing for and organizing meetings and civil conferences, as well as monitoring political and other developments. In 2004, Australia, Canada and Israel were the
countries that consistently voted in agreement with the U.S, and Canada abstained. France, Germany, Italy, Japan, and the Republic of Korea abstained for the most part. Argentina, Mexico, Russia, and the United Kingdom went back and forth between abstaining and voting against the U.S. Brazil, China, India, Indonesia, Iran, Saudi Arabia and Turkey mainly voted against the U.S (yes).

Illegal Israeli Actions in Occupied East Jerusalem and Rest of Palestinian Territory

This resolution only came up in 2003, with an overall voting result of 90-8(US)-74. The resolution expressed concern “at the commencement and continuation of construction by Israel of a wall in the Occupied Palestinian Territory” (2003 Report). The resolution asked the International Court of Justice to provide guidance on the issue of the construction of a wall around occupied Palestinian territory and East Jerusalem. Argentina, Brazil, China, India, Indonesia, Iran, Mexico, Saudi Arabia, and Turkey voted against the U.S (yes). Australia and Israel voted with the U.S (no). Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, Republic of Korea, Russia, and United Kingdom abstained.

Assistance to Palestine Refugees and Support for the UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA)

In 2003, and for what seems like the first time in the time period studied for this paper, the United States voted yes on a resolution concerning Palestine. The resolution, with a voting result of 133(US)-0-35, “acknowledged the essential role that UNRWA” as an agency, “has in the fields of education, health, and relief and social services” (2003 Report). The resolution “affirms the necessity for continuing the Agency’s work, and the importance of its operation and services for the well-being of the Palestine refugees and
for the stability of the region” (2003 Report). Furthermore, the resolution called for the
continuation of humanitarian assistance to refugees, as well as the advancement of
education initiatives that include Palestine refugee students. The United States,
Argentina, Australia, Brazil, Canada, France, Germany, Indonesia, Iran, Israel, Italy,
Japan, Republic of Korea, Mexico, Russia, and United Kingdom voted in favor of this
resolution (yes). China, India, Saudi Arabia, and Turkey voted against it.

Status of Palestine in the United nations

In 2012, this resolution sought to establish the status of Palestine as a state in the
United Nations. The United States opposed this resolution, for it believes that unilateral
decision-making at international institutions is not the way to solve “permanent-status
issues, such as Palestinian statehood” (2012 Report). The voting results for this resolution
were 138-9(US)-41. Argentina, Brazil, China, India, Indonesia, Iran, Italy, Japan,
Mexico, Russia, Saudi Arabia, and Turkey voted yes. Canada, France, and Israel voted
no. Australia, Germany, Republic of Korea, and the United Kingdom abstained.

Status of Jerusalem & Jerusalem

In 2017, a resolution concerning President Trump’s announcement that “the
United States would recognize Jerusalem as the capital of Israel and move the United
States embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem” called for UNGA states “to not make
determinations on the status of Jerusalem” (2017 Report). The voting results were 128-
9(US)-35. Brazil, China, France, India, Indonesia, Iran, Italy, Japan, Republic of Korea,
Mexico, Russia, Saudi Arabia, Turkey and the United Kingdom voted in support of the
resolution. Argentina, Australia, Canada and Mexico abstained. Israel voted no with the U.S, and Germany was absent. The Department of State, U.S representatives at the UNGA, and diplomatic officials abroad “approached nearly all member states requesting support for the United States’ position” (2017 Report). Additionally, another resolution on Jerusalem was voted on, with a result of 151-6(US)-9. The U.S heavily opposed the resolution, despite its claims of being committed to helping facilitate a comprehensive peace agreement “that is acceptable to both Israelis and Palestinians” (2017 Report). The U.S believes that these type of resolutions do not fairly take into consideration Israel’s interests. Argentina, Brazil, China, France, Germany, India, Indonesia, Iran, Italy, Japan, Republic of Korea, Mexico, Russia, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, and the United Kingdom voted against the U.S (yes). Canada and Israel voted with the U.S (no), and Australia abstained.

Human Rights Related Issues

Human rights related resolutions account for most of the success that the U.S has in persuading other countries to vote alongside it. The following resolutions are very specific in nature and address governments on very detailed issues. issue was addressed with one or more resolutions every year from 2000 to 2017.

Situation of Human Rights in Iran

This resolution came up every year from 2000 to 2017, except in 2002. Initially proposed by the European Union but then co-sponsored by the United States and Canada, this resolution condemns the violation of human rights and fundamental freedoms by the
Government of Iran against not only its people, but also “human rights defenders, nongovernmental organizations, political opponents, religious dissenters, journalists, students, academics, labor organizers”, as well as “diplomatic servants, religious leaders, and members of other groups represented in Iran” (2003 Report). The resolution expresses serious concern about the use of torture, punishments, inhuman treatments like amputations and flogging, and executions. Furthermore, the resolution calls for Iran to stop acts of violence and discrimination against women and girls, as well as discrimination against other religious and ethnic minorities. Throughout the years, the United States “lobbies other delegations to vote in favor of the text, for it believes that this resolution demonstrates the international community’s concern over the human rights situation in Iran and the desire to hold the government accountable for its human rights abuses” (2017 Report). It is in the interest of the United States “to ensure that the UNGA continues its focus on Iran’s egregious human rights record”; therefore, “the United States runs a robust lobbying campaign each year, including significant outreach in capitals” (2017 Report). For the most part, Australia, Canada, France, Germany, Israel, Italy, Japan and the United Kingdom voted with the U.S (yes); China, India, Indonesia, Iran, Russia and Saudi Arabia voted against the U.S (no); and Argentina, Brazil, Republic of Korea, and Mexico abstained. The countries with the most changes were Argentina, Brazil and Republic of Korea that constantly fluctuated between voting yes and abstaining. In 2010, Saudi Arabia started to abstain instead of opposing, and in 2016 and 2017, it voted with the U.S (yes).
Situation of Human Rights in Iraq

Similar to the resolution about human rights in Iran, this resolution condemns the outrageous acts of violence and “violation of human rights and international humanitarian law” by the Government of Iraq (2002 Report). The resolution denounces the use of torture and arbitrary executions, and calls for Iraq to abide by international law and treaties. It requested accountability for the actions of military forces and asked for the suppression of attacks against religious minority groups. The U.S co-sponsored this resolution and is in favor. It believes it is an effective way to address the challenges facing human rights in Iraq. Argentina, Australia, Brazil, Canada, France, Germany, Israel, Italy, Japan, Republic of Korea, Mexico, Turkey, and the United Kingdom voted with the U.S in support of the resolution. Saudi Arabia voted yes in 2000 and 2001, but abstained in 2002. China, India, Indonesia, and Russia abstained every year.

Situation of Human Rights in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DROC)

This resolution condemned all acts of violence against civilians, as well as massacres, mutilations, executions, disappearances, torture, sexual abuse, and the recruitment of child soldiers in the DROC. Furthermore, the resolution urges “all parties involved in the conflict to cease all military activities, and to implement the mandates of peace agreements” (2003 Report). Argentina, Australia, Brazil, Canada, France, Germany, Israel, Italy, Japan, Republic of Korea, Mexico, Russia, Turkey, and the United Kingdom voted with the United States in support of the resolution, except for Russia in 2002, when it abstained. China, India, Indonesia, and Saudi Arabia abstained in 2001, and Iran opposed. In 2002 and 2003, Iran joined the group of those abstaining but did not oppose to the resolution.
Situation of Human Rights in North Korea

The precarious humanitarian situations in North Korea and the violation of human rights of civilians, refugees and prisoners were addressed by this resolution every year from 2006 to 2011, and in 2014 and 2015. The refusal of the government of the DPRK to abide by humanitarian law and to recognize the mandates that have been appointed to verify the situation of human rights are causes of concern for the U.S and the UNGA. Issues like “the access to food, rights pertaining to refugees and those seeking asylum; the rights of vulnerable groups, including in particular women and children, and the trafficking of women, and the failure of the state to protect human rights and freedoms” continue to raise concern (2007 Report). Furthermore, this resolution also called for the collaboration in the efforts of denuclearizing the Korean peninsula. Brazil, India, Indonesia and Saudi Arabia oscillated between supporting the resolution and abstaining. The Republic of Korea also jumped from voting yes to abstaining several times. For the most part, Argentina, Australia, Brazil, Canada, France, Germany, Israel, Italy, Japan, Mexico, Turkey, and the United Kingdom voted with the U.S (yes) in support of the resolution. China, Iran, and Russia were opposed to the resolution every year.

Human Rights in Sudan

This resolution came up in 2002, 2004 and 2005. In 2002, the resolution expressed concern “at the impact of the ongoing armed conflict on human rights” (2002 Report), as well as the impact that the conflict had on civilians. The resolution called for the parties involved in the conflict to respect human rights during the process of peace negotiations. In 2002, the United States voted in favor of this resolution because it
believes it represented the concerns of the international community; however, it did “express regret that the language was not stronger in condemning issues such as slavery and religious persecution” (2002 Report). In 2000, the resolution passed with a vote of 80(US)-62-33. Argentina, Australia, Brazil, Canada, France, Germany, Israel, Italy, Japan, Republic of Korea, Mexico, and the United Kingdom voted with the U.S (yes). China, India, Indonesia, Iran, Russia, and Saudi Arabia voted against the U.S (no), and Turkey was absent. In 2004 and 2005, however, a no-action motion on this resolution was passed which resulted in a vote of 91-74(US)-11 and 84-79(US)-12 respectively, where China, India, Indonesia, Iran, Russia, and Saudi Arabia voted against the U.S; Argentina, Australia, Canada, France, Germany, Israel, Italy, Japan, Republic of Korea, Mexico, and the United Kingdom voted with the U.S; and Brazil abstained.

Human Rights in Belarus

This resolution expressed the concern for the deteriorating situation of human rights in Belarus; the refusing of the government to hold free elections; the violation of free speech rights and the persecution of civilians, opposition leaders, and journalists. The United States sponsored this resolution, in order to keep the focus of the international community on the situation in Belarus. In 2006 and 2007, Argentina, Australia, Canada, France, Germany, Israel, Italy, Japan, Republic of Korea, Turkey, and United Kingdom voted yes with the United States. China, India, Indonesia, Iran, and Russia voted against the resolution; and Brazil, Mexico, and Saudi Arabia abstained.
Human Rights in Burma

The state of human rights in Burma has been worsening since 2006. The atrocious acts of violence and terror committed against civilians have alarmed the international community. Policies of “political repression, forced relocations, military offensives against ethnic minorities, restrictions on international humanitarian organizations, and use of rape as a tool of armed conflict” are of concern for the U.S and members of the UNGA. The refugee crisis that this situation has created is affecting neighboring countries, not only because of the influx of refugees that are leaving Burma, but also because of “cross-border trafficking in narcotics and persons, and the unchecked spread of communicable diseases such as HIV/AIDS and tuberculosis” (2016 Report). The United States continues to sponsor this resolution, for it believes it expresses the concern that the situation of human rights in Burma raises. In 2006, the resolution sponsored by the U.S passed with around 80 votes in support, although a vast majority of countries, around 40 abstained. Argentina, Australia, Brazil, Canada, France, Germany, Israel, Italy, Japan, Republic of Korea, Mexico, Russia, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, and the United Kingdom voted with the U.S (yes). China, India, Indonesia, and Iran voted against the U.S (no). In 2007, 2008, and 2009, the voting results were the same, except from Indonesia and Saudi Arabia, which abstained. In 2010, Argentina, Australia, Canada, France, Germany, Israel, Italy, Japan, Republic of Korea, Mexico, Turkey, and the United Kingdom voted with the U.S; China, India, Indonesia, Iran, and Russia voted against the U.S; and Brazil, and Saudi Arabia abstained. In 2017, China and Russia were among the only 10 countries that voted against the resolution; and Indonesia and Japan abstained.
Human Rights in the Syrian Arab Republic

The resolution condemning the intense violation of human rights in the Syrian Arab Republic was first sponsored in 2011, and has been presented every year since then. The resolution strongly condemns the use of chemical weapons in Syria, and “all indiscriminate attacks, including the use of barrel bombs in civilian areas” (2015 Report). In 2011, Argentina, Australia, Brazil, Canada, France, Germany, Indonesia, Israel, Italy, Japan, Republic of Korea, Mexico, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, and the United Kingdom voted yes on the resolution. Iran voted no; and China, India, and Russia abstained. In 2012, China and Russia joined Iran in voting against the resolution, and India abstained. In 2013 and 2014, Brazil and Turkey joined the group opposing the resolution, and India remained abstaining. In 2015, only China, Iran and Russia opposed, but Indonesia joined India in abstaining. In 2016, only India abstained, and the countries voting no remained the same. That year, there were other two resolutions that pertained Syria. The resolution named Situation in the Syrian Arab Republic demanded “the immediate cessation of all attacks on civilians and civilian objects indispensable to the survival of the civilian population, as well as an immediate end to all sieges in Syria, including in Aleppo” (2016 Report). It also requested unconditional humanitarian aid access throughout the country. The same voting patterns were held for that resolution. Furthermore, in 2016, another resolution called the UNGA to “assist in the investigation and prosecution of those responsible for the most serious crimes under international law committed in the Syrian Arab Republic since March 2011” (2016 Report). China, Iran, and Russia opposed it; India and Indonesia abstained, and Israel was absent. In 2017, the same voting results occurred.
Nuclear Weapons Related Issues

Nuclear weapons are a very controversial topic, and the diverse nature of the resolutions caused a wide variety of responses. I have divided the summary of nuclear weapons related issues in two: issues that the U.S supported, and issues that the U.S opposed.

Issues Supported by the U.S

In 2000, the resolution called New Agenda for a Nuclear-Weapon-Free world started the debate on the disarmament “to reduce nuclear arsenals, and to show increased transparency in their activities of nuclear-weapon building capabilities” (2000 Report). The resolution was passed with an overwhelming vote of 154(US)-3-8 for which Argentina, Australia, Brazil, Canada, China, Germany, Indonesia, Iran, Italy, Japan, Republic of Korea, Mexico, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, and the United Kingdom voted with the U.S (yes); India and Israel voted against the U.S; and France and Russia abstained. In 2009, a similar resolution came up, the Renewed Determination toward the Total Elimination of Nuclear Weapons, that called for “all states to redouble efforts to prevent and curb the proliferation of nuclear and other weapons of mass destruction” (2009 Report). The resolution had a voting result of 171(US)-2-8 with Argentina, Australia, Brazil, Canada, Germany, Indonesia, Italy, Japan, Republic of Korea, Mexico, Russia, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, and the United Kingdom voting yes; India voting no; and China, France, Iran, and Israel abstaining. That same year, the Comprehensive Nuclear Test-Ban Treaty resolution was proposed, which “stressed the vital importance and urgency of signature and ratification of an universal and effectively verifiable treaty”
(2009 Report). With a voting result of 175(US)-1-3, India was the only country of the ones being studied that abstained.

In 2010, a resolution with the same purpose but a slightly different name, United Actions Toward Total Elimination of Nuclear Weapons, was proposed. China, India, Iran, and Israel abstained, and the total voting result was 173(US)-1-11. That same year, the Hague Code of Conduct vs Ballistic Missile Proliferation resolution was proposed, which regarded the Hague Code of Conduct as “an important tool available for countries to impede proliferation” (2010 Report). This resolution was abstained by China, India, and Indonesia; and Iran was the only country that opposed it. In 2011, the United Actions Toward Total Elimination of Nuclear Weapons resolution was supported by Argentina, Australia, Canada, France, Germany, Indonesia, Italy, Japan, Republic of Korea, Mexico, Russia, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, and the United Kingdom; and abstained by Brazil, China, India, Iran, and Israel. In 2013, Russia joined the group of nations opposing the same resolution. The resolution concerning the Hague Code of Conduct was opposed, in 2014, only by Iran, and Indonesia and Saudi Arabia joined the group of those that usually abstain.

In 2014, 2015, and 2016, the resolution about a comprehensive nuclear test-ban treaty was supported by all of the countries studied, but India, which abstained. In 2017, the resolution calling for a united action towards the total elimination of nuclear weapons came up again, and was opposed by China and Russia; and Brazil, India, Indonesia, Iran, Israel, and the Republic of Korea abstained from voting.
Issues Opposed by the U.S

In 2000, the Compliance with the Anti-Ballistic Missile (ABM) Treaty resolution was strongly opposed by the United States. The resolution called on the parties involved to comply fully with the treaty and to “limit the deployment of ABM systems, and to refrain from deployment of such systems for defense of their countries” (2000 Report). The resolution was opposed by the U.S because the language decided to describe it was untruthful and was still based on the idea that “preserving and strengthening the ABM treaty is incompatible with amending it” (2000 Report). China, France, India, Indonesia, Iran, Mexico, and Russia voted for the resolution, against the U.S. Argentina, Australia, Brazil, Canada, Germany, Italy, Japan, Republic of Korea, Turkey, and the United Kingdom abstained; and Israel voted against the resolution with the U.S. A resolution calling for the reduction of nuclear danger was also present in 2000 and opposed by the U.S. The resolution called for a review of nuclear doctrines and asked the nuclear weapons powers to strongly implement measures to prevent proliferation. Australia, Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Russia, Turkey, and the United Kingdom voted with the U.S against the resolution. Argentina, Brazil, China, Israel, Japan, and the Republic of Korea abstained; and India, Indonesia, Iran, Mexico, and Saudi Arabia voted against the U.S. Another resolution addressing the risk of nuclear proliferation in the Middle East was presented, which called for Israel to become a member of the Non-Proliferation Treaty, for it was the only country in the Middle East that was not a member of the treaty. Argentina, Brazil, China, France, Germany, Indonesia, Iran, Italy, Japan, Republic of Korea, Mexico, Russia, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, and the United Kingdom voted against the
U.S for the resolution. Australia, Canada, and India abstained; and Israel voted with the U.S and only one other country to oppose the resolution.

In 2001, a similar vote for the resolution about the compliance with the ABM treaty occurred, with France abstaining, instead of opposing, being the only change. A resolution calling for nuclear disarmament, “with the idea of total elimination of weapons” (2001 Report) was presented. Brazil, China, Indonesia, Iran, Mexico, and Saudi Arabia supported it; Australia, Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Turkey, and the United Kingdom voted against it with the U.S; and Argentina, India, Israel, Japan, Republic of Korea, and Russia abstained. Once again, the resolution calling for Israel to become a member of the NPT received the same voting results as the year prior and the year after.

In 2002, a resolution calling for the total elimination of nuclear weapons, which stresses the importance of achieving “the universality of the treaty of non-proliferation” was opposed by the U.S and India alone, whereas Brazil, China, Israel, and Mexico abstained. In 2006, a resolution to follow-up to nuclear disarmament obligations “with practical steps to be taken that promote international stability” was opposed by the U.S, Australia, Canada, France, Germany, Israel, Italy, Japan, Republic of Korea, Russia, Turkey, and United Kingdom. The U.S opposed this resolution because it believed Iran’s steps towards non-proliferation were not enough. Brazil, Indonesia, Iran, and Saudi Arabia voted for the resolution; and Argentina, China, India, and Mexico abstained.

Another resolution calling for nuclear disarmament came up in 2016 which was supported by Argentina, Brazil, China, Indonesia, Iran, Mexico, and Saudi Arabia; and abstained by India, and Japan. The United States also opposed a resolution on the
convention on the prohibition of the use of nuclear weapons, “affirming that a multilateral, universal and binding agreement prohibiting the use of nuclear weapons would contribute to the elimination of the nuclear threat” (2016 Report). Argentina, Brazil, China, India, Indonesia, Iran, Mexico, and Saudi Arabia voted against the U.S, supporting the resolution; Japan and Russia abstained. In 2017, the U.S only opposed the resolution that “supported the recently negotiated treaty to ban nuclear weapons, which was negotiated without the participation of the United States or of any other state possessing nuclear weapons” (2017 Report). Brazil, India, Iran, Mexico, and Saudi Arabia supported the resolution voting against the U.S; and Argentina and Germany abstained.

Stand Alone Issues

The following are relevant issues that came up year after year, but that did not necessarily fit under a theme.

U.S Embargo of Cuba

The U.S embargo of Cuba has been condemned at the UNGA year after year. A resolution calling the U.S to stop the embargo came up in every report from 2000 to 2017, except for 2016. The embargo imposed by the United States in 1960 as a result of Fidel Castro’s repressive regime, is seen as harsh and unnecessary by most UNGA member states. The U.S opposes this resolution because it believes that “the embargo is a bilateral issue concerning U.S efforts to break the control of the Cuban regime over its people” and it deems it unfitting for the UNGA to consider. The U.S openly lobbies
against this resolution by arguing that it is a resolution imposed by Cuba and those that support the regime to distract the members of the international community from the human rights violations and crimes that are being committed in Cuba. From 2000 to 2017, all of the countries considered for this paper voted against the U.S (yes), except for Israel, which voted with the U.S (no) every single year. As for the overall voting results, the U.S and Israel were sometimes accompanied in their vote opposing the resolution by either Micronesia, Palau or the Marshall Islands. A smaller number of countries abstained every year, but most countries were overwhelmingly in favor of the resolution.

Global Efforts for the Total Elimination of Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance and the Comprehensive Implementation of and Follow-up to the Durban Declaration and Program of Action

This resolution came up in 2002, 2008, and 2009. The resolution condemned all forms of racism and racial discrimination. Although the U.S cares deeply about these issues, it voted against the resolution because it did not support the work that the Conference Against Racism, held in Durban in 2001, accomplished. According to the U.S, the language used to describe some issues was untruthful and unfair towards Israel. In 2002, Argentina, Brazil, China, France, Germany, India, Indonesia, Iran, Italy, Japan, Republic of Korea, Mexico, Russia, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, and United Kingdom voted against the U.S for the resolution; Israel and only one other country voted with the U.S; and Australia and Canada abstained. In 2008, Australia, Canada, Israel, and the United Kingdom joined the group opposing the resolution, whereas France, Germany, Italy, Japan, and the Republic of Korea abstained. In 2010, Germany and Italy joined the U.S
and the group opposing the resolution; and France, Japan, and the Republic of Korea remained abstaining.

Additional Stand Alone Resolutions

These resolutions were not as prominent and constant throughout the years, but they were still deemed important to U.S interests. I have divided them into two categories for observation: those when the U.S was in the supporting majority of countries, and those when the U.S was in the opposing minority. Taking a quick glance at these can help in understanding the kind of issues that the U.S is more likely to support.

Table 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>U.S in Supporting Majority</th>
<th>U.S in Opposing Minority</th>
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<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>Honor crimes against women 146(US)-1-26</td>
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<td>2005</td>
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<td>2. Situation of Human Rights in Uzbekistan (Third Committee vote) 74-69(US)-24</td>
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<td>5. The Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons 176-1(US)-0</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>9. Combating Defamation of Religions 86-53(US)-42</td>
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<td>2009</td>
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<td>2010</td>
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<td>5. Transparency in Armaments</td>
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<td>12. Agricultural Technology for Sustainable Development</td>
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<td>11. Unilateral economic measures as a means of political and</td>
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<td>economic coercion against developing countries</td>
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<td>Development, Production, Stockpiling and Use of Chemical Weapons and</td>
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<td>on Their Destruction</td>
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<td></td>
<td>10. Extrajudicial, Summary, or Arbitrary Executions</td>
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<th>13. Situation of human rights in the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the city of Sevastopol (Ukraine) 70(US)-26-77</th>
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<td><strong>2017</strong></td>
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<td>1. Agricultural technology for sustainable development 152(US)-1-29</td>
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<td>2. Compliance with non-proliferation, arms limitation and disarmament agreements and commitments 173(US)-1-11</td>
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<tr>
<td>7. Strengthening the role of the United Nations in enhancing periodic and genuine elections and the promotion of democratization 175(US)-0-13</td>
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What I learned

Before I started analyzing the reports, I had a set of expected findings; however, I quickly realized that my expectations were not the reality. When I became interested in studying the dynamic of power and soft-balancing in the UN General Assembly, I thought that I was going to find that countries were eager to collaborate with the U.S, since the U.S is a proponent of values such as human rights, democracy and peace; however, after studying the voting patterns for the important votes, I came to realize that the U.S is not supported by other nations as often as I initially thought it would. For the purpose of this paper, I had the opportunity to interview a Foreign Service Officer for the U.S Department of State. He worked at the UN General Assembly for a portion of his career, so I interviewed him with the purpose of getting some first-hand insights. After

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5 Michael H. agreed to be mentioned on this thesis. I met Michael during the summer of 2018, while taking a class at Harvard University.
reading the reports, analyzing them through the lens of soft-balancing, and interviewing Michael, and I was able to gather the following research findings:

1. Country specific resolutions/country survival resolutions are the most important and the ones the U.S pays more attention to.

2. Israel-Palestine issues pose a challenge to U.S power at the UNGA, and are the ones that can mainly be used by second-tier nations to soft-balance.

3. The U.S knows that there are some countries that are never going to support its interests, and other countries that will almost always support them; therefore, it tries to win the support of the ones in the middle.

4. Seemingly evident coalitions occur from time to time (Voting coincidence percentages)

5. Voting coincidence percentages alter, enough to be noticeable, from president to president.

Country specific resolutions/country survival resolutions are the most important and the ones the U.S pays more attention to

Country-specific resolutions are fixed on and address issues affecting one country in particular. These resolutions are important because they call the specific country to action about violations of human rights and/or other issues. The human rights/country specific resolutions that were studied for his paper were, as summarized above, the situation of human rights in Iran, Iraq, the Democratic Republic of Congo, North Korea, Sudan, Belarus, Burma, and the Syrian Arab Republic. Country survival resolutions are the most controversial resolutions at the UN General Assembly, and they require the most
soft power or convincing efforts, since they are the ones that explicitly address another country. These resolutions are the closest countries get to a bilateral conflict of U.S versus the country, in a setting like the UNGA, and countries involved with vested interests use soft power and lobbying methods, to build a winning coalition and gain support. This interaction is obviously not really bilateral, but every country that is the subject of a country specific resolution tries to make it about the U.S. and the West.

The fact is, country specific resolutions are rarely just about the country they are about. Although issues like the use of torture, the recruitment of child soldiers, or crimes against women and children are being addressed with a specific country in mind, the purpose behind these resolutions goes beyond that. Yes, helping the country is important, but so is making sure these situations do not propagate to other nations. The United States and second-tier nations are interested in making sure that situations that go against what they believe in do not get out of control. For instance, the use of chemical weapons in Syria, if left unaddressed and unchecked, can signal other rogue regimes that the international community does not keep states accountable, and can cause the spread of these atrocious acts. Addressing human rights violations can be a way to keep states, especially rogue states, in check. Furthermore, for second-tier nations like China, Russia, or Iran, these resolutions can clearly indicate their interests, which then can be used by the U.S to determine foreign policy measures regarding these countries. According to the voting data provided by the reports, these types of resolutions are the ones the U.S receives more support on.
Israel-Palestine issues pose a challenge to U.S power at the UNGA, and are the ones that can mainly be used by second-tier nations to soft-balance

Israel-Palestine resolutions account for approximately one-quarter of resolutions that are adopted with a vote at the UNGA. Some sort of Israel-Palestine related issue was addressed with one or more resolutions every year from 2000 to 2017. The U.S’ stance on Israel is probably the strongest stance the U.S has about any other subject. Regardless of being almost alone for most of the resolutions concerning Israel, the U.S still holds its ground about what it has openly professed to believe. Israel-Palestine resolutions have an impact on overall voting coincidence percentages, for they can severely skew the distribution of values. When I first started analyzing the reports, I was amazed by the small number of countries that voted alongside the U.S; however, when I identified the pattern that showed that most of the lowest scoring resolutions were related to Israel, I corrected my initial perception. I believe Israel-Palestine resolutions can be useful for nations that want to create a soft-balancing coalition because of how often they come up as part of the important votes, and because of the overwhelming impact that they have in the perception that others have of the U.S. Like mentioned in the review of literature at the beginning of this paper, the perception that other second-tier nations have of the U.S as the unipole, may have a significant impact on whether or not they attempt to balance. By abstaining so strongly to resolutions that in some way or another help Palestine, other nations may see the U.S as an unrelenting and rigid superpower.
The U.S knows that there are some countries that are never going to support its interests, and other countries that will almost always support them; therefore, it tries to win the support of the ones in the middle.

Generally, although it varies from time to time, the following countries are the ones with higher voting coincidence with the U.S: Israel, Micronesia, Canada, Marshall Islands, Australia, U.K, France, Palau, Ukraine, and Czech Republic (Voting Report 2017, p.6). On the other hand, the countries with lowest voting coincidence with the U.S tend to be: Zimbabwe, Burundi, Iran, Syria, Venezuela, North Korea, Turkmenistan, Cuba, Bolivia and South Africa (2017 Voting Practices Report, p.6). According to Michael’s experience, the U.S representatives at the General Assembly have charts to keep track of the countries that vote for and against the U.S. These charts allow them to see the voting patterns, as well as identify which countries are located towards the middle of the spectrum, and can be persuaded. It is not a secret that the U.S actively lobbies for the resolutions it wishes to pass. Being able to identify the countries that can be swayed is one of the priorities of U.S representatives at the UNGA. Voting coincidence percentages can offer a wide understanding of overall inclination of countries throughout the years. A table illustrating this is available from the author. This compilation is helpful when comparing voting coincidence results, and in finding patterns of voting behavior.

Seemingly evident coalitions occur from time to time (Voting coincidence percentages)

While analyzing the reports, I was able to identify a few coalitions that, although may not be soft-balancing coalitions necessarily, still are perceivable and noticeable. A seemingly evident coalition between Germany and France was the first one that I was
able to identify. Germany and France had identical voting coincidence percentages for 11 years of the 18 studied for this paper, the years being 2002, 2003, 2004, 2005, 2006, 2007, 2008, 2013, 2014, 2015, and 2016; and the percentages were very close even for the remaining years. Their voting percentage was above 50% for all years, except 2002. Although Australia, Canada and Israel consistently presented higher voting percentages, it can be said that France and Germany managed to support the U.S for the most part whilst defending their own stance on issues that they could not compromise on. This seemingly evident coalition is important because it is exactly the way that the literature on soft-balancing explains coalitions happen. In the UNGA setting, it matters if France or Germany vote in alignment with the U.S, for “vote support is indicative of approval for U.S. policies and the values that undergird those policies” (Datta, 2009, p.281). This is important for the U.S because “to the extent that the United States is a country founded upon ideas—as a ‘city upon a hill,’ which casts a beacon of moral authority for the rest of the world to admire and consider—votes against the United States, particularly on issues for which the U.S. State Department actively lobbies, are a stern rejection of America’s moral authority” (Datta, 2009, p.281).

If one were to think about a rival of the United States, one would think of Russia or China. However, having countries like France or Germany often voting together opposing the U.S at an international organization level like the UNGA, is not something one would consider a rivalry. Nonetheless, the theory of soft-balancing not only indicates that balancing coalitions can form at international organizations, but that these coalitions may transcend the setting of an organization. Having two or more nations get comfortable working together, learning to recognize each other’s interests, and supporting each other
when opposing a super power may be a vehicle to collaboration in settings other than international organizations.

Additionally, India and Indonesia had the exact voting coincidence percentages for five years in 2004, 2010, 2012, 2014, 2015; and nearly identical coincidence in 2000, 2003, 2013, and 2017. To recognize this seemingly evident coalition is important because it may explain that, overall, countries part of a similar geographic group seem to vote more similarly with each other, than with those from different geographic regions.

On this, I need to point out that it took me by surprise that Russia and China did not have identical voting coincidence percentages for any of the years studied. They voted together in a lot of the resolutions, as it could be seen in the analysis above, but a seemingly obvious collaboration could not be seen, at least by looking at the coincidence percentages. The voting coincidence percentages with the U.S for both, China and Russia, were consistently low, always being under 50%, but it took me by surprise that the percentages for these two countries were not more similar within each other. The only reason why I had the expectation that their voting coincidence percentages were going to be more similar was because of the knowledge of their voting patterns at the Security Council, which although were not studied for this paper, still influenced my initial assumptions. At the UNSC, China is often “susceptible to Russian influence since it strives to preserve strategic coordination, so Moscow and Beijing tend to grant sympathetic votes to each other when one or the other’s interests are threatened” (Chaziza, 2014, p.248). Both, at the UNGA and the UNSC, “as strategic partners, China and Russia do come together quite often to exchange views and coordinate diplomatic actions, especially opposing US positions on the core issues in the Middle
East” (Chaziza, 2014, p.249); however, this coordination was not as evidently reflected on the voting coincidence percentages, as I initially expected.

Voting coincidence percentages alter, enough to be noticeable, from president to president

I chose to study the four different administrations (Clinton, Bush, Obama, and Trump) mainly because these presidents have had very different approaches to foreign policy. By studying the reports from 2000 to 2017, I was able to get one year of a democrat president, a full administration of a republican president, a full administration of a democrat president, and one year of a republican president. The variety of foreign policy styles provided a wide range of opportunity to identify the issues that were important for the U.S year after year. The voting coincidence percentages were the highest during the Obama administration, except from 2012. In 2016, the percentage was 66.92% and in 2017 with the Trump administration, it went down to 53.72%. The percentages were consistently low during the Bush administration. The percentage for the Clinton, Trump and part of the Obama administration oscillated within values a little above 50%. During the Bush administration, all values were below 50%. In my opinion, this is an indication of the part of the theory of soft-balancing that explains that the way the unipole is perceived matters. The Bush administration is remembered around the world as an aggressive administration. For Robert Pape, U.S grand strategy focused on avoiding giving other nations reasons to balance, “at least until the Bush Doctrine” (Pape, 2005, p.20). During the Bush administration, “the national security strategy asserted the right of the U.S to wage unilateral preventive war against so-called rogue states and
called for a military posture to maintain U.S preponderance beyond challenge from any
state in the world” (Pape, 2005, p.22). This is relevant for the purpose of this study
because the low voting coincidence percentages during the Bush administration may be
an indication of a soft-balancing reaction to this aggressive posture. The image of the
United States “plummeted even among its closest allies since preparations for preventive
war against Iraq began in earnest” (Pape, 2005, p.22).
Chapter V.

Conclusion

This study began with an overview of the characteristics of a unipolar system. By reviewing the different approaches to unipolarity, from Krauthammer’s unipolar moment to Layne’s unipolar illusion, an understanding of the realist attempt to interpret the behavior of nations when it comes to the U.S as a superpower was developed. Realism has tried to understand the reason as to why nations have not attempted to balance against U.S power. The notion of hard balancing was disregarded as an alternative at this time in history because no nation can equal the U.S in military or economic might, and the cost of hard balancing is too high for any country to pay at the moment. Therefore, the idea of soft balancing has been used to explain the apparent less costly balancing behavior presented by some second-tier nations. Robert Pape’s theory of soft balancing suggests that soft balancing is an alternative to hard balancing that “does not directly challenge a unipolar leader’s military preponderance”, but that seeks to “delay, complicate, or increase the costs of using that extraordinary power” (Pape, 2005, p.17). Furthermore, T.V Paul’s addition to the theory of soft balancing explains that “the aim of a soft balancing strategy is to deny legitimacy to actions that challenge the international or regional order, with the expectation that the target will return to cooperation and bargaining”, in addition to just delaying or interfering with a superpower’s interests (Paul, 2018, p.24) The soft balancing theory suggests that “nonmilitary tools, such as international institutions, economic statecraft, and strict interpretations of neutrality” are
most effective when balancing against a superpower, because any measures taken can have “a real but indirect, effect on the military prospects of a unipolar leader” (Pape, 2005, p.17). The mechanisms used by second-tier nations to soft balance include “territorial denial, entangling diplomacy, economic strengthening, and signaling of resolve to participate in a balancing coalition” (Pape, 2005, p.36).

Based on the soft balancing theory suggestion that nonmilitary tools, such as international institutions, economic statecraft, and strict interpretations of neutrality are most effective when balancing against a superpower, the purpose of this paper was to identify whether or not the United Nations General Assembly is an apparatus for soft balancing. After studying the voting patterns of second-tier nations for the important votes from 2000 to 2017, I was able to reach the conclusion that indication of soft balancing behavior is happening at the UNGA, but mainly for certain issues. According to my research findings, Israel-Palestine related issues severely skew the voting coincidence percentages, and are the ones mainly being used by second-tier nations to interfere with U.S interests. This finding supports Pape’s theory because it shows that although soft balancing may be unable to prevent the United States from achieving specific military aims in the near term, “it still increases the costs of using U.S power, reduce the number of countries likely to cooperate with future U.S military adventures, and it possibly shifts the balance of economic power against the United States” (Pape, 2005, p.10). This finding also supports T.V Paul’s observations of soft balancing because, in order for soft balancing coalitions to be effective, “they need to be aimed at making the U.S actions less legitimate while increasing its costs of action” (Paul, 2018, p. 103). Overall, resolutions concerning Israel, Palestine, and countries where various
interests from powerful nations are vested, such as Iraq and Syria, are likely to be used by second-tier nations to soft balance because these issues are a reflection of U.S strength. This also supports Pape’s claims because “other states may have reason to oppose military action by a unipolar leader, even if it has no intention of harming them directly”, if a unipolar leader chooses to display its force in a disproportionate manner that makes second-tier nations feel threatened (Pape, 2005, p. 14).

After studying the data, another finding that supports the soft balancing theory was reached, which is that the way the unipole’s motives are perceived matters. According to Pape, “the overwhelming power of the unipolar leader means that even a modest change in how others perceive the aggressiveness of its intentions can significantly increase the fear that it would make a bid for global hegemony” (Pape, 2005, p.15). The way this was considered for this study was by looking at the overall voting coincidence percentages for the different presidencies. By taking into consideration data from the Clinton, Bush, Obama and Trump administrations, and claiming that each president’s different approach to foreign policy is an indication of the unipole’s motives, it could be seen that the administrations that are characterized by more aggressive foreign policy measures had voting coincidence percentages that were significantly lower. This is particularly true about the Bush administration.

Furthermore, the idea proposed by Pape that soft balancing “establishes a new pattern of diplomatic activity: the cooperation among major powers that excludes the United States” could also be seen after analyzing the data for this study (Pape, 2005, p.40). Seemingly evident coalitions were identified, Germany and France having identical voting coincidence percentages for 11 years, being the most significant one.
Although this finding refers to the interaction of these countries only at the UNGA, the theory of soft balancing suggests that when nations establish balancing coalitions at international organizations, the willingness to collaborate may transcend to other aspects of foreign policy. This finding also supports Paul’s claim about the shift of diplomacy under soft balancing because, in order for soft balancing coalitions to work, “diplomacy needs to be aimed at restraining threatening behavior or polices” (Paul, 2018, p.167).

Studying the behavior of nations such as Germany and France, and seeing how they have managed to present some resistance on issues they disagree with, but support shared important issues, expands the meaning of diplomacy, and shows that any soft balancing efforts “need to be applied consistently over some length of time, with the use of institutions and limited ententes aimed at restraint and delegitimation” (Paul, 2018, p. 167).

Without a doubt, the issue of soft balancing is worth studying. The current available literature answers the questions of why, when, and how, but these answers need to evolve in the same way the international system evolves. Like discussed in this paper, any change in the way the U.S is perceived is likely to have an impact on the way second-tier nations behave, especially at the international organization level. This means that situations like the beginning of a new presidential administration, the implementation of an aggressive foreign policy measure, or the rise of revisionist actors in the international community will determine the future of soft balancing efforts. That being said, how soft balancing efforts adapt to issues like globalization, the economy, or the shift of alliances and international treaties needs to be studied in further research. For instance, what will happen with soft balancing if American foreign policy starts to
become more isolationist as a result of a new president? Or on the contrary, what will happen to soft balancing efforts if globalization keeps bringing nations closer, and the complex interconnection of the international system deepens? How will non-state related threats like ISIS or terrorist attacks affect soft balancing, if the apparent aggressive measures taken by the U.S are meant to combat these threats? And lastly, how will soft balancing efforts have to adjust if the rhetoric to delegitimize international institutions becomes more prevalent in presidential campaigns and administrations? These questions, among others provided by scholars and experts, can offer a good foundation for further research.

My hope for this thesis was to be able to provide an understanding of soft balancing efforts at the United Nations General Assembly. The United Nations General Assembly is a platform where nations can discuss issues that are relevant to their interests, collaborate with each other to promote issues that align with their values, and find nations that oppose what they oppose. Studying the participation of the U.S, the sole superpower, at an organization where all member states have equal representation: one nation - one vote, was extremely interesting. Soft balancing behavior is occurring at the UNGA, but the extent of its impact on the U.S as an unipole cannot be told yet. Although the issues discussed on the important votes at the UNGA align with U.S national interests, ultimately, soft balancing coalitions only delay, complicate, or increase the costs of using extraordinary power. How effective soft balancing coalitions are in the struggle to balance against a unipole is something that only time will tell.
References


