Soft Balancing, Institutions, and Peaceful Change

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Students of soft balancing argue that the fabric of the international system has changed since the end of World War II.[1] Economic and security interdependence have increasingly undermined the benefits and heightened the risks associated with interstate war and intense hard balancing, the type that relies on formal alliances and massive military buildups. Norms of national self-determination, decolonization, and peaceful conflict resolution have spread at the expense of expansionist ideologies, affecting not only the cost-benefit analyses of political decision-makers and electorates but also what they see as right and wrong. The deepening and widening institutionalization of world politics has created an institutional infrastructure that facilitates diplomatic negotiations and allows for defectors and aggressors to be monitored and sanctioned. Consequently, states are now more likely to balance by institutional and diplomatic means than by military alliances and intense armament buildup.

Yet, the success of soft-balancing strategies in fostering peaceful change varies widely, even in today's globalized and institutionalized international environment. In this essay, we explore these variations and identify three conditions for success that we argue can inform both academic analysis and political practice: inclusion, commitment, and status recognition. We draw lessons from the historical examples of the Concert of Europe in the early nineteenth century and the League of Nations in the early twentieth century, and discuss how current threats to the liberal international order challenge possibilities for soft balancing to bring about peaceful change.

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Legitimization and Delegitimization through Institutions

States, particularly great powers and their second-ranking challengers, can resort to institutional soft balancing in order to bolster the legitimacy of their own policies and to deny the legitimacy of their opponent's. We adopt here T. V. Paul's definition of soft balancing as: "restraining the power or aggressive policies of a state through international institutions, concerted diplomacy via limited, informal ententes, and economic sanctions in order to make its aggressive actions less legitimate in the eyes of the world and hence its strategic goals more difficult to obtain."[2] Legitimacy accorded by the international system is important for great powers to preserve their status and privilege, but it is even more important for small states. After all, the security and survival of such small states depend on the recognition from international institutions and great powers that their borders are inviolable and their existence is legitimate. Delegitimization of an aggressive policy by international institutional means could act as a signaling device by the soft balancing states, even if it does not make much difference in the end. Signaling tools include joint statements, declarations, and sanctions.

For this essay, we use Martha Finnemore's definition of "legitimacy" as the "tacit acceptance of social structure in which power is exercised."[3] The powerful often seek to exercise their power on the basis of legal conventions or traditional authority bestowed on them through treaties, for example. Gaining legitimacy through institutions is frequently part of a great power's effort to gain acceptance or acquiescence from others for its behavior toward other states, especially in the arena of interventions. Balance of power, both classical and contemporary, is based partially on this legitimacy principle, as alliances themselves are predicated at some level on the legitimacy of the powers entering into these relationships. Though institutions can offer collective legitimization of great power interventions, denial of that legitimization can be a tool in the hands of weaker actors. This tool can be particularly useful when weaker actors need to confront a state that offers them collective goods by way of security or economic benefits. Institutions can provide legitimate cover for weaker states to impose on more powerful states economic and political sanctions, which are key components of a soft-balancing strategy. Retribution against the individual weaker states is less likely when they are "sheltered" by an international institution in this way.[4]

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For these reasons, soft balancing through international institutions can be an effective means of effectuating peaceful change, in levels ranging from modest—what we will refer to as "minimalist"—goals that aim to bring about incremental change, to more ambitious—what we will call "maximalist"—goals that seek more profound change and transformation in the form of continuous interstate cooperation for a more peaceful and just world order.[5]

How Is Peaceful Change Possible? Inclusion, Commitment, and Status Recognition

International institutions are the key to successful soft balancing for peaceful change. The literature on international institutions has shown how increasing transparency, limiting cheating, and creating organizational infrastructures and legal frameworks for decision-making, dispute settlement, and compensation can facilitate negotiations and lower the transaction costs of collective action. In addition, international institutions set standards for what counts as appropriate behavior in international affairs, having helped to delegitimize expansionist ideology and behavior. Institutional soft balancing can act as a signaling device to deter aggressive powers. It is often regarded as the better option in strategic contexts where the threat of war is not effective or feasible. However, not all institutions are equally effective at fostering peaceful change. The UN has had a patchy record in this area even though countries have often attempted to use the Security Council and the General Assembly for soft-balancing purposes. The Security Council voting down U.S. resolutions prior to the Iraq invasion in 2003 is a good example of secondary, less powerful states attempting to delegitimize the actions of a great power. This section uses two other prominent historical examples—the Concert of Europe and the League of Nations—as prisms through which to identify the necessary institutional requirements for peaceful change.[6] We argue that inclusion, commitment, and status recognition are necessary for peaceful change to be successful. We further illustrate this point with recent examples of successful and unsuccessful attempts at peaceful change.

The Concert of Europe

The use of international institutions for the purpose of soft balancing for peaceful change is not a recent phenomenon. In the nineteenth century, the Concert of Europe successfully prevented a great power war in Europe from 1815 to 1853. The Concert, which consisted of the five European great powers after the

conclusion of the Napoleonic Wars in 1815 (the United Kingdom, Austria, Prussia, Russia, and France), recognized a special role for great powers in monitoring and managing the international system, including the peace settlement that followed the war. The five countries agreed that territorial changes could only be made with the consent of all Concert powers, and that one power should not change its foreign policy orientation without the consent of the others. The great power status of all of the countries was to be protected, and none of them should suffer humiliation from the others. Although motivated by the suppression of revolutionary movements within their territories, the conservatively oriented Concert powers shared a normative commitment to stability, system maintenance, and the recognition of both great power status and great power responsibilities. The legitimacy of these commitments was conferred through international treaties to which the powers voluntarily acceded and through hard and soft balancing. The Concert powers were highly status quo–oriented states, but their actions produced peaceful change—although limited to minimalist goals aimed at incremental change—on a continent with a history of continuous interstate wars.

This combination of a normative community that agreed on what constituted a well-functioning international society, with threats of sanctions and retaliation in the case of defection, proved effective in deterring the aggressive ambitions of domestic elites, including the British desire for colonial conquests and the Russian ambitions in Greece and the Balkans. The inclusion of all the great powers, even defeated postwar France, and the prioritization of systemic stability, rather than taking advantage of the ailing Ottoman Empire, assured that all five powers had a stake in the system. Temptations to break ranks were deterred by the risk of chaos and a loss of status and territory. However, since the system was highly conservative, it was more effective at securing a peaceful status quo than fostering peaceful change. The Concert proved ineffective in handling the domestic and international changes resulting from differential growth rates in the wake of the industrial revolution, and the strengthening of domestic society in the wake of the democratic and nationalist revolutions that swept the European continent in the mid-nineteenth century. Thus, the Crimean War, which effectively ended the Concert system in 1853, was the result of fallout from the long-term decline of the Ottoman Empire. By the time that Germany unified in 1871, the already faltering Concert could not handle the rise of this discontent German great power. The rise of Germany as a revisionist power highlighted one of the Concert's main shortcomings: although it initially succeeded

in building a new order with effective mechanisms against a great power war, once created it was an exclusive club with no mechanism for accepting new members or accommodating new and rising powers.

The League of Nations

In contrast to the Concert of Europe, the League of Nations was from the outset explicitly "reformist," aimed at facilitating peaceful change through the "institutionalization of the international political process." Its architects viewed war "as a radical 'rupture' to be exorcised from inter-state relations."[7] In further contrast to the Concert, however, the League lacked the inclusion of all the great powers of its day; most importantly Germany and the United States. The former country was not allowed to join the League until 1926 and left in 1933 after the other great powers refused to recognize German rearmament, and the latter country was unwilling to join. The victors of the First World War openly disagreed on the aims and means of the League. France, in particular, favored a permanent reduction of German military capability combined with an alliance-based hard balancing of German power. The United States under President Woodrow Wilson instead advocated soft balancing through "collective security and legitimacy denial through the League as a response to aggressive actions."[8] Britain supported the French aim of containing German military resurgence in principle, but for budgetary reasons it was reluctant to spend money on the rearmament necessary to assist France in its goal. In addition, Britain had an interest in reviving the German economy, which had been an important export market for British industry before World War I. Although successful in settling some minor disputes in the 1920s, the League suffered from the divergent interests of the great powers and the lack of commitment and formal member-state obligations to implement its principles of imposing sanctions on territorial aggressors. The League's efforts at soft balancing against revisionist Italy in response to its Abyssinian aggression and against Japan in response to its aggression in Manchuria failed. The League-orchestrated international sanctions emboldened nationalist coalitions in both countries that were bent on war.

Conditions for Success

The histories of the Concert of Europe and the League of Nations help us identify what conditions are necessary for institutions to successfully facilitate soft balancing for peaceful change. The first condition is inclusion, both in terms of the number of members and in terms of their ideological positions. Soft balancing for

peaceful change is most likely to succeed if the soft balancers represent a broad segment of international society rather than a particular caucus of states. Without Germany and the United States, the League lacked both power and legitimacy. In contrast, by incorporating all the great powers—including France (vanquished in the Napoleonic Wars), relatively liberal Britain, and tsarist Russia—the Concert succeeded for almost four decades in building a peaceful European order. The wider the membership, the smaller the risk that the institution will be perceived as representing the interests of a particular segment of international society, such as the victors of the last war. Institutional declarations and sanctions are less likely to be perceived as the narrow self-interest of one state or a small group of states, but rather as conveying an intersubjective understanding of moral appropriateness by speaking on behalf of, for example, Europe (in the case of the EU), or even international society (in the case of the UN).[9]

To be sure, large and diverse membership complicates reaching an agreement, but once an agreement is achieved, soft balancing for peaceful change is more likely to be successful. Because membership is diverse, action is only taken when fundamental norms of the institution are threatened or broken. Consequently, soft-balancing efforts are likely to have a high degree of legitimacy. In addition, a wide membership increases the chance that soft balancing is leveraged against a member state. The chance of success is higher when the aggressor state is also a member state of the organization than when it is not because "reputation costs are highest when states act in defiance of formal legal commitments and IOs."[10] Violating norms and rules that a country previously agreed to is likely to be perceived as hypocritical and to undermine the future bargaining position of the state. However, this is often less straightforward in practice than in theory. In the 1998–1999 Kosovo conflict between the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (Serbia and Montenegro) and Kosovo Albanian rebels, NATO member states argued that Serbian troops were violating fundamental human rights and displacing Kosovo Albanians and raised the alarm about potential ethnic cleansing. On these grounds, NATO justified its military intervention. Russia and China soft balanced in the UN, vetoing a UN Security Council resolution authorizing the war. They argued that military action constituted an expansion of the U.S. sphere of influence and they made the case for diplomatic negotiations with both sides of the conflict. Eventually, soft balancing failed as NATO embarked on an air campaign against Yugoslav troops from March to June 1999.

There is a high chance of success in making potential member states comply with conditions for peaceful change by offering prospective security, economic, and status gains inside the club as a reward for peaceful change. Enlargements of NATO and the EU after the Cold War proved to be effective instruments for peaceful change because existing members of the two organizations agreed upon a set of criteria that dictated certain domestic changes within prospective member states, as well as a commitment from these states to peaceful development of the region. However, the two organizations were less successful in formulating sanctions against members once inside the club, resulting in some new members sliding away from democracy, human rights, and transparency. Moreover, as exemplified by the Russian annexation of Crimea in 2014, efforts to soft balance with the long-term prospect of affiliation or membership may provoke disgruntled states into preventive military action.

The second condition for success is commitment. Soft balancing for peaceful change can only succeed if powerful domestic coalitions in the target state are convinced that compliance is less costly than aggression. The domestic groups in the soft-balancing coalition should also have the commitment to sustain their restraining policies toward the target state.[11] One important way of signaling such a commitment is through institutionalization. Members of the Concert of Europe were committed to a shared agenda of a stable and peaceful development of Europe. They were acting simultaneously as soft balancers and as the target states for that balancing. The likely cost of defection was the end of the Concert and the stable framework for peaceful change that Concert members agreed upon. The League had lofty ambitions but little commitment even from core member states such as France and the United Kingdom, which shared an interest in containing Germany but could not agree on how to do so. In the contemporary international system, the EU provides an important—although more agile—parallel to the Concert. The commitments of both Germany and France to peaceful change through integration and the ability of the two powers to continuously soft balance each other economically and politically has allowed the EU to develop and survive fundamental power shifts and crises.[12] Although often interpreted as a sign of crisis, the British decision to leave the EU peacefully and in a negotiated understanding with the EU is evidence of the strength of the European security community, although the fear that this will make the EU less inclusive in the future has been cause for concern in small North European member states.

The third condition for success is status recognition, especially in the context of great power relations. The success of integrating France into the Concert and the mistake of initially excluding Germany from the League show that soft balancing for peaceful change is most likely to succeed if compliance can be assured without humiliation. Consequently, balancing must aim to modify objectionable policies, not to remove the regime pursuing those policies. Military capabilities are vital for deterring potential aggressors as well as for putting an end to aggression, but peaceful change beyond the absence of violent conflict depends on fostering a degree of consent and acceptance from those subject to soft balancing. This is more important for soft balancing for peaceful change than for soft balancing in general because peaceful change requires the target to accept a change in policy. Therefore, soft balancing is only possible if the soft balancers refrain from threatening the continued existence of the regime. Anti-regime rhetoric is likely to have an adverse effect not only on political decision-makers but also on domestic audiences by hardening ideological stances and sowing the seeds of populism. This may induce targets of soft balancing to focus their resources on resisting rather than complying.

The agreement on, and later abandonment of, the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA)—also known as the Iran nuclear deal—illustrates the importance of all three elements discussed above: inclusiveness, commitment, and status recognition. The Islamic Revolution in 1978–1979 raised concerns in neighboring states that the revolution would spread to other countries. Although these fears were eventually dampened, Iran was nevertheless identified as a "rogue state" by the Clinton administration in 1994 and as a member of the "axis of evil" by the Bush administration in 2002. Effectively marginalized by the world's only superpower, Iran continued efforts to develop nuclear technology. Consequently, beginning in the early 2000s, Iran was subject to UN Security Council resolutions, critique from the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), and sanctions. However, in 2015 the so-called P5+1 (the five permanent members of the UN Security Council plus Germany) and the EU brokered a deal with Iran, supplemented by a road map agreement between Iran and the IAEA. The agreement was inclusive, with signatories representing a broad segment of international society; committed, as it provided clear targets and milestones for Iran and for the abandonment of sanctions as the deal was implemented; and offered status recognition to Iran, effectively readmitting the country to

international society and thereby acknowledging the legitimate existence of the Iranian regime.

However, following the 2018 U.S. withdrawal from the agreement, the conflict between the United States and Iran has escalated, with an exchange of threats and attacks on oil tankers in the Gulf of Oman and major oil facilities in Saudi Arabia. The U.S. killing of Qassem Soleimani, the head of the Quds Force, a wing of the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps, in January 2020 prompted Iranian retaliation with missile attacks on U.S. bases and the Iranian abandonment of the JCPOA, while U.S. president Trump branded Iran "the leading sponsor of terrorism."[13] Consequently, the prospects for peaceful change are small. There is no longer an inclusive coalition willing to reach an agreement (France, the United Kingdom, and Germany disagree with both Iran and the United States and have triggered the JCPOA's dispute resolution mechanism), commitment has been cast into disarray with unclear consequences, and the United States has returned to a highly threatening posture, questioning the legitimacy of the Iranian regime.

The Future of Peaceful Change: Opting for the Lesser Evil

The current crisis of the liberal world order has important consequences for the ability of states and institutions to soft balance for peaceful change. While the institutional infrastructure of both global and regional orders has so far proven largely resilient,[14] the inclusiveness of this order, the commitment of the great powers to its future development, and the willingness to recognize the status and concerns of other states have all been questioned over the past few years. Although the Trump presidency has accentuated these challenges, they are deep rooted and signal both important challenges and the need for necessary changes in approaches to soft balancing for peaceful change.

First, efforts at soft balancing for peaceful change are challenged by the rearticulation of "spheres of influence" as a central tenet of great power politics,[15] as exemplified by Russia's war with Georgia in 2008 and annexation of Crimea in 2014, Chinese claims and military construction activities in the South China Sea, and the Trump administration's praise of the Monroe Doctrine and support for dividing the world into "grand spheres of influence apportioned to the United States, China and Russia."[16] On the one hand, this regionalization of world politics

may enhance prospects for peaceful change by creating mini–international societies akin to Europe in the nineteenth century, when the Concert powers' governance of Europe was in effect also a governance of international society. This would allow for a stronger set of shared values as a basis of soft balancing for peaceful change and a stronger commitment from states in the region. On the other hand, these mini–international societies would be unipolar and inward looking. The massive power asymmetry between the regional unipole and the other states would make peaceful change a one-way street, leaving secondary powers and small states virtually without any opportunities to soft balance the great power. Parts of Africa and the Pacific region would be on the margins or outside the great power spheres of influence and therefore rarely subject to or part of soft balancing for peaceful change.

Second, while the reassertion of spheres of influence by great powers points to a potential future undercommitment to peaceful change, overcommitment to peaceful change seems to play at least a part in the current crisis of the liberal international order. A number of developing states have been alienated by the post–Cold War liberal vision of the UN as a quasi–world government with a "responsibility to protect" citizens against governments and deliver human rights and democracy across the globe.[17] It could be argued that this development has violated both the inclusiveness of the UN and the recognition of states outside the Western liberal coalition of states as equals.

The best remedy for both under- and overcommitment to peaceful change may be to take a pragmatic look at the political practice of the UN, which has helped solidify norms of nonaggression and human development since 1945. A less ambitious agenda for peaceful change would return to the original purpose of the UN as an arena for compromise and peaceful conflict resolution among sovereign states, and would increase ideological inclusiveness, signal the recognition of states outside the West, and allow a commitment to a shared base of principles—although the price would be a greater willingness to accept, and de facto legitimize, authoritarian practices. More specifically, the question is whether or not the UN and other international institutions can work as agents of peaceful change and accommodate rising powers and established powers. Can the institutional power structures change, and give meaningful voice to the newcomers? Or will the newcomers create their own institutions and facilitate peaceful change and accommodation? The current institutional structures show the latter pattern more than the former.

Conclusion

Soft balancing is a method for peaceful change.[18] It inflicts costs on and signals resolve to aggressor states, and is most likely to be successful when embedded within international institutions. Calibrating foreign policies toward soft balancing for peaceful change requires institutional inclusiveness and commitment as well as the willingness and ability to recognize the status of states and regimes as legitimate members of international society, even when the soft balancing is being conducted against them with the aim of changing their policies.

Soft balancers may aim to foster peaceful change as a response to an immediate crisis with a high probability of war, as a long-term strategy, or as a combination of the two. Much in the same way one can differentiate between immediate deterrence (which aims to prevent a specific imminent attack) and general deterrence (which aims to foster long-term security), one can discern between "immediate soft balancing" and "general soft balancing." Typically, the former entails goals for minimalist peaceful change, whereas the latter includes maximalist goals for more profound changes in international society. Examples of immediate soft balancing include attempts by France, Germany, Russia, and China to use the UN to restrain the United States prior to the 2003 invasion of Iraq, and the European states' use of the European Union to curb Russian aggression after the 2014 annexation of Crimea. In the current international system, the United States along with others such as India, Japan, and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) states are engaging in a form of general soft balancing through institutional mechanisms to restrain China's possible threatening behavior and expansionist strategies. Similarly, China is using international and regional institutions as well as its limited strategic partnership with Russia to restrain the United States and its allies via initiatives such as the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation and the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank. The long-term implications of these strategies are yet to be seen, but they may be viewed as examples of fine-grained signaling that allows states to avoid the devastating costs of war while still restraining opponents. Unless China resorts to aggresive expansionism, which would threaten the sovereign existence of other states, its peaceful rise may be possible partly due to these milder forms of strategic and institutional balancing by affected states. In sum, both U.S. and Chinese strategies recognize the need (at least to some degree) for commitment and status recognition, while at the same time limiting inclusivity to their own spheres of influence. A likely consequence

is an international order where ambitions for peaceful change are increasingly tied to the regional setting.

NOTES

[1] See T. V. Paul, *Restraining Great Powers: Soft Balancing from Empires to the Global Era* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2018), pp. 15–19.
[2] Ibid., p. 20.
[3] Martha Finnemore, "Legitimacy, Hypocrisy, and the Social Structure of Unipolarity: Why Being a Unipole Isn't All It's Cracked Up to Be," *World Politics* 61, no. 1, (January 2009), p. 62. See also Christian Reus-Smit, *American Power and World Order* (Cambridge, U.K.: Polity), pp. 43–44.
[4] Alyson J. K. Bailes and Baldur Thorhallsson, "Instrumentalizing the European Union in Small State Strategies," *Journal of European Integration* 35, no. 2 (2013), pp. 99–115.
[5] See the discussion in T. V. Paul, "The Study of Peaceful Change in World Politics," introduction to T. V. Paul, Deborah Welch Larson, Harold Trinkunas, Anders Wivel, and Ralf Emmers, eds., *Oxford Handbook on Peaceful Change in International Relations* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021).
[6] Our discussion of these two institutions builds primarily on the general discussion of soft balancing in the Concert of Europe and the League of Nations in Paul, *Restraining Great Powers*, pp. 46–56 and 48–62.
[7] Friedrich V. Kratochwil, "Politics, Norms and Peaceful Change," *Review of International Studies* 24, no. 5 (December 1998), p. 206.
[8] Paul, *Restraining Great Powers*, p. 59. The political elite in the United States were divided on how to best meet the challenges in Europe.
[9] For the general argument, see Patricia A. Weitsman, *Waging War: Alliances, Coalitions, and Institutions of Interstate Violence* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2013), p. 42.
[10] Alexander Thompson, *Channels of Power: The UN Security Council and U.S. Statecraft in Iraq* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2009), p. 19.
[11] On a similar role of coalitions for economic sanctions, see Edward D. Mansfield, "International Institutions and Economic Sanctions," *World Politics* 47, no. 4 (July 1995), pp. 575–605.
[12] Anders Wivel and Ole Wæver, "The Power of Peaceful Change: The Crisis of the European Union and the Rebalancing of Europe's Regional Order," *International Studies Review* 20, no. 2 (June 2018), pp. 317–25.
[13] Donald Trump, "Remarks by President Trump on Iran" (White House, January 8, 2020), www.whitehouse.gov/briefings-statements/remarks-president-trump-iran/.
[14] Anders Wivel and T. V. Paul, "Exploring International Institutions and Power Politics," in Anders Wivel and T. V. Paul, eds., *International Institutions and Power Politics: Bridging the Divide* (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 2019), pp. 6–8.
[15] Andrew Hurrell, "Kissinger and World Order," *Millennium: Journal of International Studies* 44, no. 1 (September 2015), pp. 165–72.
[16] Robbie Gramer and Keith Johnson, "Tillerson Praises Monroe Doctrine, Warns Latin America of 'Imperial' Chinese Ambitions," *Foreign Policy*, February 2, 2018. See also Nathan Gardels, "Trump Is Not the Leader of the U.S.—Just of His Base," "Opinion," *Washington Post*, July 19, 2018, foreignpolicy.com/2018/02/02/tillerson-praises-monroe-doctrine-warns-latin-america-off-imperial-chinese-ambitions-mexico-south-america-nafta-diplomacy-trump-trade-venezuela-maduro/.
[17] Louise Riis Andersen, "Curb Your Enthusiasm: Middle-Power Liberal Internationalism and the Future of the United Nations," *International Journal: Canada's Journal of Global Policy Analysis* 74, no. 1 (March 2019), pp. 47–64.
[18] Ilai Z. Saltzman, "Soft Balancing as Foreign Policy: Assessing American Strategy toward Japan in the Interwar Period," *Foreign Policy Analysis* 8, no. 2 (April 2012), p. 133.

Abstract: As part of the roundtable "International Institutions and Peaceful Change," this essay examines the role of institutional soft balancing in bringing forth peaceful change in international relations. Soft balancing is understood as attempts at restraining a threatening power through institutional delegitimization, as opposed to hard balancing, which relies on arms buildup and formal alignments. We argue that soft balancing through international institutions can be an effective means to peaceful change, spanning minimalist goals, which aim at incremental change without the use of military force and war, and maximalist goals, which seek more profound change and transformation in the form of continuous interstate cooperation aimed at a more peaceful and

just world order. However, the success of soft-balancing strategies in fostering peaceful change varies widely, even in today's globalized and institutionalized international environment. We explore these variations and identify three conditions for success that can inform both academic analysis and political practice: inclusion, commitment, and status recognition. We draw lessons from two historical examples: the Concert of Europe in the early nineteenth century and the League of Nations in the early twentieth century, and discuss how current threats to the liberal international order challenge soft balancing for peaceful change.

Keywords: soft balancing, institutions, peaceful change, status, commitment, inclusion