



Power transition and satisfaction of GCC member states: A dyadic analysis of voting behavior at the UNGA from 1946 to 2022

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Abstract

Objectives: This study aimed to determine the extent to which Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) member states would be satisfied on the international political hierarchy in the event of successful power transition from an American-led global order to a Chinese-led one. **Method:** This is a comparative empirical analysis with ordinary least squares regression of voting dyads at the United Nations General Assembly from 1946 to 2022 between all states and the United States on one hand, and all states and China on the other. Special attention is given to the GCC members since their joining of the UN. Also included is a brief historical analysis of GCC group prior to and after independence, in addition to a critique of the balancing paradigm in international relations. **Results:** Results indicate that the power transition paradigm is better suited for studying the international relations of the GCC member states, while the balancing framework is saturated with logically inconsistent assumptions rendering it degenerative. **Conclusion:** This research concludes that the GCC states are currently considered relatively unsatisfied with the US led global order, and that their position on Organski's power pyramid will shift to the satisfied side given successful power transition to a Chinese-led global order.

Keywords: power transition theory, balance of power, GCC, progressive paradigm, degenerative paradigm

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تحول القوة ورضا الدول الأعضاء في مجلس التعاون الخليجي: تحليل ثنائي لسلوك التصويت في الجمعية العامة للأمم المتحدة من عام 1946 إلى عام 2022

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ملخص

الأهداف: الهدف من هذه الدراسة هو تحديد مدى رضا دول مجلس التعاون الخليجي عن التسلسل الهرمي السياسي الدولي في حالة نجاح انتقال السلطة من نظام عالمي تقوده الولايات المتحدة إلى نظام تقوده الصين. **المنهج:** وتشمل الأساليب المستخدمة تحليلاً تجريبياً مقارناً بواسطة المربعات الصغرى العادية لثنائيات التصويت في الجمعية العامة للأمم المتحدة من عام 1946 إلى عام 2022 بين جميع الدول والولايات المتحدة من ناحية، وبين جميع الدول والصين من ناحية أخرى. وقد تم إيلاء اهتمام خاص لأعضاء دول مجلس التعاون الخليجي منذ انضمامهم إلى الأمم المتحدة. ويتضمن البحث تحليلاً تاريخياً موجزاً لمجموعة دول مجلس التعاون الخليجي قبل الاستقلال وبعده، بالإضافة إلى نقد نموذج توازن القوة في العلاقات الدولية. **النتائج:** وتشير النتائج إلى أن نموذج انتقال القوة هو أكثر ملاءمة لدراسة العلاقات الدولية لدول مجلس التعاون الخليجي، في حين أن إطار التوازن مشبع بافتراضات غير متسقة منطقياً مما يجعله تنكسي. **الخاتمة:** تستنتج الدراسة إلى أن دول مجلس التعاون الخليجي تعتبر حالياً غير راضية نسبياً عن النظام العالمي الذي تقوده الولايات المتحدة، وأن موقعها في هرم السلطة الذي وضعه أورغانسكي سوف يتحول إلى الجانب الراضي في ظل انتقال السلطة إلى نظام عالمي تقوده الصين.

الكلمات المفتاحية: نظرية انتقال القوة، ميزان القوى، دول مجلس التعاون الخليجي، البحث التقدمي، البحث التنكسي

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Introduction

The pace at which China is mitigating differences in power between itself and the United States, coupled with strong evidence of a degenerative “balancing” paradigm, has motivated scholars to evoke Power Transition Theory (PTT) as the framework for analysis in the post-Cold War era. After a review of the fundamentals of PTT, and a critique of the balancing framework, this study empirically analyses the extent to which Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) member states are satisfied with the competitors for dominance on the international political hierarchy. The empirical analysis relies on voting behavior at the UN General Assembly to proxy for state satisfaction. The purpose of this analysis is to determine whether a Chinese-led global order would push the GCC member states closer towards the satisfied camp on the international order, or if such a shift in power would do the opposite and push the GCC states further towards the dissatisfied camp.

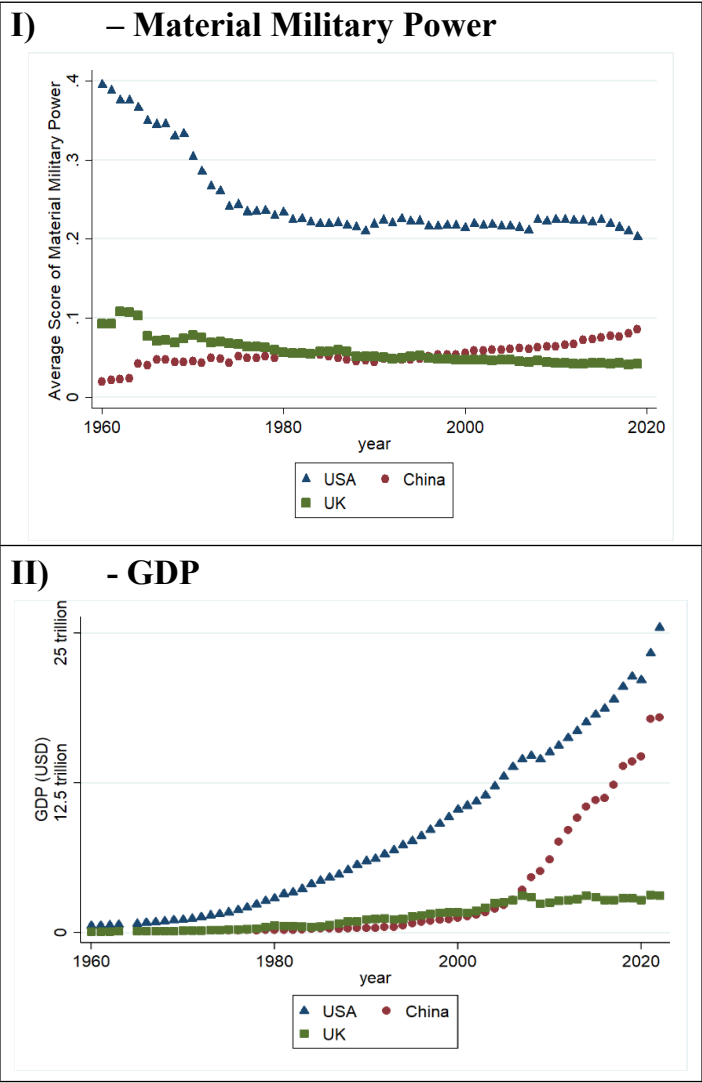
The study’s question is: Are the GCC member states satisfied on the international political hierarchy, and what does a transition to a Chinese-led global order mean for such satisfaction? The hypothesis is that successful transition to a Chinese-led global order will increase the extent of satisfaction for each of the GCC member states with the international political hierarchy.

Power Transition Theory

According to the World Bank’s databank, in 1982, the Chinese GDP was equivalent to less than 7% of the American one. Forty years later, the Chinese GDP became equivalent to a little more than 70% of the American GDP. The gap in material military power between the two countries is also on a diminishing trajectory (see Figure 1).⁽¹⁾

(1) For material military power, see dataset from Souva, 2022. Data on GDP is from the world bank data website <https://data.worldbank.org/>

Figure 1
Comparing Economic and Military Measures between the US & China, with the United Kingdom Included for Reference



Given the prospects of competition between the two powers, some international relations scholars have abandoned the “balancing” paradigm and its various reformulations due to its failure in producing a reliable framework for political analysis.⁽²⁾ Vasquez (1997), for example, assails the balancing paradigm on the grounds that it is pseudoscientific as opposed to being a reliable framework for international relations analysis. The most important critiques he offers include the non-falsifiability of the balancing paradigm, rendering it closer to a dogma rather than an academic theory. That is in addition to the contradictory hypothesis brought about by different emendations of realist theory, such as the classical, structural, and neoclassical theories. Scholars have thus employed Power Transition Theory given its progressiveness as a research program (Dicicco, 1999).⁽³⁾

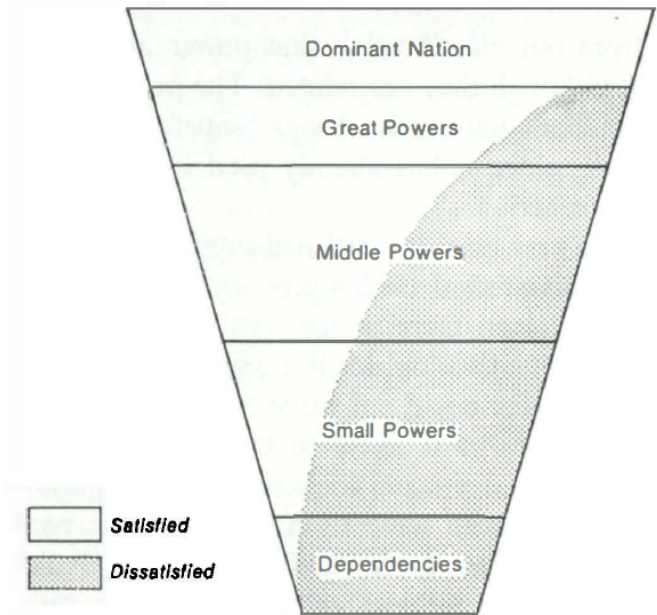
PTT rejects the assumption that the global order is an anarchic one, and that a “balance of power” is the mechanism enabling stability at an international level. Instead, as Organski (1968), points out after detailing the flaws of the balance of power paradigm, PTT posits that the global order is a hierarchical one that is divided between the satisfied and dissatisfied states (see Figure 2).

(2) See generally Vasquez, 1997.

(3) See also the works of Yang (2013), Kim (2015), and Ross (2020).

Figure 2

International Power Hierarchy (Organski, 1968)



Tammen et al. (2000) explain that states enter a “parity” phase when a challenger’s power indicators are estimated at 80% of the dominant state’s power level, and the parity phase ends when the challenger’s power indicators are greater than 120% of the formerly dominant state’s power level. During parity, the chances of conflict are only heightened if the challenger is emerging from the dissatisfied camp as happened when the Germans competed with the British for global domination prior to WWII. If, however, the challenger emerged from the satisfied camp, as the Americans did after British exhaustion during WWII, the transition from a dominant power to the challenger would have been a peaceful process.

The Theoretical Framework for Studying International Politics

Previous research on the GCC, vis-à-vis the international political order, has relied on balancing propositions, but not, to the best of my knowledge, the PTT paradigm. Ulrichsen (2010), for example, examines the implications of “increasing confidence in the international arena and greater awareness of [the GCC’s] pivotal position within the global rebalancing of economic and political power.” Telci (2021) asks if Qatar is “the new actor in the balance of power in the Gulf.” Al Sayed (2022) also examines GCC relations with Iran using balancing vs. hedging as a frame of reference.

Such research is predicated on the balancing paradigm that Waltz (1979) revived through his neorealism. Waltz’s (1979) neorealism describes the unit of analysis, that is, states, as “functionally undifferentiated” in an anarchic environment or “ordering principle.” This means that all states are equal in essence, with power being the one component that explains variation in international politics. The theory goes on to hold a powerful state cannot go unchecked by another state, as a “balance of power” is the precondition for “world stability and peace” (Waltz, 1979).

Scholars Buzan & Mathias (2010) have pointed out that Waltz is most likely confounding functional with stratifactory differentiation when it comes to the unit of analysis. The difference between functional and stratifactory differentiation is important, as the former refers to the subsystems of a larger organization, while the latter refers to rank in a hierarchy. In this case, Waltz assumes that states have similar subsystems (or functions); hence, he views anarchy among equal units. A former colonial metropolis is, therefore, assumed to possess the same organizational blueprint to administer territory that a postcolonial failed state would. Waltz also posits that

those same equal units possess different power capacities, which essentially necessitates the formation of some international hierarchy (as opposed to anarchy). Waltz then proceeds to hold that whenever a powerful state increases its power, another powerful state will emerge for some unexplained reason to “balance” against it. The hierarchy is thus supposed to have an anarchic and competitive characteristic among relatively powerful states.

On the functional side, Waltz’s assumption is indefensible especially when factoring in the political history of different states. As for the stratifactory dimension, Waltz’s proposition is logically inconsistent. Waltz’s student, Stephen Walt, demonstrates the problem with treating states as like-units by showing that Waltz’s theory does not explain Arab state behavior. He produces his “balance of threat” idea after emendations to the extant balancing proposition so to enable the explanation of Arab international politics. It later transpires, however, that his attempt to salvage the balancing paradigm will still leave students and scholars interested in the subject desperately trying to unpackage nuance in the same way they did with Waltz’s theory. Indeed, as Zagare (2000) explains, “Waltz’s nuanced reformulation of balance-of-power theory would not pass the test” of originality and logical consistency.⁽⁴⁾

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- (4) Healy (2017) has warned scholars about falling into one of three known nuance traps during the theory formulation stage. The first he calls nuance of the fine-grain: he describes this trap as “a rejection of theory masquerading as increased accuracy.” The second nuance trap is the expansion of a theoretical system to the point of closing it off from disconfirmation, effectively turning it into something unfalsifiable like religion. The last trap is the nuance of the connoisseur, and Healy describes it as a “species of self-congratulatory symbolic violence” where the sensitivity to nuance “is a manifestation of one’s distinctive ability to grasp and express the richness” of what is observable. Both Walt, Waltz, and all balancing proponents have fallen into the three traps at different levels.

Regarding the methodological issues with the balancing hypothesis, in the introduction of his book, Walt (1990) wrote:

[...] the Middle East provides a strong test of many familiar hypotheses. Because most propositions about alliance formation [...] have been derived from the history of the European great power system, it is especially appropriate to examine their utility in predicting the behavior of states that are neither European nor great powers. [...] if familiar hypotheses apply to this region as well, that is strong testimony to their explanatory power.

The problem here is that Walt recognizes how great-power centric the theory formulation stage is; yet, he is not rejecting the faulty premise when explaining relations with and among non-European states. Instead, he suggests that an extant regional theory with a focus on the Europe can be tested out in other parts of the world.

The theoretical mess, that is, the balancing paradigm, has, unfortunately, been proliferated as some intelligent and nuanced theory. Such logic can be understood as a faulty extension and repackaging of the colonial attitude that processed the world in terms of European (civilized) and non-European (barbaric) people. Other Western scholars like Huntington (1971), for example, more explicitly address this logic when they wrote about modernization theory.⁽⁵⁾ As such, it would be difficult to maintain that the balancing approach offers an objective framework for analysis at an international level given its essentially regional basis. The study of international politics is, therefore, better

(5) He writes, “[...] the advanced countries of the West, it was assumed, had ‘arrived’; their past was of interest not for what it would show about their future but for what it showed about the future of other societies which still struggled through the transition between tradition and modernity.” Writing during the decolonization period, Huntington (1971) mentions a general difficulty in distinguishing between Western and modern developments because there were no modern and non-western states with only Japan potentially fitting that description.

enabled with a true international (as opposed to regional or European) relations theory such as PTT; a paradigm shift towards PTT consequently becomes necessary for any objective analysis of IR.

The GCC States as European Protectorates

As protectorates, the territories were not in any danger of having their resources devoured or people enslaved.⁽⁶⁾ Local rulers also were able to count on British support so long as they abided by the protectorate agreement.⁽⁷⁾ With the discovery of oil, however, the colonial powers

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- (6) The GCC states were all, at some point, British protectorates between the mid-19th and early 20th centuries. Bahrain's Perpetual Truce of Peace and Friendship of 1861, the Trucial States agreements of 1892 with the present-day United Arab Emirates, the Anglo-Kuwait agreement of 1899, the Treaty of Peace, Friendship, and Navigation with Oman in 1891, the Anglo-Qatari treaty of 1916, and the Treaty of Darin with the Saudis in 1915 made the Gulf territories British protectorates. Albaharna (1968) explains that the role of the British Political Resident in the Gulf was "to maintain, through his Political Agents, close contact with the rulers and governments of the Shaikhdoms and safeguard their political and economic interest and the interests of the British government [...]." In the case of Kuwait, for example, the ruling authority was able to benefit from leasing to the British a portion of land in 1907 (at Bandar Shuwaikh) in exchange for 60,000 Indian Rupees per year (Albaharna.1968). The Saudi leadership was also empowered with British assistance to help the latter resist Ottoman influence over the Arabian Peninsula. After signing the 1915 treaty of Darin, the British provided Ibn Saud with 20,000 pounds sterling, 1000 guns, 200,000 units of ammunition, and a monthly stipend of 5,000 pounds sterling (McLoughlin, 1993). In Oman's case the viceroy of India, Curzon, suggests Oman's leadership was also financially supported by the British (Curzon 1892).
- (7) In 1920 when the Ikhwan attacked Kuwait, for example, the British sent warships and aircraft to help defend Kuwait (see Toth, 2005). While Saudi claims over Kuwaiti territory persisted, a settlement through British channels was reached in 1922. See the Uqair Protocol of 1922 between Kuwait and Sultanate of Nejd. In Bahrain's case, article 2 of the 1861 treaty has the local ruler agree to "[...]abstain[ing] from all maritime aggression," in exchange for British protection. See Vol 282 Head IV, Volume 11 (eleven) Bahrein and Wahabee Complications' [322r] (663/708), British Library: India Office Records and Private Papers, IOR/R/15/1/179, in Qatar Digital Library. When the Bahraini leadership abrogated the treaty by attacking the Qatari coast in 1867, destroying many of their boats, the British deposed of local leader and continued their dealings with the former leader's brother instead. A Collection of Treaties, Engagements, and Sanads Relating to India and Neighbouring Countries: Volume 10. Office of the Superintendent of Government Printing, India Foreign and Political Department. January 1 1892.

developed a newfound interest in the Arabian Peninsula. Local rulers agreed to a one-time concession to develop the oil sector in each of their territories. With Saudi Arabia for example, the first concession was in 1933 to Standard Oil of California (SOCAL). The concession provides the founder of the kingdom (Ibn Saud) with

An initial loan of £35,000 in gold and a second loan of £20,000 after 18 months, and a rental of £5,000 per year for the concession area, beginning in the second year. Then, if oil should be discovered in commercial quantities, SOCAL would provide a £50,000 loan in gold and a second loan of £50,000 a year later.⁽⁸⁾

In exchange, SOCAL receives exploration rights of 360,000 square miles of Saudi land for 60 years (that is until 1993). The concession was signed in 1933, and oil was discovered in commercial quantities five years after the signing.⁽⁹⁾

While Saudi Arabia succeeded in having SOCAL establish the oil extraction capacity, other territories in the areas had different foreign companies gain concessions for the development. In Kuwait for example, the Gulf Oil Corporation (presently Chevron) gained the first concession in 1934. In the same year, the Anglo-Persian oil company (presently British Petroleum) signed the first concession with Qatar. Each of the territories had awarded concessions to different international oil extraction companies to develop their oil

(8) Grutz, 1999.

(9) Ibn Saud, however, engaged in obsolescence bargaining, and changes to the original concession kept occurring. In 1950 Ibn Saud threatened to nationalize the oil fields, which prompted Arabian American Oil Company (ARAMCO – previously SOCAL) to agree to a 50/50 profit sharing agreement. Changes continued until 1988, when the kingdom bought out ARAMCO. Similar obsolescence bargaining scenarios occurred in many states across the GCC region.

sector.⁽¹⁰⁾ The oil reserves these companies discovered turned out to be the largest in the world. With their formal independence during the decolonization period in the previous century, the wealth gained by the GCC states propelled them towards stability at a faster pace than other territories with weaker economies.

However, the GCC economies remained largely dependent on the export of hydrocarbon resources. Of the top ten largest sovereign wealth funds (SWF) in the world, four belong to the GCC states given their natural resources. The combined wealth of the four SWFs amounts to around 3 trillion USD, and this is while discounting the GCC SWFs that have not made it in the top ten rank.⁽¹¹⁾ SWFs can cushion the impact of deficit spending and can help with the state's ability in providing welfare services for their residents.

Functionality of the GCC States

During the decolonization period after the Second World War, the colonial powers granted the overseas territories around the world independence irrespective of whether they were “able to stand by themselves under the strenuous conditions of the modern world.”⁽¹²⁾ This resulted in the emergence of states that were weaker and less effective at governing when compared to the colonial metropolises. Fawcett (2017) for example explains,

(10) A few decades after signing of the concessions, some of the GCC territories were able to help form the Organization for Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) cartel with other major oil exporters around the world. Through this organization, the oil exporters developed a stronger voice for their dealings with the former colonial powers, and their oil companies known as the Seven Sisters. These are now Chevron, BP, and Exxon.

(11) See <https://www.swfinstitute.org/fund-rankings/sovereign-wealth-fund>

(12) The Covenant of the League of Nations, (Adopted 29 April, 1919, entered into force 10 January, 1920) Paris. Art 22.

In [the post-colonial ‘quasi state’] the legal façade of sovereignty, of formal independence, persists and is actively promoted by the international community and local elites, while other recognizable attributes of sovereignty [...] are weak or non-existent, giving rise to the claims of fictional sovereignty or quasi-state status.

The GCC states, however, proved to be an exception to the postcolonial trend given their hydrocarbon resources that enabled greater stability and effective administrative capacity when compared to the postcolonial average.

Table 1
Comparing FSI between GCC and G7 for the Year 2023

Country	Total	S1: Demographic Pressures	S2: Refugees and IDPs	C3: Group Grievance	E3: Brain Drain	E2: Economic Inequality	E1: Economy	P1: State Legitimacy	P2: Public Services	P3: Human Rights	C1: Security Apparatus	C2: Factionalized Elites	X1: External Intervention
GCC													
KSA	65.3	4.3	3.2	9.5	2.7	4.8	3.6	7.6	3.8	8.1	5.1	8.5	4.1
Bahrain	65.1	4.1	1.4	9.5	3.0	5.7	3.6	8.0	2.9	8.7	5.3	7.6	5.3
Kuwait	51.2	4.4	2.0	4.7	2.5	4.8	2.6	7.2	2.7	7.4	2.4	7.5	3.0
Oman	48.7	4.2	1.6	2.9	1.4	4.1	4.4	7.2	3.1	6.7	2.4	6.6	4.1
Qatar	40.5	3.0	1.3	2.8	1.1	5.3	1.1	6.4	2.3	5.5	1.0	5.0	5.7
UAE	37	3.6	1.4	2.2	2.1	3.1	1.6	6.4	2.1	6.8	2.3	3.6	1.8
Mean	51.3	3.9	1.8	5.3	2.1	4.6	2.8	7.1	2.8	7.2	3.1	6.5	4.0

Cont. Table 1

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G7													
Canada	18.9	1.2	2.0	2.0	0.7	2.5	1.4	0.4	1.7	1.9	2.2	2.5	0.4
Germany	24.6	2.3	4.5	3.4	1.9	2.7	1.5	0.7	1.5	0.7	2.3	2.3	0.8
France	28.8	3.1	2.4	6.4	2.0	2.9	3.4	1.0	1.2	1.1	2.9	1.9	0.5
Japan	30.5	5.9	2.6	1.9	2.7	2.9	3.5	0.3	1.8	2.8	1.5	2.6	2.0
UK	41.9	3.4	2.4	6.1	2.4	3.7	5.0	3.6	2.6	2.7	2.9	5.8	1.3
Italy	42.6	4.6	4.3	3.7	2.5	2.9	5.4	2.0	3.9	0.7	4.5	4.9	3.2
USA	45.3	5.2	2.2	6.5	1.7	4.0	2.1	4.2	2.2	4.2	4.7	7.3	1.0
Mean	33.2	3.7	2.9	4.3	2.0	3.1	3.2	1.7	2.1	2.0	3.0	3.9	1.3

Despite the economic security in the GCC, a glimpse at the fragile states index (FSI) data⁽¹³⁾ in table 1 reveals that the GCC states are functionally unequal to some former colonial metropolises in terms of the political dimension. The FSI scores are formed through a triangulation method involving content, qualitative, and quantitative

(13) "The Fragile States Index Data." Fund For Peace. 2023. Accessed October 30, 2023. <https://fragilestatesindex.org/analytics/>

analysis.⁽¹⁴⁾ The FSI indicators examine the levels of social cohesion (C1 to C3), economic factors (E1 & E2), political stability and legitimacy (P1 to P3), demographic pressures (S1 & S2), and the extent of external intervention (X1). The scores for each indicator would range from 0 to 10 with greater numbers indicating a negative outlook. Table 1 compares the FSI scores between the G7 states and GCC states for the year 2023.

The GCC scores are not bad in terms of most indicators and, in some instances, are outperforming the G7 averages. However, a clear exception is made to the political indicators in terms of political legitimacy (P1) and human rights (P3). While the FSI methodology for calculating legitimacy is not limited to the strength of democratic practice, there exists a clear relationship between the two measures (see appendix 1).⁽¹⁵⁾ The best P1 score among the GCC is a tie between the UAE and Qatar at 6.4/10. The worst P1 score among the G7 is that of the USA at 4.2/10.

Interconnected with democratic practice is the issue of human rights. Human rights policy is perhaps the easiest way for the GCC to improve its FSI scores. Reforming laws that discriminate based on sex, in addition to administrative rules with regards to migrant rights, and repealing laws that limit different freedoms would improve the GCC's overall political indicators.⁽¹⁶⁾

(14) For more on how data was formulated, see methodology: <https://fragilestatesindex.org/methodology/>

(15) Almuslem and Shuaibi (2024) point out, in examining country risk for investors, that different measures of democracy will have different impact on the postcolonial category of states. Their conclusions have important implications for the notion of development via democratization efforts for the GCC states.

(16) In the case of Kuwait, for example, human rights activists have repeatedly called for repealing articles 182 and 153 from the penal code, in addition to enabling migrants access to legal assistance to challenge a decision on administrative deportation. More generally, none of the GCC states allows for political party formation.

The FSI data indicates that neorealism's core assumption of functional equality among states is blind to the simple fact that functional equality cannot be assumed without faulty reductionism. In terms of functions, different states will have different capacities; that is, states are functionally differentiated. PTT, of course, recognizes the functional spectrum and that the international system is hierarchically organized as opposed to being an anarchic one among "like units." To help determine the position of the GCC states on this hierarchy, we can turn to economic indicators to show that, despite their oil resources, the GCC member states, even when clustered together with 16 other Arab states, are unable to surpass Nazis⁽¹⁷⁾ like the current German political establishment in terms of economic power (see Figure 3). Given such an indicator, we can confidently place the GCC states as small or medium powers on Organski's power hierarchy.

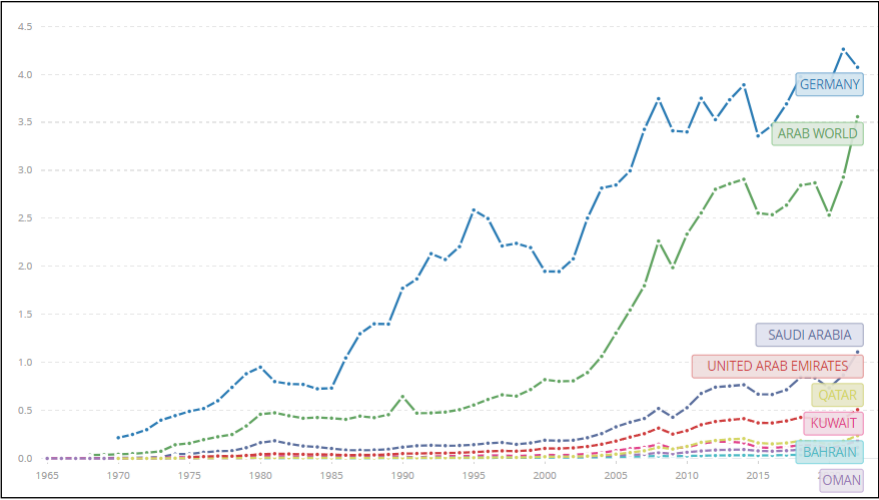
What remains to be determined, however, is whether the GCC member states are to be categorized as satisfied or dissatisfied. The religious, linguistic, ethnic, and political characteristics of the GCC clearly set it apart from the dominant power's characteristics. The main dimension enabling the GCC's cooperative relations with the dominant power and the rest of the satisfied western world is the natural resources the GCC states are exporting (oil), along with the GCC investments through their sovereign wealth funds. As a result, we can expect the GCC member states to be relatively dissatisfied

(17) I mean Nazis in spirit. Many analysts assume that the German political leadership has experienced a moral awakening after their defeat in WWII. But a mere gloss at their attitude towards the settler colonial project in Palestine (which violates humanitarian law art. 49(6) of Geneva IV for e.g.), and the Israeli war crimes through their bombardment of schools and camps near the end of 2023, shows that the German leadership through Olaf Scholz was opposed to a ceasefire. European leaders, in contrast, gasped at the deaths of Ukrainians which were a mere fraction of the Palestinian case. See: https://www.timesofisrael.com/liveblog_entry/german-chancellor-opposed-to-immediate-ceasefire-in-gaza/.

when compared with, for example, European states given that the latter group would at least share the religious (Christian) and ethnic (White) background with the dominant power.

Figure 3

GDP (Trillions of USD)



Source: <https://data.worldbank.org/>

Satisfaction of GCC States vis-à-vis China and USA

To verify the extent to which the GCC are either satisfied or dissatisfied on the global power hierarchy, I use the Ideal Point Difference (IPD) score that was developed by Bailey et al. (2017) to estimate voting similarity at the UN general assembly from 1946 until 2021. Their dataset creates an “ideal point” using an item response theory statistical model based on voting behavior for each member state of the UN for each year. I can, therefore, use the distance between two ideal points for each country to indicate the extent to which the two states are likeminded or opposed. I also include

economic controls from the World Bank databank, in addition to the Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem) polyarchy score as an indicator of the extent to which each state is democratic. Table 2 presents the summary statistics.

Table 2

Summary Statistics

Variable	Obs	Mean	Std. Dev.	Min	Max
IPD distance	1,751,766	-1.02604	0.841351	-5.73192	0
GDP per capita	1,538,225	9235.461	18410.02	0	234,317.1
GDP growth (%)	1,491,559	3.608179	6.161671	-64.0471	149.973
Log GDP	1,540,654	23.34235	2.44208	16.45205	30.86824
Population	1,656,514	3.28E+07	1.22E+08	9,609	1,420,000,000
Polyarchy score	1,584,892	0.448681	0.284359	0.008	0.924

The ordinary least squares regression in Table 3 shows statistically significant results for all regional groups. In the case of the GCC regional category, along with the African and Latin American groups, the coefficient shows a greater IPD distance score with the US when compared to China. The opposite is the case for the Western European category, where the coefficient indicates a smaller IPD difference with the US when compared to China. When visualizing the results, we can examine the IPD for each of the six GCC member states as well after running a separate regression test (see appendix 2).⁽¹⁸⁾ At the individual state level, the results are generally in line with the broader GCC trend with some minor variability. The GCC coefficient in table 3 indicates that the GCC states will feel better satisfied with a Chinese-led global order than a US led one given the increased similarity the GCC have with China in terms of voting behavior.

(18) For the year-by-year visualization of the IPD distance dyads, see appendices 5 & 6.

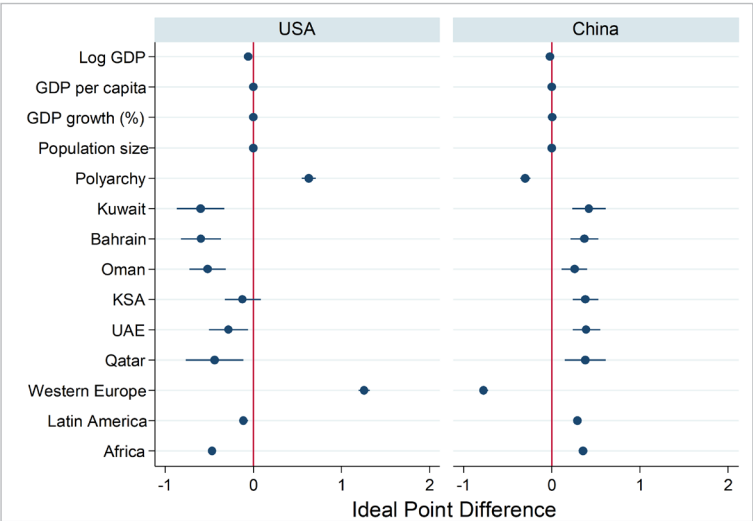
Table 3*OLS Regression*

VARIABLES	Ideal Point Difference	
	(1) with the US	(2) with China
Log GDP	-0.0578*** (0.00501)	-0.0232*** (0.00377)
GDP Per Capita	-2.43e-06*** (8.22e-07)	-8.13e-08 (6.00e-07)
GDP Growth (%)	0.000697 (0.00135)	0.00143 (0.000980)
Population	-1.90e-10*** (7.18e-11)	6.64e-10*** (7.23e-11)
Polyarchy	0.613*** (0.0407)	-0.305*** (0.0302)
GCC	-0.413*** (0.0545)	0.355*** (0.0388)
Western Europe	1.263*** (0.0326)	-0.777*** (0.0251)
Latin America	-0.107*** (0.0251)	0.291*** (0.0186)
Africa	-0.464*** (0.0224)	0.352*** (0.0163)
Constant	-1.627*** (0.115)	-0.146* (0.0873)
Observations	7,914	7,211
R-squared	0.414	0.452

Note. Standard errors in parentheses *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1.

While some of the economic controls are statistically significant, it is important to highlight that their substantive effect is negligible as visualized when plotting the coefficients in Figure 4. This is also true when controlling for population size. The polyarchy control, on the other hand, indicates that consolidating democracy can substantively reduce the IPD difference with the United States, but not with China given its undemocratic political system.⁽¹⁹⁾ Figure 4 shows that the polyarchy (democracy) scores will contribute to improving the dyadic voting behavior between the United States and some given states, while increases in the same measure will worsen the proximity with China. For the individual GCC states, Figure 4 shows that all states have more in common with China than they have with the United States, thus indicating greater satisfaction with successful power transition.

Figure 4
Plotting Coefficients



(19) The substantive effect of greater democracy scores on reducing the IPD difference with the United States is in line with the literature on the democratic peace.

These results indicate that the GCC states will emerge as relatively satisfied on the international political hierarchy in the event of a successful and peaceful transition in power from a US-led global order to a Chinese-led one. Current trends indicate declining trade between the US and the GCC, while trade between the regional group and China is on the increase (Webster and Pelayo, 2023). Coupled with the rejection of White supremacy, which enabled a double standard with humanitarian crises (Western responses to Palestine vs. Ukraine for example), it would be interesting to see how the political agendas of the individual GCC member states would be better enabled with a new global leadership that has similar voting inclinations at the UNGA.

Concluding Remarks

This study explores and compares the utility of the balancing vs. PTT paradigm in studying the international relations of the GCC states. After pointing out that the balancing paradigm is a degenerative one, born out of a Western European bias, the study utilizes PTT as the more scientifically robust framework for political analysis. The results show that the interests of the GCC states are not fully expanded given the colonial (White supremacist) inclinations of the Western political leadership. With a Chinese-led global order, however, the dyadic analysis suggests that the GCC interests will be better secured. The unscientific and unempirical basis to the balancing propositions has important implications for students of international relations in the Western World as well. If students and their instructors aim to pursue cogent analysis for policy recommendation purposes, they will be able to better pursue their objectives without the balancing hypotheses with its logical inconsistencies. Without the theoretical mess, students from both the GCC area and in other parts of the world will be able to acknowledge that great powers can go unchallenged

with no force to balance against it. Such acknowledgment can save future policy makers the embarrassment of committing to a certain path without fully understanding the devastating consequences.

Given China's success in mitigating the power gap between itself and the United States, we can expect a Chinese-led global order soon. While power transition from an unsatisfied challenger is usually accomplished through war, this will be the first time in history that the challenger and status quo powers both possess nuclear weapons. Given the destructive capacity of both states, we can hope that the effect of nuclear deterrence will prevent any conflict between the two rival sides as they compete for the position that is at the top of the hierarchy. Future research can delve deeper to explore the specific areas in which the GCC interests are best enabled with the two competing global powers.

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Appendices

Appendix 1

OLS regression examining the Economist Intelligence Unit democracy data, with the World Bank Rule of Law measure, with the FSI State Legitimacy data

State Legitimacy	
EIU Democ score	-0.498*** (0.0697)
Rule of Law	-1.126*** (0.245)
Constants	8.079*** (1.698)
N	102
adj. R-sq	0.864
Standard errors in parentheses	
* p<0.10, ** p<0.05, *** p<0.01	

Appendix 2

Robust Regression

VARIABLES	Ideal Point Difference	
	with the USA	with China
Log GDP	-0.0603*** (0.00504)	-0.0236*** (0.00380)
GDP Per Capita	-2.32e-06*** (8.52e-07)	-2.35e-07 (6.24e-07)
GDP Growth (annual %)	0.000654 (0.00135)	0.00144 (0.000981)
Population	-1.77e-10** (7.18e-11)	6.65e-10*** (7.24e-11)
Polyarchy	0.628*** (0.0408)	-0.304*** (0.0304)
- Kuwait	-0.599*** (0.138)	0.423*** (0.0968)
- Bahrain	-0.591*** (0.116)	0.368*** (0.0819)
- Oman	-0.518*** (0.105)	0.256*** (0.0738)
- KSA	-0.120 (0.104)	0.381*** (0.0748)
- UAE	-0.283** (0.113)	0.391*** (0.0801)
- Qatar	-0.439*** (0.167)	0.380*** (0.118)

Cont. Appendix 2

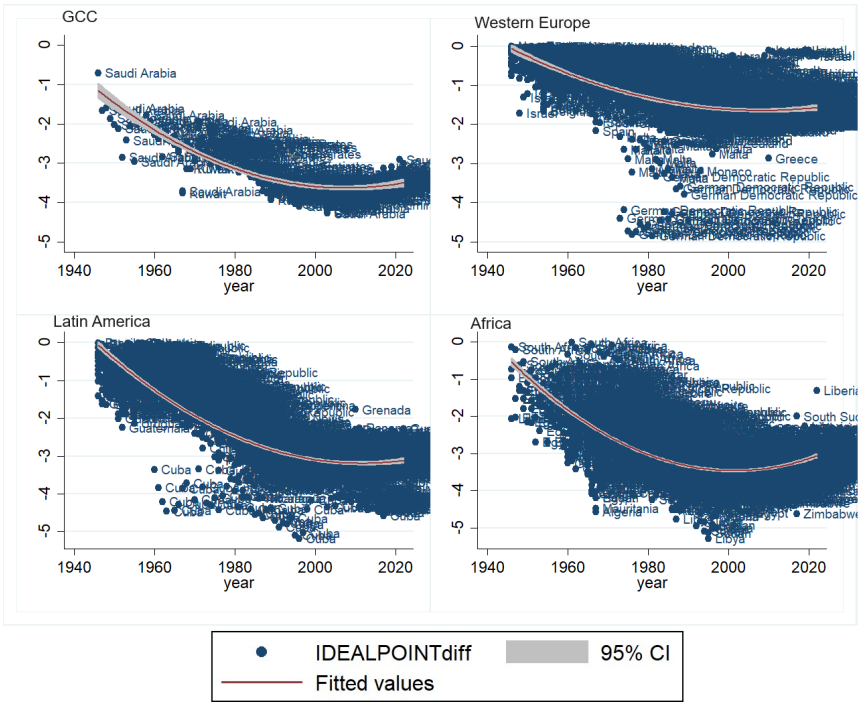
Robust Regression

VARIABLES	Ideal Point Difference	
	with the USA	with China
Western Europe	1.260*** (0.0328)	-0.772*** (0.0253)
Latin America & Caribbean	-0.109*** (0.0251)	0.290*** (0.0186)
Africa	-0.466*** (0.0224)	0.351*** (0.0163)
Constant	-1.574*** (0.116)	-0.138 (0.0879)
Observations	7,914	7,211
R-squared	0.415	0.452

Note. Standard errors in parentheses, *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1.

Appendix 3

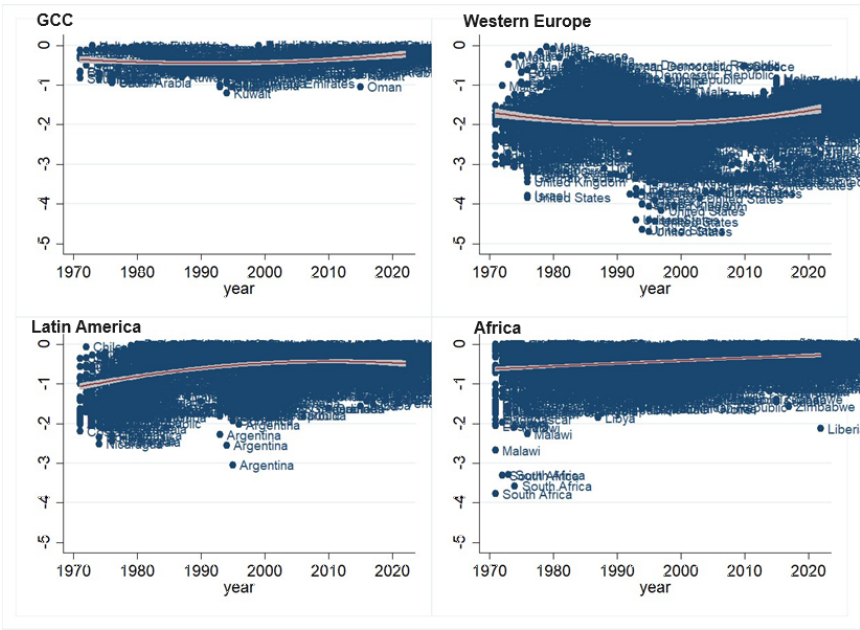
USA and Regional IPD Distance Dyads



Note. Y-axis shows IPD distance dyad between 4 regional groups and the USA. The plots show the average scores dropping below the -3 mark for all groups except the Western European ones.

Appendix 4

China and Regional IPD Distance Dyads



Note. Y-axis shows IPD distance dyad between 4 regional groups and China. The plots show the average scores remaining above the -1 mark for all groups except the Western European ones.

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