INTRODUCTION
Unipolarity, State Behavior, and Systemic Consequences

By G. JOHN IKENBERRY, MICHAEL MASTANDUNO, and WILLIAM C. WOHLFORTH

AMERICAN primacy in the global distribution of capabilities is one of the most salient features of the contemporary international system. The end of the cold war did not return the world to multipolarity. Instead the United States—already materially preeminent—became more so. We currently live in a one superpower world, a circumstance unprecedented in the modern era. No other great power has enjoyed such advantages in material capabilities—military, economic, technological, and geographical. Other states rival the United States in one area or another, but the multifaceted character of American power places it in a category of its own. The sudden collapse of the Soviet Union and its empire, slower economic growth in Japan and Western Europe during the 1990s, and America's outsized military spending have all enhanced these disparities. While in most historical eras the distribution of capabilities among major states has tended to be multipolar or bipolar—with several major states of roughly equal size and capability—the United States emerged from the 1990s as an unrivaled global power. It became a "unipolar" state.

Not surprisingly, this extraordinary imbalance has triggered global debate. Governments, including that of the United States, are struggling to respond to this peculiar international environment. What is the character of domination in a unipolar distribution? If world politics is always a mixture of force and consent, does unipolarity remove restraints and alter the mix in favor of force? Is a unipolar world likely to be built around rules and institutions or based more on the unilateral exercise of unipolar power? To what extent and in what ways can a unipolar state translate its formidable capabilities into meaningful political influence? These questions have been asked in the context of a global debate over the projection of power by the Bush administration. To

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what extent has America's foreign policy after 2001 been a reflection simply of the idiosyncratic and provocative strategies of the Bush administration itself, rather than a manifestation of the deeper structural features of the global system of power? These concerns over how a unipolar world operates—and how the unipolar state itself behaves—are the not-so-hidden subtext of world politics at the turn of the twenty-first century.

Classic questions of international relations theory are at stake in the debate over unipolarity. The most obvious question concerns balance of power theory, which predicts that states will respond to concentrated power by counterbalancing.[1] Some are puzzled by what they see as the absence of a balancing response to American unipolar power, whereas others argue, to the contrary, that incipient or specific types of balancing behavior are in fact occurring.[2] A related debate concerns power transition theory, which focuses on the specific forms of conflict that are generated between rising and declining hegemonic states.[3] The abrupt shift in the distribution of capabilities that followed the end of the cold war and the rise of China after the cold war raise questions about the character of conflict between dominant and challenger states as they move along trajectories of rise and decline. A unipolar distribution also raises issues that scholars grappled with during the cold war, namely, about the structure and dynamics of different types of polar systems. Here the questions concern the ways in which the features of polarity affect the durability and war proneness of the state system.[4] Likewise, scholarly debates about threat perception, the impact of regime characteristics on foreign policy, the propensity of dominant states to provide

[1] See Jack S. Levy, "Balances and Balancing: Concepts, Propositions and Research Design," in John A. Vasquez and Colin Elman, eds., *Realism and the Balancing of Power: A New Debate* (Saddle River, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 2003).

[2] G. John Ikenberry, ed., *America Unrivaled: The Future of the Balance of Power* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2002); and T. V. Paul, James J. Wirtz, and Michel Fortman, eds., *Balance of Power: Theory and Practice in the 21st Century* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2004). On incipient balancing, see Kenneth Waltz, "Structural Realism after the Cold War," *International Security* 24 (Summer 2000); Christopher Layne, "The Unipolar Illusion: Why New Great Powers Will Arise," *International Security* 17 (Spring 1993); Robert Pape, "Soft Balancing against the United States," *International Security* 30 (Summer 2005); and Keir Lieber and Gerard Alexander, "Waiting for Balancing: Why the World Is Not Pushing Back," *International Security* 30 (Summer 2005).

[3] Robert Gilpin, *War and Change in World Politics* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1981); A. F. K. Organski, *World Politics* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1958); and A. F. K. Organski and Jacek Kugler, *The War Ledger* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980).

[4] See Karl W. Deutsch and J. David Singer, "Multipolar Power Systems and International Stability," *World Politics* 16 (April 1964); Richard N. Rosecrance, "Bipolarity, Mutilpolarity and the Future," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 10 (September 1966); Kenneth N. Waltz, "The Stability of a Bipolar World," *Daedalus* 93 (Summer 1964); and Morton A. Kaplan, *System and Process in International Politics* (New York: John Wiley, 1957).

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collective goods, and the ability of a state to translate preponderant capabilities into effective influence are also at stake in the debate over unipolarity.[5]

This special issue is a systematic inquiry into the logic and dynamics of unipolarity. Its starting point is the distinctive distribution of capabilities among states in the contemporary global system. The central question driving our inquiry is straightforward: to what extent—and how—does this distribution of capabilities matter for patterns of international politics?

In their initial efforts to make sense of an American-dominated international system, scholars and observers have invoked a wide array of grand terms such as empire, hegemony, unipolarity, imperium, and "uni-multipolarity."[6] Scholars are searching for a conceptual language to depict and place in historical and comparative perspective the distinctive political formation that has emerged after the cold war. But this multiplicity of terms obscures more than it reveals. In this project unipolarity refers narrowly to the underlying material distribution of capabilities and not to the political patterns or relationships depicted by terms such as empire, imperium, and hegemony. What makes the global system unipolar is the distinctive distribution of material resources. An important research question is whether and in what ways this particular distribution of capabilities affects patterns of international politics to create outcomes that are different from what one might expect under conditions of bipolarity or multipolarity.

Setting up the inquiry in this manner requires a basic distinction between power as material resources and power as influence. Power resources refer to the distribution of material capabilities among states. The global system today—seen in comparative historical perspective—has concentrated power capabilities unprecedented in the modern era. But this observation should not prejudge questions about the extent and character of influence or about the logic of political relationships within

[5] For example, Stephen Walt, *Taming American Power: The Global Responses to American Primacy* (New York: Norton, 2006); Robert Jervis, "The Remaking of a Unipolar World," *Washington Quarterly* 29 (Summer 2006).

[6] A huge literature has emerged—or returned—depicting America as an empire. See, for example, Charles Maier, *Among Empires: American Ascendancy and Its Predecessors* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006); Niall Ferguson, *Colossus: The Price of America's Empire* (New York: Penguin, 2004); Chalmers Johnson, *The Sorrows of Empire: Militarism, Secrecy, and the End of the Republic* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2004). On hegemony, see G. John Ikenberry, *After Victory: Institutions, Strategic Restraint, and the Rebuilding of Order after Major War* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001). On imperium, see Peter Katzenstein, *A World of Regions: Asia and Europe in the American Imperium* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2006). On uni-multipolarity, see Samuel Huntington, "The Lonely Superpower," *Foreign Affairs* 78 (March–April 1999).

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the global system. Nor should this observation prejudge the question of whether the global system is coercive, consensual, legitimate, or illegitimate. Describing the system as unipolar leaves unanswered the Weberian questions about the logic and character of the global political system that is organized around unipolarity.[7]

In the remainder of this introduction, we develop a framework for analyzing unipolarity and highlight the arguments of the articles that follow. The individual contributions develop hypotheses and explore the impact of unipolarity on the behavior of the dominant state, on the reactions of other states, and on the properties of the international system. Collectively, we find that unipolarity does have a profound impact on international politics. 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 and revisionist states. A unipolar distribution of capabilities will eventually give way to other distributions. The argument advanced here is not that unipolarity will last indefinitely but rather that as long as it does last, it will constitute a critical factor in understanding patterns of foreign policy and world politics.

Definition and Measurement

Scholars use the term unipolarity to distinguish a system with one extremely capable state from systems with two or more great powers (bi-, tri-, and multipolarity). Unipolarity should also be distinguished from hegemony and empire, terms that refer to political relationships and degrees of influence rather than to distributions of material capability. The adjective unipolar describes something that has a single pole. International relations scholars have long defined a pole as a state that (1) commands an especially large share of the resources or capabilities states can use to achieve their ends and that (2) excels in all the component elements of state capability, conventionally defined as size of population and territory, resource endowment, economic capacity, military might, and organizational-institutional "competence."[8]

A unipolar system is one whose structure is defined by the fact of only one state meeting these criteria. The underpinnings of the concept

[7] In this way, we are following a basic distinction made in the power theory literature. See, in particular, David A. Baldwin, *Paradoxes of Power* (New York: Basil Blackwell, 1989).

[8] Kenneth Waltz, *Theory of International Politics* (Reading, Mass.: Addison-Wesley 1979), 131.

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are familiar to international relations scholars. They flow from the massive literature on polarity, especially from Waltz's seminal treatment. The core contention is that polarity structures the horizon of states' probable actions and reactions, narrowing the range of choice and providing subtle incentives and disincentives for certain types of behavior. An appreciation of polarity yields important insights about patterns of behavior in international politics over the long term. Even for those scholars most persuaded of its analytical utility, polarity is at best a necessary part of an explanation rather than a sufficient explanation.[9] The distribution of capabilities may be a place to begin an explanation, but it is rarely enough to complete one.

Polarity is a theoretical construct; real international systems only approximate various polar ideal types. The polarity concept implies a threshold value of the distribution of capabilities. The more unambiguously the poles in a real international system pass the threshold, the more confident analysts can be that the properties attributed to a given system structure in theory will obtain in practice. The more unambiguously the capabilities of the great powers in a multipolar system clearly stand apart from all other states and are comparable to each other, the more relevant are the insights from the theoretical literature on multipolarity. Waltz often discussed the logic of a bipolar system as if it were a two-actor system. The more dominant the superpowers were in reality, the more confidence analysts could have that those logical deductions actually applied. In reality, the cold war international system was never "perfectly" bipolar. Analysts used to speak of loose versus tight bipolarity and debated whether the Soviet Union had the full complement of capabilities to measure up as a pole.

How do we know whether or to what degree an international system has passed the unipolar threshold? Using the conventional definition of a pole, an international system can be said to be unipolar if it contains one state whose overall share of capabilities places it unambiguously in a class by itself compared to all other states. This reflects the fact that poles are defined not on an absolute scale but relative to each other and to other states. In addition, preponderance must characterize all the relevant categories of state capabilities.[10] To determine polarity, one has to examine the distribution of capabilities and identify the states

[9] For a comprehensive critical review of the polarity literature, see Barry Buzan, *The United States and the Great Powers: World Politics in the Twenty-first Century* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2004).

[10] Wohlforth, "The Stability of a Unipolar World," *International Security* 21 (Summer 1999); idem, "U.S. Strategy in a Unipolar World," in Ikenberry (fn. 2); Stephen G. Brooks and William Wohlforth, *World Out of Balance: International Relations and the Challenge of American Primacy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008).

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whose shares of overall resources obviously place them into their own class.

There will doubtless be times in which polarity cannot be determined, but now does not appear to be one of them. Scholars largely agree that there were four or more states that qualified as poles before 1945; that by 1950 or so only two measured up; and that by the 1990s one of these two poles was gone. They largely agree, further, that no other power—not Japan, China, India, or Russia, not any European country and not the EU—has increased its overall portfolio of capabilities sufficiently to transform its standing.[11] This leaves a single pole.

There is widespread agreement, moreover, that any plausible index aggregating the relevant dimensions of state capabilities would place the United States in a separate class by a large margin.[12] The most widely used measures of capability are GDP and military spending. As of 2006 the United States accounted for roughly one-quarter of global GDP and nearly 50 percent of GDP among the conventionally defined great powers (see Table 1). This surpasses the relative economic size of any leading state in modern history, with the sole exception of the United States itself in the early cold war years, when World War II had temporarily depressed every other major economy. By virtue of the size and wealth of the United States economy, its massive military capabilities represented only about 4 percent of its GDP in 2006 (Table 2), compared with the nearly 10 percent it averaged over the peak years of the cold war—1950–70—as well as with the burdens borne by most of the major powers of the past.[13]

The United States now likely spends more on defense than the rest of the world combined (Table 2). Military research and development (R&D) may best capture the scale of the long-term investments that

[11] Some scholars argue that bipolarity or multipolarity might characterize international politics in certain regional settings. See, for example, Robert Ross, "The Geography of the Peace: East Asia in the Twenty-first Century," *International Security* 23 (Spring 1999); and Andrew Moravcsik, "The Quiet Superpower," *Newsweek*, June 17 2002.

[12] See, e.g., Ethan B. Kapstein, "Does Unipolarity Have A Future?" in Kapstein and Michael Mastanduno, eds., *Unipolar Politics: Realism and State Strategies after the Cold War* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999); Birthe Hansen, *Unipolarity and the Middle East* (New York: St. Martin's, 2000); Wohlforth (fn. 10, 1999, 2002); Brooks and Wohlforth (fn. 10); William E. Odom and Robert Dujarric, *America's Inadvertent Empire* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004); and Arvind Virmani, "Global Power from the 18th to the 21st Century: Power Potential (VIP2), Strategic Assets and Actual Power (VIP)," Working Paper no. 175 (New Delhi: Indian Council for Research on International Economic Relations, 2005). The most comprehensive contrarian view is Michael Mann, whose main arguments are that the United States is weaker economically that it seems (a claim mainly about the future) and that U.S. military capability is comparatively ineffective at achieving favorable outcomes (a claim about utility); Mann, *Incoherent Empire* (London: Verso, 2003)

[13] Calculated from *Budget of the United States Government Fiscal Year 2005: Historical Tables* (Washington, D.C.: United States Government Printing Office, 2005).

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TABLE 1
ECONOMIC INDICATORS FOR THE MAJOR POWERS[a]
(2006)

	GDP Current Prices ($ Billion)	*% Great Power GDP, Current Prices*	*% World GDP, Current Prices*	*% World GDP, PPP*	*GDP per Capita, Current Prices*	*Public Debt (% GDP)*	*Productivity ($ GDP per Hour Worked)*
United States	13,245	46.1	27.5	22.5	44,190	64.7	48.3
China	2,630	9.2	5.5	9.7	2,001	22.1	n.a.
Japan	4,367	15.2	9.1	7.4	34,188	176.2	34.4
Germany	2,897	10.1	6	4.6	35,204	66.8	44
Russia	979	3.4	2	3.1	6,856	8	n.a.
France	2,232	7.8	4.6	3.4	35,404	64.7	49
Britain	2,374	8.3	4.9	3.5	39,213	42.2	40.1

SOURCES: *International Monetary Fund, World Economic Outlook Database, April 2007,* at http://www,imf.org/external/pubs/ft/weo/2007/01/data/index.aspx (accessed November 7, 2007); World Bank, *2005 International Comparison Program, Preliminary Results,* at http://siteresources.worldbank.org/ICPINT/Resources/ICPreportprelim.pdf (accessed December 12, 2007); Central Intelligence Agency, *CIA World Factbook, at* https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/ (accessed November 8, 2007); Organization for Economic Development and Cooperation, *OECD Employment Outlook 2007, Statistical Annex,* at http://www.oecd.org/document/26/0,3343,en_2649_33927_38551002_1_1_1_1,00.html (accessed November 8, 2007); Organization for Economic Development and Cooperation, *OECD Compendium of Productivity Indicators 2006.*

[a] % World GDP, PPP is World Bank estimate for 2005; differences between PPP and market exchange rate measures are discussed in Brooks and Wohlforth (fn. 10), chap. 2. Data for United States public debt are from 2005. Productivity estimates are from 2005.

TABLE 2
DEFENSE EXPENDITURES FOR THE MAJOR POWERS[a]
(2006)

	Defense Expenditures ($ Billion)	*% Great Power Defense Expenditures*	*% World Defense Expenditures*	*Defense Expenditures % of GDP*	*Defense R&D Expenditures ($ Billion)*
United States	528.6	65.6	46	4.1	75.5
China	49.5	6.1	4	2	n.a.
Japan	43.9	5.4	4	1	1.1
Germany	36.9	4.6	3	1.4	1.1
Russia	34.7	4.3	3	4.1	n.a.
France	53	6.6	5	2.5	3.9
Britain	59.2	7.3	5	2.7	4.4

SOURCES: Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, "The 15 Major Spending Countries in 2006," at http://www.sipri.org/contents/milap/milex/mex_data_index.html (accessed November 8, 2007); Stockholm International Peace Research Institute Military Expenditures Database, at http://www.sipri.org/contents/milap/milex/mex_database1.html (accessed November 8, 2007); Organization for Economic Development and Cooperation, *OECD Main Science and Technology Indicators* 2006, no. 2 (Paris: OECD, 2006), 49.

[a] Defense expenditures as % GDP are 2005 estimates; R&D expenditures are for 2004.

now give the United States its dramatic qualitative edge over other states. As Table 2 shows, in 2004 U.S. military expenditures on R&D were more than six times greater than those of Germany, Japan, France, and Britain combined. By some estimates over half of the military R&D expenditures in the world are American, a disparity that has been sustained for decades: over the past thirty years, for example, the United States invested more than three times what the EU countries combined invested in military R&D. Hence, on any composite index featuring these two indicators the United States obviously looks like a unipole. That perception is reinforced by a snapshot of science and technology indicators for the major powers (see Table 3).

These vast commitments do not make the United States omnipotent, but they do facilitate a preeminence in military capabilities vis-à-vis all other major powers that is unique in the post-seventeenth-century experience. While other powers can contest U.S. forces operating in or very near their homelands, especially over issues that involve credible nuclear deterrence, the United States is and will long remain the only state capable of projecting major military power globally.[14] This domi-

[14] Sustained U.S. investment in nuclear capabilities, against the backdrop of Russian decline and Chinese stasis, have even led some to question the existence of stable deterrence between these countries. See Keir A. Lieber and Daryl G. Press, "The End of MAD? The Nuclear Dimension of U.S. Primacy," *International Security* 30 (Spring 2006).

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TABLE 3
SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY INDICATORS FOR THE MAJOR POWERS
(2003–6)

	High Tech Production ($ Millions (2003)[a]	*% World High Tech Production* (2003)	*Gross Domestic Expenditure R&D ($ Million PPP)* (2006)	*# of Triadic Patent Families* (2005)[b]	*Science and Engineering Doctoral Degrees* (2003)[c]	*PCs per 1000 People* (2004)	*Internet Access per 1000 People* (2005)	*Secure Internet Servers*[e] *per Million People* (2006)
United States	1,351,048.7	39	343,747.5	16,368	26,891	762.2	630.1[d]	869.2
China	423,825.9	12	115,196.9	433	8,153	40.9	85.1	0.4
Japan	376,250.1	11	130,745.4	15,239	7,581	541.6	667.5	331.9
Germany	146,494	4	62,493.2	6,266	10,796	545.3	454.7	348.6
Russia	n.a.	n.a.	16,668.7	49	10,409	104.3	152.3	3.2
France	136,665.7	4	40,392	2,463	6,890	495.7	429.6	96.5
Britain	116,200.2	3	35,171.10	1,588	8,810	599.8	473.5	561.5

SOURCES: World Bank, *World Development Indicators 2007*, at http://go.worldbank.org/3JU2HA60D0 (accessed November 8, 2007); Organization for Economic Development and Cooperation, OECD *Main Science and Technology Indicators*, 2007, vol. 1, at http://www.oecd.org/document/33/0,3343,en_2694_344551_1901082_1_1_1_1,00.html (accessed November 8, 2007); National Science Board, "Science and Engineering Indicators 2006, Volume 2," at http://nsf.gov/statistics/seind06/pdf/colume2.pdf (accessed November 8, 2007).

[a] In 1997 dollars.

[b] Triadic patents families represent attempt to receive patents for an invention in the United States, Europe, and Japan.

[c] The data for China are from 2001; the data for France are from 2002; and the data for Russia are from 2000.

[d] Data are from 2005, with the exception of the U.S. data, which are from 2004.

[e] Secure Internet servers use encryption technology in internet transactions; see www.netcraft.com.

nant position is enabled by what Barry Posen calls "command of the commons"—that is, unassailable military dominance over the sea, air, and space. The result is an international system that contains only one state with the capability to organize major politico-military action anywhere in the system.[15] No other state or even combination of states is capable of mounting and deploying a major expeditionary force outside its own region, except with the assistance of the United States.

Conventional measures thus suggest that the concentration of military and overall economic potential in the United States distinguishes the current international system from its predecessors over the past four centuries (see Figure 1). As historian Paul Kennedy observed: "Nothing has ever existed like this disparity of power; nothing, . . . I have returned to all of the comparative defense spending and military personnel statistics over the past 500 years that I compiled in *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers,* and no other nation comes close."[16]

The bottom line is that if we adopt conventional definitions of polarity and standard measures of capabilities, then the current international system is as unambiguously unipolar as past systems were multipolar and bipolar.

Unipolarity and Its Consequences

As the array of articles in this special issue indicates, the effects of unipolarity are potentially widespread. For purposes of analytical clarity it is possible to consider these effects in three ways, in terms of (1) the behavior of the unipole, (2) the actions of other states, and (3) the properties of the international system itself.

Behavior of the Unipole

The specific characteristics and dynamics of any unipolar system will obviously depend on how the unipolar state behaves. But the unipole's behavior might be affected by incentives and constraints associated with its structural position in the international system. Indeed, even the unipole's domestic politics and institutions—the immediate wellsprings of its behavior on the international scene—might themselves change profoundly under the influence of its position of primacy in the

[15] David Wilkinson, "Unipolarity without Hegemony," *International Studies Review* 1 (Spring 1999); Hansen (fn. 12); Stuart Kaufman, Richard Little, and William Wohlforth, eds., *The Balance of Power in World History* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007); and Posen, "Command of the Commons: The Military Foundations of U.S. Hegemony," *International Security* 28 (Fall 2003).

[16] "The Eagle Has Landed: The New U.S. Global Military Position," *Financial Times Weekend*, February 1, 2002.

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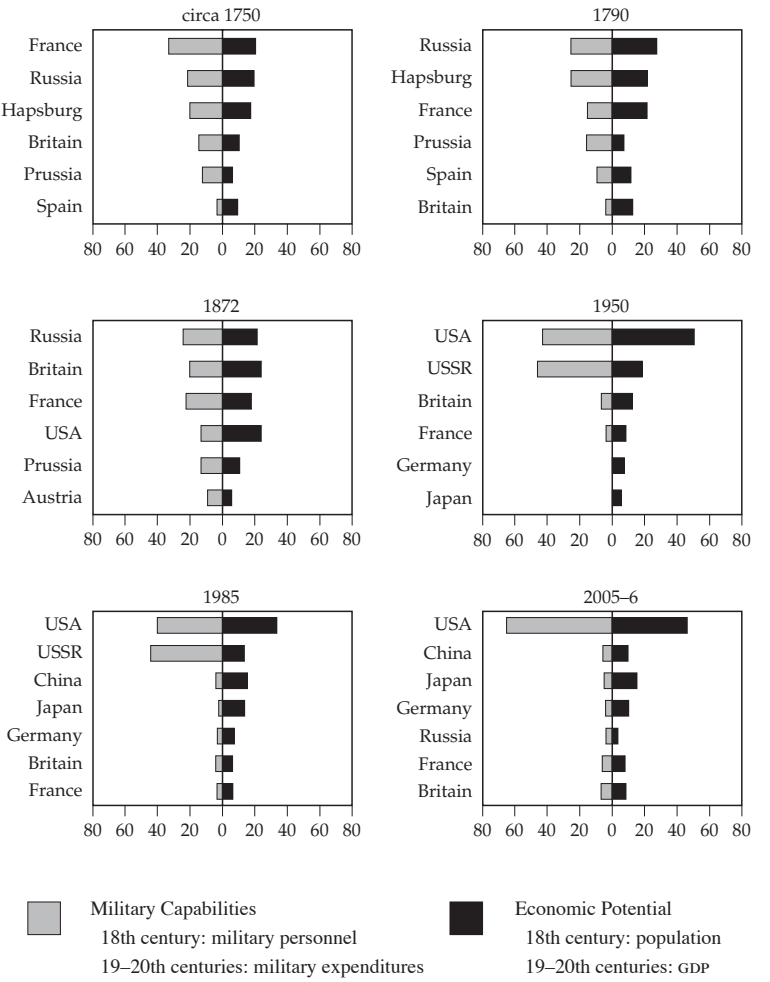


Figure 1
Distribution (Percentage) of Economic and Military Capabilities among the Major Powers[a]
(17th–21st Centuries)

Sources: This figure is reproduced from Brooks and Wohlforth (fn. 10), 30. Eighteenth-century data: Paul M. Kennedy, *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers* (New York: Random House, 1987). GDP, 1870–1985: Angus Maddison, *Monitoring the World Economy, 1829–1992* (Paris: OECD, 1995); GDP, 2005–6: sources from Table 1; military expenditures, 1872–1985: National Material Capabilities data set v. 3.02, at http://www.correlatesofwar.org. The construction of these data is discussed in J. David Singer, Stuart Bremer, and John Stuckey, "Capability Distribution, Uncertainty, and Major Power War, 1820–1965," in Bruce Russett, ed., *Peace, War, and Numbers* (Beverly Hills, Calif.: Sage, 1972), 19–48.

[a] Germany = FRG, and Russia = USSR in 1950 and 1985; Maddison's estimates are based on states' modern territories. For 1872, Austria, Hungary, and Czechoslovaikia are combined, as are Russia and Finland.

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international system. The articles in this special issue yield hypotheses concerning four general behavioral patterns.

UNIPOLARITY AND REVISIONISM: IS THE UNIPOLE A SATISFIED STATE?

The stability of any international system depends significantly on the degree to which the major powers are satisfied with the status quo.[17] In *War and Change in World Politics*, Robert Gilpin argued that leading states "will attempt to change the international system if the expected benefits exceed the expected costs."[18] In the quarter century since that book's publication, international relations scholars have never seriously debated whether the "expected net gain" of systemic revisionism might be positive for the United States. It is hardly surprising that scholars set aside the question of revising the territorial status quo—it is hard to imagine plausible arguments for the utility of large-scale conquest in an age of nuclear weapons and economic globalization. But the territorial status quo is only a part of what Gilpin meant by "international system." The other part comprises the rules, institutions, and standards of legitimacy that frame daily interactions. Why has there been no scholarly debate on whether the United States might seek to revise that aspect of the system? In the 1980s, to be sure, the question did not seem relevant. Scholars believed that the United States was in relative decline, so the costs of changing the system were simply assumed to be high, and a U.S. preference for the status quo appeared obvious.

The transition from bipolarity to unipolarity arguably represented a dramatic power shift in favor of the United States, altering Gilpin's equation toward revisionism. Yet the question of whether, as a new unipole, the United States might adopt a more revisionist stance has not figured centrally in international relations research. The reason was a key assumption built into almost all research on hegemonic stability and power transition theory: that the leading state in any international system is bound to be satisfied. Hence, research on the origins of satisfaction and revisionism is overwhelmingly about subordinate states, not the dominant state.[19]

[17] E. H. Carr, *The Twenty Years' Crisis* (London: Macmillan and Company, 1939); Organski (fn. 3); Randall L. Schweller, "Bandwagoning for Profit: Bringing the Revisionist State Back In," *International Security* 19 (Summer 1994); and Robert Powell, "Stability and the Distribution of Power," *World Politics* 48 (January 1996).

[18] Gilpin (fn. 3), chap. 2.

[19] See, for example, Ronald L.Tammen, Jacek Kugler, Douglas Lemke, Carole Alsharabati, Brian Efird, Alan C. Stam III, and A. F. K. Organski, *Power Transitions: Strategies for the 21st Century* (New York: Chatham House, 2000); Jonathan M. DiCicco and Jack S. Levy, "Power Shifts and Problem Shifts," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 43 (December 1999); and Jason Davidson, *The Origins of Revisionist and Status-quo States* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006).

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Robert Jervis's article in this issue demonstrates that this assumption is no longer tenable. While the case can be made that a unipole—particularly one that achieved this status in an international system already strongly shaped by its power and preferences—might rationally opt for conservatism,[20] international relations scholarship is rich with hypotheses proposing that the opposite is equally if not more likely. Jervis argues that unipolarity offers powerful structural incentives for the leading state to be revisionist. These include the absence of countervailing power, the tendency for both the interests and the fears of the leading state to increase as its relative capabilities increase, and the psychological tendency to worry more about the future to the extent the present situation is desirable. Jervis also suggests that these structural incentives are reinforced by particular features of the American approach to unipolarity—the sense after the attacks of September 11, 2001, that the world could and must be transformed and the enduring and widespread belief that international peace and cooperation will be sustained only when all other important states are democratic. The structural and contingent features of contemporary unipolarity point plausibly in the direction of a revisionist unipole, one simultaneously powerful, fearful, and opportunistic.

UNIPOLARITY AND THE PROVISION OF PUBLIC GOODS

Public or collective goods may be consumed by multiple actors without those actors necessarily having to pay the full costs of producing them. The classic theoretical insight is that if enough actors follow their rational self-interest and choose to free ride on the efforts of others, public goods will be underproduced or not produced at all.[21] Overcoming the free-rider problem therefore requires cooperation among self-interested actors.[22] A good part of the IR literature, in particular that associated with hegemonic stability theory, hypothesizes that cooperation in international relations requires the leadership of a dominant state.[23]

[20] Josef Joffe, "Bismarck or Britain? Toward an American Grand Strategy after Unipolarity," *International Security* 19 (Spring 1995); and Michael Mastanduno, "Preserving the Unipolar Moment: Realist Theories and U.S. Grand Strategy after the Cold War," *International Security* 21 (Spring 1997).

[21] See Robert O. Keohane, *After Hegemony: Cooperation and Discord in the World Political Economy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), and the literature discussed therein.

[22] Kenneth Oye, ed., *Cooperation under Anarchy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986).

[23] This literature is vast, and its claims have been subject to considerable critical scrutiny. Key statements include Charles P. Kindleberger, *The World in Depression, 1929–1939* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1973); Robert O. Keohane, "The Theory of Hegemonic Stability and Changes in International Economic Regimes," in Alexander L. George, Ole R. Holsti, and Randolph M. Siverson, *Change in the International System* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1980); Stephen D. Krasner, "State Power and the Structure of International Trade," *World Politics* 28 (April 1976); Bruce Russett, "The Mysterious Case of Vanishing Hegemony," *International Organization* 39 (Spring 1985);

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Given its preponderance of economic and military resources, the dominant state has the ability to bear a disproportionate share of the costs of providing international collective goods such as an open world economy or a stable security order. The dominant state has an interest in bearing those costs because it benefits disproportionately from promoting systemwide outcomes that reflect its values and interests.

During the cold war the United States took on the responsibilities that Kindleberger argued were needed to promote international economic stability, such as serving as an open market of last resort and allowing the use of its currency for exchange and reserve purposes. International economic stability among the Western powers reinforced their security alliance against the Soviet Union. The United States also bore a disproportionate share of the direct costs of Western alliance security. The Soviet Union, on its side of the international divide, ultimately shouldered disproportionate alliance costs as well.[24] Waltz took the argument a step further, arguing that in the bipolar system the United States and the Soviet Union may have been adversaries but, as the two dominant powers, shared a mutual interest in system stability, an interest that prompted them to cooperate in providing public goods such as nuclear nonproliferation.[25] Hedley Bull makes a similar point in his classic study of the international system as a society of states.[26]

How might the shift from a bipolar to a unipolar system affect the inclination of the now singularly dominant state to provide international public goods? Two hypotheses arise, with contradictory behavioral expectations. First, we might expect a unipole to take on an even greater responsibility for the provision of international public goods. The capabilities of a unipole relative to other major states are greater than those of either dominant power in a bipolar structure. The unipole's incentive should be stronger as well, since it now has the opportunity to influence international outcomes globally, not just in its

Duncan Snidal, "The Limits of Hegemonic Stability Theory," *International Organization* 39 (Autumn 1985); David A. Lake, "Leadership, Hegemony and the International Economy: Naked Emperor or Tattered Monarch with Potential?" *International Studies Quarterly* 37 (December 1993); and Joanne Gowa, "Rational Hegemons, Excludable Goods, and Small Groups: An Epitaph for Hegemonic Stability Theory?" *World Politics* 41 (April 1989).

[24] See Valerie Bunce, "The Empire Strikes Back: The Evolution of the Eastern Bloc from Soviet Asset to Liability," *International Organization* 39 (Winter 1985); and Randall Stone, *Satellites and Commissars: Strategy and Conflict in the Politics of Soviet-Bloc Trade* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996).

[25] Waltz (fn. 8).

[26] Hedley Bull, *The Anarchical Society: A Study of Order in World Politics* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1977).

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particular subsystem. We should expect the unipole to try to "lock in" a durable international order that reflects its interests and values.[27]

A second hypothesis, however, suggests the opposite. We should expect a unipolar power to underproduce public goods despite its preponderant capabilities. The fact that it is unthreatened by peer competitors and relatively unconstrained by other states creates incentives for the unipole to pursue more parochial interests even at the expense of a stable international order. The fact that it is extraordinarily powerful means that the unipole will be more inclined to force adjustment costs on others, rather than bear disproportionate burdens itself.

Two of the contributions below address these issues. Michael Mastanduno's analysis of the global political economy shows that the dominant state will be both system maker and privilege taker—it will seek simultaneously to provide public goods and to exploit its advantageous structural position for parochial gain. It enlists the cooperation of other states and seeks, with varying degrees of success, to force adjustment burdens upon them. Jervis suggests that because the unipole has wide discretion in determining the nature and the extent of the goods provided, its efforts are likely to be perceived by less powerful states as hypocritical attempts to mask the actual pursuit of private goods.

UNIPOLARITY AND CONTROL OVER OUTCOMES

It has long been an axiom of social science that resources (or capabilities as defined herein) do not translate automatically into power (control over outcomes or over the behavior of other actors).[28] Yet most observers regard it as similarly axiomatic that there is some positive relationship between a state's relative capability to help or harm others and its ability to get them to do what it wants. Even if the relationship is complex, more capabilities relative to others ought to translate generally into more power and influence. By this commonsense logic, a unipole should be expected to have more influence than either of the two great powers in a bipolar system.

Articles in this special issue argue that the shift from bipolarity to unipolarity may not be an unambiguous benefit for the unipole's ability to wield influence. On the contrary, a unipolar state may face the paradoxical situation of being simultaneously more capable and more constrained. Two distinct theoretical logics suggest that a unipole might enjoy less power to shape the international system than a superpower in

[27] Ikenberry (fn. 6).
[28] Robert Dahl, "The Concept of Power," *Behavioral Science* 2 (July 1957); Baldwin (fn. 7).

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bipolarity. First is the logic of balancing, alliance, and opposition, discussed in the contributions by Stephen Walt and Mastanduno. The increased concentration of capabilities in the unipole may elicit increased opposition from other states—in the form of either traditional counterbalancing or subtler soft balancing. Even if such resistance falls short of offering a real counterweight, it may materially hamstring the unipole's ability to exercise influence. As Walt argues, the structural shift to unipolarity removed one of the major motivations for the middle-ranked great powers to defer to the United States. Mastanduno offers a similar argument: the collapse of a unifying central threat signifies that in this post–cold war era the United States has less control over adjustment struggles with its principal economic partners, because it can no longer leverage their security dependence to dictate international economic outcomes. Globalization reinforces this U.S. predicament by expanding the number of relevant players in the world economy and by offering them alternatives to economic reliance on the United States. While under bipolarity the propensity of other middle powers to defer to the United States was structurally favored, under unipolarity the opposite may obtain. Even if observable balancing behavior reminiscent of bipolarity or multipolarity never occurs, a structurally induced tendency of the middle-ranked great powers to withhold cooperation may sap the unipole's effective power.

Second is a social logic of legitimacy, analyzed by Martha Finnemore. To use capabilities effectively, she argues, a unipole must seek to legitimate its role. But any system of legitimation imposes limits on the unipole's ability to translate capabilities into power. Finnemore stresses that the legitimation strategy followed by the United States after World War II—institutionalization—imposes especially severe constraints on the use of its material capabilities in pursuit of power. The rules, norms, and institutions that constitute the current international order are thus especially resistant to the unilateral use of superior capabilities to drive outcomes. Hence, for reasons Finnemore spells out in detail, the shift from bipolarity to unipolarity may well have diminished the effective utility of the preponderant capabilities of the United States.

UNIPOLARITY AND DOMESTIC POLITICS

The impact of domestic politics on foreign policy is of long-standing interest in the study of politics. In his classic appraisal of the United States, Tocqueville concluded that the U.S. political system was "decidedly inferior" to other types in the conduct of foreign policy, with a tendency to "obey impulse rather than prudence" and to "abandon a

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mature design for the gratification of a momentary passion."[29] During the cold war Theodore Lowi, Stephen Krasner, and others reinforced the idea that American political institutions create disadvantages in external policy.[30] More recent literature has reversed the presumption and argues that democracy offers distinctive advantages in foreign policy, including legitimacy, transparency, the ability to mobilize the public for war fighting efforts, and the potential to use competition among branches of government to gain advantage in diplomacy and negotiations.[31]

Political scientists have placed greater emphasis on the impact of regime type on foreign policy than on how changes in the relative international position of a country affect the role domestic politics play in its foreign policy.[32] Nonetheless, conventional wisdom during the cold war suggested that the bipolar structure had a double disciplining effect on the conduct of U.S. foreign policy. The external threat disciplined American society, leading interest groups and the public generally to defer to central decision makers on the definition of national interest and how best to achieve it. Domestic politics stopped at the "water's edge" because the international stakes were so high. The cold war constrained American decision makers as well, forcing them to exercise caution in the international arena and to assure that public opinion or interest groups did not capture or derail foreign policy for parochial reasons.

Under unipolarity, the double disciplining effect is no longer operative, with neither publics nor central decision makers as constrained as in a bipolar context. The consequent impact of domestic politics on foreign policy will depend in part on which party is more inclined to take the initiative: central decision makers or societal actors. One hypothesis is that under unipolarity the line between domestic and foreign policy will blur and domestic politics will no longer stop at the

[29] Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, trans. Henry Reeve (Cambridge: Sever and Francis, 1863), 1: 299–300.

[30] Theodore Lowi, "Making Democracy Safe for the World," in G. John Ikenberry, ed., *American Foreign Policy: Theoretical Essays* (New York: Harper Collins 1989); and Stephen Krasner, "United States Commercial and Monetary Policy: Unravelling the Paradox of Internal Weakness and External Strength," in Peter Katzenstein, ed., *Between Power and Plenty* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1978).

[31] For example, David Lake, "Powerful Pacifists: Democratic States and War," *American Political Science Review* 86 (March 1992); Dan Reiter and Allan C. Stam, *Democracies at War* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002); and Robert Pastor, "The President vs. Congress," in Robert Art and Seyom Brown, eds., *U.S. Foreign Policy: The Search for a New Role* (New York: MacMillan, 1993).

[32] See Otto Hintze, "Military Organization and the Organization of States," in Felix Gilbert, ed., *The Historical Essays of Otto Hintze* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1975); and Peter Alexis Gourevitch, "The Second Image Reversed," *International Organization* 32 (Autumn 1978).

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water's edge. With less at stake in foreign policy, it is harder for leaders to discipline societal actors and easier for societal actors to capture aspects of the foreign policy agenda to suit their parochial needs. The likely results are a less coherent foreign policy and a tendency for the state to underperform in the international arena, missing opportunities to exercise influence commensurate with its preponderant capabilities. A second hypothesis is that central decision makers will exploit the lack of constraint to manipulate a public—one that no longer has clear guiding principles in foreign policy—to respond to a wide array of possible threats and opportunities. As Jervis suggests, for the unipole threats may be nowhere—or everywhere.

The article by Jack Snyder, Robert Shapiro, and Yaeli Bloch-Elkon takes up the impact of domestic politics under unipolarity. They find that the Bush administration has taken advantage of the structural discretion offered by unipolarity to conduct a far more active and risky foreign policy than would be possible under the constraints of bipolarity. Developments in American politics such as political polarization have not only encouraged this effort by leaders but have also enabled interest groups to tie their particular domestic concerns to the more activist foreign policy agenda, and they have encouraged opportunistic leaders to use foreign policy as a salient issue in domestic political debate.

Unipolarity and the Behavior of Secondary States

Unipolarity may present secondary states with dramatically different incentives and constraints than would bipolar or multipolar settings. Authors in this special issue highlight three general behavioral patterns that may be shaped by the unipolar stucture: strategies of resistance to or insulation from the unipole's overweening capabilities, alliances and alignments, and the use of international institutions.

balancing and other forms of resistance

The proposition that great concentrations of capabilities generate countervailing tendencies toward balance is among the oldest and best known in international relations.[33] Applying this balancing proposition to a unipolar system is complex, however, for even as unipolarity increases the incentives for counterbalancing it also raises the costs. Walt

[33] See the reviews and discussion in Jack S. Levy, "Balances and Balancing: Concepts, Propositions, and Research Design," in John A. Vasquez and Colin Elman, eds., *Realism and the Balancing of Power: A New Debate* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 2003); and Jack S. Levy and William R. Thompson, "Hegemonic Threats and Great-Power Balancing in Europe, 1495–1999," *Security Studies* 14 (January–March 2005).

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and Finnemore each analyze the interplay between these incentives. They agree on the basic proposition that the current unipolar order pushes secondary states away from traditional hard counterbalancing—formal military alliances and/or military buildups meant to create a global counterweight to the unipole—and toward other, often subtler strategies, such as soft balancing, hiding, binding, delegitimation, or norm entrapment. These analyses lead to the general expectation that a shift from a multipolar or bipolar to a unipolar structure would increase the relative salience of such subtler balancing/resistance strategies.

Walt argues that standard neorealist balance of power theory predicts the absence of counterbalancing under unipolarity. Yet he contends that the core causal mechanisms of balance-of-threat theory remain operative in a unipolar setting. Walt develops a modification of the theory that highlights the role of soft balancing and other subtler strategies of resistance as vehicles to overcome the particular challenges unipolarity presents to counterbalancing. He contends that balancing dynamics remain latent within a unipolar structure and can be brought forth if the unipole acts in a particularly threatening manner.

Finnemore develops a contrasting theoretical architecture for explaining secondary state behavior. For her, both the absence of balancing and the presence of other patterns of resistance can be explained only by reference to the social, as opposed to the material, structure of international politics. In particular, secondary state strategies that have the effect of reining in the unipole cannot be understood as the result of standard security-maximizing incentives. Rather, they are partially the outgrowth of the secondary states' internalization of the norms and rules of the institutional order. If the unipole acts in accordance with those rules, the tendency of other states to resist or withhold cooperation will be muted. Finnemore establishes three social mechanisms that constrain the unipole: legitimation, institutionalization, and incentives for hypocrisy. Each of these entails a logic of resistance to actions by the unipole that violate certain socially defined boundaries.

ALLIANCES AND ALIGNMENT

Scholars have long recognized that the dynamics of alliance and alignment transcend the imperative of counterhegemonic balancing.[34] Ag-

[34] See, for example, Glen H. Snyder, *Alliance Politics* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1997); Stephen M. Walt, "Alliances in Theory and Practice: What Lies Ahead?" *Journal of International Affairs* 43 (Summer–Fall 1989); idem, "Why Alliances Endure or Collapse," *Survival* 39 (Spring 1997); and Paul W. Schroeder, "Historical Reality versus Neorealist Theory," *International Security* 19 (Winter 1994).

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gregating capabilities against a potentially dominant state is thus only one of the many purposes alliances serve. States may also choose to ally with a dominant power either to shield themselves from its capabilities or to seek to influence its policies. In addition, secondary states may ally with each other for purposes not directly connected to resistance to the dominant state, such as influencing each other's domestic or foreign policies or coordinating policies on regional or functional issues.

Larger patterns of such alliance behavior may be systematically related to the international system's structure. Scholars contend that in classic multipolar systems, especially those with no clear hegemon in sight, a large proportion of alliance behavior was unconnected to systemic balancing imperatives.[35] Under bipolarity, the proportion of alliance dynamics that was an outgrowth of systemic balancing increased, yet the rivalry between the two superpowers also created opportunities for secondary states to use alliance choices as leverage, playing each superpower off against the other. Walt argues that in a unipolar system nearly all significant alliance behavior will in one way or another be a reaction to the unipole—to contain, influence, or exploit it. As a result, independent alliances focused on other threats will be relatively rare, compared to bipolar or multipolar systems. Walt also contends that under unipolarity leverage opportunities dramatically decline compared to bipolarity, and he specifies the conditions under which secondary states will tend to opt for alignments with the unipole, neutrality, or resistance.

USE OF INTERNATIONAL INSTITUTIONS

Although their relative power affords opportunities to go it alone, dominant states find a variety of reasons to use international institutions. Institutions may be helpful in coalition building. They facilitate the exercise of power by creating patterns of behavior that reflect the interests and values of the dominant state. Institutions can conceal or soften the exercise of power, and they can lock in a hegemonic order and enable it to persist "after hegemony."[36]

Weaker states in a unipolar structure similarly have incentives to utilize institutions. Two types of motivation are relevant. First, weaker states may engage a unipole by enlisting its participation in new or modified institutional arrangements in order to constrain or tie it down. Since a unipolar state may be powerful enough to follow its own

[35] See Schroeder (fn. 34); and R. Harrison Wagner, "What Was Bipolarity?" *International Organization* 47 (Winter 1993).

[36] Keohane (fn. 21); Ikenberry (fn. 6).

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rules, possibly to the detriment of weaker states, those states may appeal within an institutional context to the unipole's concern for its reputation as a member of the international community or to its need for cooperating partners, in order to persuade it to engage in rule-based order even if it cannot simply determine the rules unilaterally. The dispute between the United States and some of its allies over U.S. participation in the International Criminal Court reflects the attempt by weaker states to tie the unipole down and the unipole's effort in turn to remain a free agent in the event it cannot define the institutional rules. Second, weaker states may create or strengthen international institutions that exclude the unipolar state. These institutions might be designed or intended to foster a common identity (for example, the European Union, the East Asian Economic Caucus), build capacity to withstand influence attempts by the unipole (for example, the European common currency), or create the potential to act independently of the unipole or at cross-purposes with it (for example, Shanghai Cooperation Organization, European Rapid Reaction Force).

In bipolarity, weaker states tend to participate in institutional arrangements defined and dominated by one or the other of the major players. The nonaligned movement during the cold war was distinctive precisely because it sought—though not necessarily with success—to institutionalize a path independent of either superpower. Under conditions of unipolarity, we can hypothesize that weaker states, lacking the capacity to balance the unipole, will turn to a variety of institutional initiatives intended to constrain the unipolar state or to enhance their own autonomy in the face of its power. The use of international institutions by weaker states is highlighted in the articles by Walt and Finnemore.

Systemic Properties: How Peaceful Is Unipolarity, and Will It Endure?

The classical systems theorists were preoccupied with two dependent variables: peacefulness and stability.[37] Scholars today have reason to be less optimistic that deterministic laws of stability or peacefulness can be derived from the structural characteristics of any international system.[38] Nonetheless, the questions of whether some types of interna-

[37] See the discussion in Jervis, *System Effects: Complexity in Political and Social Life* (Princeton: Princeton University Press 1997), chap. 3; and idem, "Unipolarity: A Structural Perspective," in this issue.

[38] See Robert Powell, *In the Shadow of Power: States and Strategies in International Politics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999); and Alexander Wendt, *Social Theory of International Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

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tional systems are more prone to conflict than others and whether some types are more likely to endure than others remain critical and take on added significance in the context of the more novel international system of unipolarity

UNIPOLARITY AND GREAT POWER CONFLICT

Two major theoretical traditions deal with causes of war in ways that may relate to system structure: neorealism and power transition theory. Applying these in the context of unipolarity yields the general proposition that military conflicts involving the unipole and other major powers (that is, great power wars) are less likely in unipolar systems than in either bipolar or multipolar systems. According to neorealist theory, bipolarity is less war prone than multipolarity because each superpower knows that only the other can threaten it, realizes that it cannot pass the buck to third parties, and recognizes it can balance accretions to the other's capabilities by internal rather than external means. Bipolarity blocks or at least complicates three common paths to war in neorealism: uncertainty, free riding, and fear of allied defection. The first and second operated during the 1930s and the third operated prior to World War I. By the same logic, unipolarity is even less war prone: none of these causal mechanisms is relevant to a unipole's interactions with other great powers. Power transition and hegemonic theories predict that major war involving the leading state and a challenger becomes more likely as their relative capabilities approach parity.[39] Under unipolarity, parity is beyond the reach of a would-be challenger, so this mechanism does not operate. In any event, many scholars question whether these traditional theories of war remain relevant in a world in which the declining benefits of conquest, nuclear deterrence among most major powers, the spread of democracy, and changing collective norms and ideas reduce the probability of major war among great powers to a historically low level.[40] The absence of major conflicts among the great powers may thus be overdetermined or have little to do with unipolarity.

Wohlforth develops an alternative theoretical framework for assessing the consequences of unipolarity for great power conflict, one that focuses on status or prestige seeking as opposed to security as the core preference for major states. From a diverse theoretical literature he derives a single hypothesis on the relationship between unipolar capabil-

[39] See Gilpin (fn. 3); Tammen et al. (fn. 19); and Levy and DiCiccio (fn. 19).
[40] Robert Jervis, *American Foreign Policy in a New Era* (London: Routledge, 2005), 31.

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ity distributions and great power conflict. He tests it in the current international system and historically, and he derives further implications for relationships between the unipole and secondary states. He supplies theoretical reasons and initial empirical support for the proposition that unipolarity itself helps to explain low levels of militarized interactions among great powers since 1991. The same logic and evidence, however, suggest that the route back to bipolarity or multipolarity may be more prone to great power conflict than many scholars now suppose.

THE DURABILITY OF A UNIPOLAR SYSTEM

The current unipolar system has already lasted longer than some scholars were anticipating at the end of the cold war.[41] How much longer it will persist before transforming itself into the more "normal" systemic pattern of multipolarity or perhaps into to a new bipolarity remains to be seen. Durability will depend primarily on developments in the capabilities and behavior of the unipole and other major powers. Because the unipole is such a disproportionately powerful actor in this system, the evolution of its own capabilities and behavior is likely to carry the greatest weight. Other actors are more likely to react to the unipole than to trigger system-transforming processes on their own.

The evolution of relative *capabilities* is obviously a crucial variable, and there is no clear theoretical presumption. One hypothesis is that unipolarity is self-reinforcing. The unipole is so far ahead militarily that it finds it relatively easy to maintain and even widen its capability lead over that of would-be peers—especially if, as some scholars argue, the contemporary U.S. defense industry benefits from increasing returns to scale.[42] Given massive investments in the military requirements of unipolar status over many years, other states face formidable barriers to entry—technological, economic, and domestic political—in any effort to become peer competitors.

The contrary hypothesis can be drawn from Gilpin's work, which highlights the tendency of dominant powers to plant the seeds of their own demise. Dominant states may not maintain or widen their capability lead because they fall prey to overextension abroad and/or the

[41] See Christopher Layne, "The Unipolar Illusion: Why New Great Powers Will Arise," *International Security* 14 (Spring 1993); Kenneth N. Waltz, "The Emerging Structure of International Politics," *International Security* 18 (Fall 1993); and idem, "Structural Realism after the Cold War," in Ikenberry (fn. 2). See also the retrospective in Christopher Layne, "The Unipolar Illusion Revisited," *International Security* 31 (Winter 2006).

[42] See Jonathan Caverley, "United States Hegemony and the New Economics of Defense," *Security Studies* 16 (October 2007).

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corrupting influences of affluence at home.[43] Similarly, the very success of their order may inadvertently encourage or develop challengers to their dominant role within it.[44] The U.S.-centered system promotes openness and globalization; the diffusion of the benefits of these processes strengthens states on the periphery that can outpace the United States economically and eventually translate their economic strength into political influence and military capacity.

The *behavior* of the unipole matters as well, again with potentially divergent effects. 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.[45] Through its behavior, the unipole may encourage would-be challengers to accept subordinate but beneficial roles. Alternatively, and because it has the capability and discretion to act as a revisionist state itself, the unipole's behavior might heighten the insecurity of other states and prompt them to contemplate individual or collective challenges to its dominance.

The impact of developments across capabilities and behavior may be reinforcing or contradictory. A unipole might successfully reassure other states while simultaneously maintaining its capability lead over them. It might alarm other states while dissipating its relative advantages. Or its behavior might point in one direction while its capabilities point in another.

Conclusion

One of the oldest insights in the study of international relations is that power, in the form of material capabilities, has a decisive impact on relations among states. Thucydides famously recorded the frank and brutal observation that "the strong do what they can and the weak suffer what they must." In a world of states, power disparities generate both security and insecurity and have an impact on what states want and what they can get. Few scholars embrace theories of world politics that rely exclusively on the structural circumstances created by material capabilities of states and its distribution within the international system. But it is also widely agreed that one ignores such factors at one's explanatory peril.

[43] Gilpin (fn 3).
[44] Ibid., 75.
[45] Michael Mastanduno, "Preserving the Unipolar Moment: Realist Theories and U.S. Grand Strategy after the Cold War," in Kapstein and Mastanduno (fn. 12).

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For most of modern world history, the distribution of material capabilities has been best characterized as multipolar or bipolar. The contemporary structure is extraordinary and has the potential to endure beyond a historical "moment." One of the great theoretical challenges in the study of international relations is to identify the extent to which and the various ways in which a unipolar distribution of power influences how states act and generates patterns of conflict and cooperation. In broad terms, the articles in this issue are concerned with how a unipolar international order differs in its character and functioning from a bipolar or multipolar order. In more operational terms, we are interested in how the shift from the cold war bipolar system to the current American-centered unipolar system matters for the behavior of states and the character of international rule and order.

There are obvious limitations on our ability to validate hypotheses or subject theoretical claims to rigorous empirical tests. Precisely because a unipolar distribution of power has not appeared routinely in earlier eras, we do not possess multiple historical cases for systematic comparisons. It is equally difficult to draw inferences about the impact of unipolarity because we are still living through it. In effect, we are in the midst of a historical cycle. Patterns of foreign policy and international outcomes will be better discerned after unipolarity has given way to bipolarity or multipolarity. What this special issue can and does accomplish, however, is to lay out the questions, categories, and hypotheses that should continue to guide inquiry and to offer initial empirical determinations of our claims. The set of hypotheses we develop collectively in three categories—the behavior of the unipole, the reactions of secondary states, and the overall functioning of the international system—constitutes a rich agenda for future theoretical and empirical research. Three aspects of that agenda strike us as sufficiently salient to merit emphasis in closing.

First, scholarship needs to untangle and clarify three related but distinct manifestations of unipolarity that easily become confused in the process of making causal arguments. One is the unipolar distribution of power as an ideal type across time, the second is unipolarity in the particular international circumstances of the early twenty-first century (for example, including the existence of nuclear weapons and a security community among some of the leading powers), and the third is American unipolarity, or unipolarity with the United States as the dominant state with its particular institutional and ideological features. In making causal claims, it is exceedingly difficult to determine how deeply rooted cause and effect are in the distribution of power. Do the

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foreign policy patterns of the Bush administration follow in a relatively straightforward way from conditions of unipolarity or are they much more circumstantial? Would other states—were they to emerge as a unipolar power—act in a similar way, or is behavior more contingent on the character of the state or the peculiarities of its leaders? The authors in this issue offer various answers to these questions of causation, but they tend to agree that there remains considerable contingency in a unipolar system. Constraints and opportunities—as well as threats and interests—do shift when the global system moves from bipolarity to unipolarity, but the linkages between the structure of power and the actions of states are not straightforward. Future research will want to specify these linkages and the way in which circumstance modifies and mediates the structural impact of unipolarity.

A second research agenda concerns the nature and character of constraints on the unipolar state. One of the defining features of unipolarity is that the power of the leading state is not balanced by other major states. Yet in the absence of this classic mechanism of power constraint it remains unclear what, if anything, in fact disciplines and restrains unipolar power. Finnemore looks closely at the role of legitimacy as a constraint on state power and provides some evidence that this so-called soft mechanism of constraint does matter. It is plausible to expect that a unipolar state, any unipolar state, would prefer to lead and operate in an international order that is seen as normatively acceptable—that is, legitimate—to other states. Legitimate domination is more desirable than coercive domination. But questions remain about how powerful this incentive is for the leaders of a dominant state and how costly it actually becomes to the unipole, in the short and longer term, when its behavior and the system associated with its power are perceived by others as less legitimate.

A third research area concerns how unipolarity affects the logic of hegemonic behavior. As noted earlier, there are two lines of argument regarding how a unipolar state might act in regard to the provisioning of public goods, rules, and institutions. One suggests that the leading state has a clear incentive to commit itself to leadership in the establishment and management of a cooperative, rule-based system. It receives a flow of material rewards and enjoys reduced costs of enforcement according to this logic. But the theoretical and policy-relevant question is whether the shift from cold war bipolarity to unipolarity has altered hegemonic leadership incentives. One possibility is that the decline in a shared security threat makes it harder to strike bargains: the leading state's offerings of security are less needed by other states and

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it is less dependent on the frontline support of weaker and secondary states. Another possibility is that unipolarity increases the incentives for free riding by subordinate states while at the same time reducing the willingness of the lead state to bear the disproportionate costs of public goods provision. Hegemonic leadership may also hinge on judgments about the overall life cycle of unipolarity. If a unipolar state assumes that its dominance is semipermanent, it may be willing to suffer lost legitimacy or the costs of enforcement—costs that are seen as less consequential than the freedom of action that is achieved by reducing its hegemonic responsibilities. But if the leading state judges that its unipolar position will decline in the years ahead, the value of rules and institutions may increase to the extent those rules and institutions are "sticky" and can help protect the leading state's interests and lock in its preferred international order during the days when it inevitably becomes relatively less capable.

The hypotheses and findings in this special issue ultimately take us back to basic questions in the study of international relations. The surprising onset of unipolarity encourages us to revisit questions about how the international structure of capabilities shapes, encourages, and constrains state behavior. In attempting to make sense of this new type of global structure, we are forced to grapple with the enduring issue of how the powerful and the weak make their way in a changing international environment.

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