# ALLIANCES IN A UNIPOLAR WORLD

By STEPHEN M. WALT

AN alliance (or alignment) is a formal (or informal) commitment for security cooperation between two or more states, intended to augment each member's power, security, and/or influence. Although the precise arrangements embodied in different alliances vary enormously, the essential element in a meaningful alliance is a commitment for mutual support against some external actor(s). Because these arrangements affect both the capabilities that national leaders can expect to draw upon and the opposition they must prepare to face, alliances are always a key feature of the international landscape and should play an important role in the calculations of any foreign policy decision maker.[1]

The advent of unipolarity has had profound effects on the nature of contemporary alliances. A preponderance of power in the hands of a single state—in this case, the United States—had never before occurred in the modern era. Because the gross distribution of capabilities helps identify both possible sources of threat and the potential allies that might be recruited to deal with them, the condition of unipolarity inevitably shapes the alliance choices that are available to different states. A unipolar distribution of capabilities will also influence bargaining within contemporary alliances, based on the relative strength of different actors and the alliance options available to each.[2]

These insights—drawn from the realist tradition in international relations theory—imply that the emergence of unipolarity in the aftermath of the cold war was bound to affect both the membership of dif-

[1] George Modelski regards *alliance* as "one of the dozen or so key terms in international politics," and Hans Morgenthau refers to alliances as a "necessary function of the balance of power operating in a multi-state system." See Modelski, "The Study of Alliances: A Review," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 7 (April 1963); and Morgenthau, "Alliances in Theory and Practice," in Arnold Wolfers, ed., *Alliance Policy and the Cold War* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1959).

[2] The most comprehensive analysis of the effects of system structure on alliance politics is Glenn W. Snyder, *Alliance Politics* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1997). Snyder analyzes both multipolar and bipolar systems but does not address unipolarity.

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ferent alliance networks and the nature of relations within them. Given that realist theories focus on how political actors compete for security in the absence of an overarching central authority, they remain relevant to understanding how unipolarity emerged and what its characteristic features will be.[3] The current unipolar structure is itself the product of four decades of relentless competition between the United States and the Soviet Union; further, the arrival of unipolarity did not bring an end to interstate security competition. U.S. primacy falls well short of global hegemony, which means that major powers must continue to worry about security issues and take steps to guarantee it, either alone or in concert with others. Certain structural constraints may be looser in unipolarity—especially for the unipole itself—but realism remains relevant both as an element of the explanation for the emergence of unipolarity and as a tool for understanding its dynamics.[4]

Yet there is no consensus on the overall impact that unipolarity will have on contemporary international alliances, in part because it is a novel condition in world politics. The implications of unipolarity have yet to receive sustained theoretical attention; there are after all only fifteen or so years of history on which to base any evaluation of our conjectures.[5] Some writers believe unipolarity heralds the dissolution of NATO and other cold war–era alliances, whereas others predict that the other major powers are likely to draw closer together in an effort to contain the overwhelming power of the United States.[6] Another view suggests that the remaining medium powers lack the capacity to balance the overwhelming power of the United States and that any attempt to construct an anti-U.S. coalition would face insurmountable

[3] On the core elements of the realist tradition, see Stephen M. Walt, "The Enduring Relevance of the Realist Tradition," in Ira Katznelson and Helen Milner, eds., *Political Science: State of the Discipline III* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2005).

[4] On realism's ability to account for the end of the cold war, see William C. Wohlforth, "Realism and the End of the Cold War," *International Security* 19 (Winter 1994–95).

[5] The most sophisticated theoretical statement is William C. Wohlforth, "The Stability of a Unipolar World," *International Security* 24 (Summer 1999). Other useful analyses include G. John Ikenberry, ed., *American Unrivaled: The Future of the Balance of Power* (Ithaca, N.Y: Cornell University Press, 2001); Ethan B. Kapstein and Michael Mastanduno, *Unipolar Politics: Realism and State Strategies after the Cold War* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999); David Malone and Yuen Foong Khong, eds., *Unilateralism and U.S. Foreign Policy: International Perspectives* (Boulder, Colo.: Lynne Rienner, 2003); and T. V. Paul, James J. Wirtz, and Michel Fortmann, *Balance of Power: Theory and Practice in the 21st Century* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2004).

[6] Works anticipating NATO's gradual decline include Stephen M. Walt, *The Origins of Alliances* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, paperback edition, 1990), preface; and idem, "The Ties That Fray: Why Europe and America Are Drifting Apart," *National Interest,* no. 54 (Winter 1998–99). Predictions of imminent balancing against the United States include Kenneth N. Waltz, "The Emerging Structure of International Politics," *International Security* 18 (Fall 1993); and Christopher Layne, "The Unipolar Illusion: Why New Great Powers Will Rise," *International Security* 17 (Spring 1993).

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dilemmas of collective action.[7] This last group of authors suggests that other states, instead of balancing U.S. power, are more likely to bandwagon with it. Yet another line of argument maintains that today's medium and lesser powers will align with the United States not because they fear U.S. power but because they are primarily concerned with regional threats and want to use U.S. power to deal with them.[8]

This article seeks to advance the discussion by presenting a theoretical analysis of alliance formation in unipolarity. In a world with a single global superpower, how will other states choose allies and what strategies will they follow in order to maximize international support and minimize opposition? What strategies should we expect the unipole to pursue, and with what effects? Will relations *within* existing unipolar alliances differ from behavior observed in bipolar and multipolar systems, and in what ways? To what extent has behavior since 1991 confirmed or confounded these expectations?

The remainder of this article is organized as follows. Section I summarizes the existing literature on alliances and discusses some of the methodological challenges involved in analyzing the implications of unipolarity. Section II describes the structural features of unipolarity and some of the more obvious implications for statecraft. Section III analyzes how states are likely to choose allies in unipolarity, illustrating the principal strategies with contemporary examples. Section IV offers conjectures about the impact of unipolarity on relations within existing alliances, focusing in particular on the ability of the unipole to use alliances as a tool for managing relations with lesser powers and on the strategies that weaker partners may employ to increase their own influence over a more powerful partner. I conclude in Section V with some observations about the durability of the current condition and the appropriate strategies for testing these conjectures.

## I. The Alliance Literature[9]

The primary purpose of most alliances is to combine the members' capabilities in a way that furthers their respective interests, especially their

[7] See especially Charles Krauthammer, "The Unipolar Moment Revisited," *National Interest,* no. 70 (Winter 2002–3), esp. 8–9. This view is also implicit in Wohlforth (fn. 5); and documented in idem, "Revisiting Balance of Power Theory in Central Eurasia," in Paul, Wirtz, and Fortmann (fn. 5).

[8] See Stephen M. Walt, *Taming American Power: The Global Response to U.S. Primacy* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2005), 187–91.

[9] Useful but dated surveys of the alliance literature include Michael Don Ward, "Research Gaps in Alliance Dynamics," *Monograph Series in World Affairs* 19 (1982); Stephen M. Walt, "Multilateral Collective Security Arrangements," in Richard Shultz, Roy Godson, and Ted Greenwood, eds., *Security*

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security goals. Accordingly, the prevailing conception in the literature sees alliances primarily as a response to an external threat. Threats, in turn, are a function of power, proximity, specific offensive capabilities, and aggressive intentions, and the expected response to an emerging threat is to attempt to balance against it.[10]

The desire to balance perceived threats is not the only motivation for making an alliance, however. Under certain circumstances, states may choose to bandwagon with an existing threat, especially if they believe that resistance is impossible or if they are convinced a threat can be deflected or appeased by accommodating it.[11] States facing an internal challenge may seek external support in order to deal with this danger, and needy governments may be "bribed" into alignment by promises of economic or military assistance.[12] States with similar ideologies or domestic political systems are sometimes seen as more likely to ally with one another, although certain ideologies (such as Marxism-Leninism and pan-Arabism) proved to be more divisive than unifying. Finally, states may also enter an alliance in order to gain greater influence over their alliance partners. As Schroeder emphasized in an important essay, alliances are both "weapons of power" and "tools of great power management."[13]

Over time, the literature on intra-alliance relations has focused on four main issues. The first concerns the distribution of burdens within an alliance. As Olson and Zeckhauser demonstrated in a seminal article, because security is a collective good, larger powers within an al-

*Studies for the 1990s* (Washington, D.C.: Brassey's, 1993); idem, "Why Alliances Endure or Collapse," *Survival* 39 (Spring 1997).

[10] See Stephen M. Walt, *The Origins of Alliances* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1987).

[11] Discussions of bandwagoning include Walt (fn. 10); Deborah Larson, "Bandwagon Images in American Foreign Policy: Myth or Reality?" in Jack L. Snyder and Robert Jervis, eds., *Dominoes and Bandwagons: Strategic Beliefs and Superpower Competition in the Eurasian Rimland* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991); John J. Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2001); Robert Kaufman, "To Balance or Bandwagon? Alignment Decisions in 1930s Europe," *Security Studies* 1, no. 3 (1992); and Randall K. Schweller, "Bandwagoning for Profit: Bringing the Revisionist State Back In," *International Security* 19 (Summer 1994).

[12] See Steven David, *Choosing Sides: Alignment and Realignment in the Third World* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1991).

[13] See Paul W. Schroeder, "Alliances, 1815–1945: Weapons of Power and Tools of Management," in Klaus Knorr, ed., *Historical Dimensions of National Security Problems* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 1976), 230–31. Robert Osgood argues that "next to accretion [of power], the most prominent function of alliances has been to restrain and control allies." See Osgood, *Alliances in American Foreign Policy* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1968), 22; also Patricia Weitsman, *Dangerous Alliances: Proponents of Peace, Weapons of War* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2004); Chris Gelpi, "Alliances as Instruments of Intra-Allied Control or Restraint," in Helga Haftendorn, Robert Keohane, and Celeste Wallander, eds., *Imperfect Unions: Security Institutions over Time and Space* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999); and Jeremy Pressman, *Warring Friends: Alliance Restraint in International Politics* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2008).

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liance tend to bear a disproportionate share of the costs while smaller members tend to free ride. This insight has spawned a large literature featuring both theoretical refinements and numerous empirical studies, with Olson and Zeckhauser's core finding remaining largely intact.[14] A second issue is alliance cohesion and leadership; in general, the more asymmetric the distribution of capabilities within an alliance, the more durable it is likely to be and the greater the ability of the alliance leader to dictate alliance policy. Third, a number of studies have explored the twin dangers of "abandonment" (being left in the lurch in a crisis or war) and "entrapment" (being dragged into misguided wars by one's alliance commitments). States that fear abandonment are less able to restrain adventurous allies and more likely to be entrapped, while states that resist entrapment must worry that key allies will lose confidence in them and seek more reliable partners.[15]

Finally, a number of scholars have examined the impact of norms and institutions on alliance dynamics, generally concluding that alliances are more effective and long-lived (1) when they are highly institutionalized, (2) when the member states are liberal regimes, and (3) when there are explicit norms regulating alliance decision making.[16] Critics argue that alliance norms and institutions are largely epiphenomenal and that the distribution of capabilities (or threats) will play a more important role in shaping alliance formation and cohesion.[17]

Theoretical differences notwithstanding, the existing literature on alliances shares one common trait: it is a product of the past bipolar and multipolar eras and inevitably reflects both past policy concerns and the available historical evidence. Testing conjectures about contemporary alliances is complicated further by the need to distinguish between

[14] Mancur Olson and Richard Zeckhauser, "An Economic Theory of Alliances," *Review of Economics and Statistics* 48 (August 1966). A useful survey of subsequent work in this area is Todd Sandler and Keith Hartley, "Economics of Alliances: The Lessons for Collective Action," *Journal of Economic Literature* 39 (September 2001).

[15] Glenn Snyder and Kenneth Waltz argue that these twin dangers are more worrisome in multipolar systems than in bipolar systems, and Thomas Christensen and Jack Snyder suggest that these problems are even more pronounced when conquest is easy and the need for prompt and reliable allies is especially great. See Snyder, "The Security Dilemma in Alliance Politics, *World Politics* 36 (July 1984); idem (fn. 2)*;* Waltz, *Theory of International Politics* (Reading, Mass.: Addison-Wesley, 1979), 170–73; and Christensen and Snyder, "Chain Gangs and Passed Bucks: Predicting Alliance Patterns in Multipolarity, *International Organization* 44 (Spring 1990).

[16] See Haftendorn, Keohane, and Wallander (fn. 13)*;* Thomas Risse-Kappen, *Cooperation among Democracies: The European Influence on U.S. Foreign Policy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997); Robert B. McCalla, "NATO's Persistence after the Cold War," *International Organization* 50 (Summer 1996); and G. John Ikenberry, *After Victory: Institutions, Strategic Restraint, and the Rebuilding of Order after Major Wars* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000).

[17] See John J. Mearsheimer, "The False Promise of International Institutions," *International Security* 19 (Winter 1994–95): and Pressman (fn. 13).

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the effects of (1) the structural features of unipolarity, (2) America's status as the single superpower, and (3) the particular policies adopted by specific U.S. administrations. In other words, how much observable behavior is explained by the unipolar structure alone, how much by the unique qualities of the current unipole (that is, its ideology, geographic location, history, and so on), and how much by the particular policies of the Clinton administration, the Bush administration, or their successors?

This problem underscores the importance of stating the causal logic of different conjectures clearly. Which predictions reflect purely structural features (that is, the unipolar distribution of power) and would be valid no matter which state was the unipole? Which behaviors result from the fact that the United States happened to emerge as the unipole and would presumably apply no matter who the president was? Finally, which effects derive from the particular policies of specific U.S. leaders and would not have occurred had a different administration been in power or had the current one made different choices among clear alternatives?

It follows that efforts to test these different conjectures should rely heavily on qualitative techniques such as process tracing and pay close attention to the perceptions, preferences, and motivations of key actors. In order to correctly test whether states are balancing, hedging, or bandwagoning, we need to know more than just the distribution of capabilities and a list of who allied with whom. We also need to know what security problem the alliance was intended to address and why particular leaders opted for a specific policy choice. We should also be appropriately modest in drawing conclusions, given that fifteen years is a relatively short time period and we simply cannot control for all the potentially relevant variables (that is, we cannot compare *American-led* unipolarity with data drawn from an epoch where some other state was the unipole).[18] With these caveats in mind, let us now consider how unipolarity will shape alliance behavior.

## II. Structural Effects

A unipolar system is one in which a single state controls a disproportionate share of the politically relevant resources of the system. Unipo-

[18] On process tracing, see especially Alexander L. George and Andrew Bennett, *Case Studies and Theory Development in the Social Science* (Cambridge: MIT Press/BCSIA Studies in International Security, 2005); Stephen Van Evera, *Guide to Methods for Students of Political Science* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1997); and Henry E. Brady and David Collier, eds., *Rethinking Social Inquiry: Diverse Methods, Shared Standards* (New York: Rowman and Littlefeld, 2004).

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larity implies that the single superpower faces no ideological rival of equal status or influence; even if ideological alternatives do exist, they do not pose a threat to the unipolar power's role as a model for others.

Wohlforth argues that the "unipolar threshold" is reached when one state is so strong that there is no possibility of a counterhegemonic coalition. While useful, this conception still contains a number of ambiguities. It is not clear if this definition means that the leading state has more than 50 percent of the total resources of the system, or if the leading state is merely so strong that, as a practical matter, it would be difficult to impossible to unite all the states that would be needed to balance it.[19] Similarly, if a countervailing coalition did form, how close must it get to the unipole in order to shift the structure from unipolarity back to bipolarity or multipolarity? Is the system unipolar if no rival state (or coalition) could hope to defeat the unipole in an all-out war, or does it become multipolar once another state (or coalition) is merely able to impose sufficient costs so as to thwart the unipole's main aims (without necessarily being able to impose its will on the unipole)? The relationship between latent versus mobilized power is also ambiguous: is the system unipolar if other states lack the raw power potential to challenge the unipole no matter how hard they try, or is it unipolar merely because potential balancers have consciously chosen not to devote the resources at their disposal to this task?[20]

Despite these ambiguities, Wohlforth is almost certainly correct in describing the current structure of world politics as unipolar. The United States has the world's largest economy (roughly 60 percent larger than the number two power), and it possesses by far the most powerful military forces. If one includes supplemental spending, U.S. military expenditures now exceed those of the rest of the world *combined.*[21] Despite its current difficulties in Iraq and the recent downturn in the U.S. economy, the United States retains a comfortable margin of superiority over the other major powers. This capacity does not allow the United States to rule large foreign populations by force or to re-create the sort of formal empire once ruled by Great Britain, but it does give the United States "command of the commons" (that is, the ability to operate with near impunity in the air, oceans, and space) and the ability to defeat

[19] See William Wohlforth, "U.S. Strategy in a Unipolar World," in Ikenberry (fn. 5), 103–4.

[20] As Lieber and Alexander emphasize, Europe has sufficient population and economic strength to pose a significant counterweight to American power, were its members willing to invest the necessary resources towards this common goal. See Keir Lieber and Gerard Alexander, "Waiting for Balancing: Why the World Is Not Pushing Back," *International Security* 30 (Summer 2005), 116–19.

[21] See "Worldwide Military Expenditures, *globalsecurity.org,* at http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/spending.htm (accessed January 3, 2008).

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any other country (or current coalition) in a direct test of battlefield strength.[22] Put differently, the United States is the only country that can deploy substantial amounts of military power virtually anywhere—even in the face of armed opposition—and keep it there for an indefinite period. Moreover, it is able to do this while spending a substantially smaller fraction of its national income on defense than previous great powers did, as well as a smaller fraction than it spent throughout the cold war.[23] The United States also enjoys disproportionate influence in key international institutions—largely as a consequence of its economic and military capacities—and casts a large cultural shadow over much of the rest of the world as well.[24]

In short, America's daunting capabilities are a defining feature of the contemporary international landscape, the debacle in Iraq and its various fiscal deficits notwithstanding. U.S. primacy shapes the perceptions, calculations, and possibilities available to all other states, as well as to other consequential international actors. Although other states also worry about local conditions and concerns, none can ignore the vast concentration of power in U.S. hands.

It is important to emphasize again the distinction between the general condition of unipolarity and the particular features of the specific unipolar order that exists today. State behavior today is influenced partly by the overall distribution of capabilities, but also by the particular geographic location of the United States, the liberal ideals with which the United States is associated, and the specific historical features and institutional connections inherited from the cold war. Each of these features shapes contemporary alliance dynamics, and any attempt to identify the impact of unipolarity on alliance behavior must take these competing causal factors into account.

[22] See Barry R. Posen, "Command of the Commons: The Military Foundations of U.S. Hegemony," *International Security* 28 (Summer 2003).

[23] The United States spent 9.3 percent of GDP on defense in 1960, 8.1 percent in 1970, and 5.2 percent in 1990. By contrast, it spent only 3.7 percent of GDP on defense in 2005; the source is "Outlays by Superfunction and Function: 1940–2009," Office of Management and Budget, Historical Tables, Budget of the United States Government, Fiscal Year 2005 (Washington, 2004), table 3.1, at www.whitehouse.gov/omb/budget/fy2005/pdf/hist.pdf (accessed June 27, 2006).

[24] Summaries of the U.S. position include the introduction, in this issue; Stephen G. Brooks and William Wohlforth, *World Out of Balance: International Relations and the Challenge of American Primacy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008); Wohlforth (fn. 5); Walt (fn. 8); and Joseph S. Nye, *The Paradox of American Power: Why the World's Only Superpower Cannot Go It Alone* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001). American primacy is also acknowledged by quasi Marxists such as Perry Anderson, who writes: "With still the world's largest economy, financial markets, reserve currency, armed forces, global bases, culture industry and international language, the US combines assets that no other state can begin to match." See Anderson, "Jottings on the Conjuncture," *New Left Review* 48 (November–December 2007).

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Overall, weaker powers have essentially three choices in a unipolar world. They can (1) ally with each other to try to mitigate the unipole's influence, (2) align with the unipole in order to support its actions or exploit its power for their own purposes, or (3) remain neutral. In a unipolar world, therefore, most alliances will in some sense be a reaction to the dominant state—either to constrain it or to exploit it. Independent alliances may form to address purely local concerns on occasion, but they will be less common and probably less important.

This unprecedented situation contains several obvious implications for contemporary alliance behavior, albeit with somewhat contradictory effects.

### Greater Freedom of Action for the Unipole

By definition, unipolarity means that the unipole has greater freedom of action than great powers do under either bipolarity or unipolarity. It enjoys greater freedom of action because it does not have to worry about direct opposition from any country possessing roughly equal capabilities. Thus, the United States can now contemplate actions it would have quickly rejected when the Soviet Union was intact. Fear of a hostile Soviet reaction discouraged U.S. escalation during the Korean and Vietnam Wars and led the United States to behave cautiously in the Middle East and elsewhere. Were the Soviet Union still intact and allied with Iraq, for example, the United States would certainly have thought twice before invading the latter in 2003.

Similarly, although the United States was the clear leader of the Western alliance system throughout the cold war, the need to keep Europe out of Soviet hands (and the concomitant need for some level of tangible allied support) forced Washington to devote considerable effort to consensus building and coordination with its weaker partners. Today, by contrast, the United States has no great power rivals, less need for allied support, and thus a greater capacity to go it alone.[25] To the extent that allies are needed (to legitimate a particular course of action or to provide overseas facilities, for example), the unipole has a greater ability to pick and choose among different alliance partners.

As Snyder has shown, alliance ties in bipolarity were to large extent structurally determined.[26] In unipolarity, by contrast, structural imperatives are either absent or greatly diminished. With less need for a large

[25] Emphasizing and exploring the value of the go-it-alone option is Lloyd Gruber, *Ruling the World: Power Politics and the Rise of Supranational Institutions* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000).

[26] See Snyder (fn. 2).

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and cohesive alliance network, the unipole (in this case the United States) has greater leeway to opt for its preferences. Thus, the United States, as the unipolar power, will be more inclined to align with states for which it feels a strong ideological affinity (for example, its fellow democracies) or with states that demonstrate a clear willingness to follow its lead. It is therefore no accident that the Bush administration has explicitly endorsed reliance on ad hoc "coalitions of the willing." Or as former secretary of defense Donald Rumsfeld put it in 2005: "[T]he mission determines the coalition."[27]

### Increased Concerns about the Power of the Unipole

The second effect follows directly from the first. Unipolarity inevitably creates concerns about the imbalance of power in the unipole's favor. Again, this is an inevitable structural feature of unipolarity: because the unipole can act on its own and because its actions will have far-reaching effects, all states must worry about what it might do and how its actions might affect them. Even if the unipole is not hostile and does not pose an existential threat to most other states, it may still take actions that inadvertently harm the interests of others. Thus, even longtime allies will be concerned about the concentration of power in the unipole's hands.[28]

This structural feature of unipolarity explains why concerns about U.S. primacy predated the election of George W. Bush in 2000. French and German leaders began voicing concerns about U.S. "hyperpower" and "unilateralism" when Bill Clinton was president, and NATO's efforts to deal with the Bosnian crisis in the mid-1990s and the 1999 Kosovo War were punctuated by intense intra-alliance quarrels, considerable resentment at U.S. high-handedness, and growing awareness of Europe's excessive dependence on U.S. power. In 2000 the official Russian National Security Strategy warned of "attempts to create an international relations structure based on domination by Western countries . . . under U.S. leadership and designed for unilateral solutions (including the use of military force) to key issues in world politics." Or as a senior Chinese diplomat told an American reporter that same year: "How can we base our national security on your assurances of good will?" Oxford historian Timothy Garton Ash captured this concern perfectly in his comment that "the problem with American power is not that it is

[27] Interview with Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld, *Der Spiegel*, October 31, 2005; and also the preface to *The National Security Strategy of the United States of America* (Washington, D.C.: The White House, September 2002).

[28] This issue is explored at length in Walt (fn. 8), chap. 2.

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American. The problem is simply the power. It would be dangerous even for an archangel to wield so much power."[29]

Subsequent events have shown that other states' concerns were not misplaced. The U.S. decision to invade Iraq created a failed state there; that situation in turn raised Turkish concerns about Kurdish nationalism, increased Sunni Arab concerns about Iran's ascendancy, and also heightened Israeli concerns about Iran and Islamic jihadism. The invasion also led indirectly to terrorist bombings in Madrid and possibly London and contributed to rising oil prices for everyone. The United States did not intend to produce any of these effects, of course, but each of them underscores the reasons why even friendly states worry about the imbalance of power in the unipole's favor.

## Greater Obstacles to Counterhegemonic Balancing

Even if other states now worry about the unipole's dominant power position, the condition of unipolarity also creates greater obstacles to the formation of an effective balancing coalition. When one state is far stronger than the others, it takes a larger coalition to balance it, and assembling such a coalition entails larger transaction costs and more daunting dilemmas of collective action. In particular, each member of the countervailing coalition will face greater incentives to free ride or pass the buck, unless it is clear that the unipolar power threatens all of them more or less equally and they are able to develop both a high degree of trust and some way to share the costs and risks fairly. Moreover, even if a balancing coalition begins to emerge, the unipole can try to thwart it by adopting a divide-and-conquer strategy: punishing states that join the opposition while rewarding those that remain aloof or support the unipole instead.

These structural obstacles would exist regardless of who the single superpower was, but a counterhegemonic alliance against the United States faces an additional nonstructural barrier. The United States is

[29] In the 1990s French foreign minister Hubert Vedrine repeatedly complained about American "hyperpower" and once declared that "the entire foreign policy of France . . . is aimed at making the world of tomorrow composed of several poles, not just one," and German chancellor Gerhard Schroder warned that the danger of American "unilateralism" was "undeniable." See Craig R. Whitney, "NATO at 50: With Nations at Odds, Is It a Misalliance," *New York Times,* February 15, 1999; "Russia's National Security Concept," *Arms Control Today* 30, no. 1 (2000), 15; Eric Eckholm, "China Says U.S. Missile Shield Could Force a Nuclear Buildup," *New York Times,* May 11, 2000, A1, A16; and Timothy Garton Ash, "The Peril of Too Much Power," *New York Times*, April 9, 2002. Similar statements acknowledging the resentment and concern generated by U.S. power include *The National Defense Strategy of the United States of America* (Washington, D.C., Department of Defense, March 2005), 5; Max Boot, "Resentment: It Comes with the Territory," *Washington Post,* March 3, 2003; and William Kristol and Robert Kagan, "The Present Danger," *National Interest,* no. 59 (Spring 2000).

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the sole great power in the Western hemisphere, while the other major powers are all located on the Eurasian landmass. As a result, these states tend to worry more about each other; furthermore, many have seen the United States as the perfect ally against some nearby threat. Accordingly, they are even less likely to join a coalition against the United States, even if U.S. power is substantially greater. Assembling a vast counter-American coalition would require considerable diplomatic virtuosity and would probably arise only if the United States began to pose a genuine existential threat. It is unlikely to do so, however, in part because this same geographic isolation dampens American concerns about potential Eurasian rivals.[30] America's geopolitical isolation has been an advantage throughout its history, and it remains an important asset today.[31]

## Credibility and Leverage

Alliances depend in part on credibility—on the belief that commitments will be honored—and unipolarity is likely to have somewhat contradictory effects on the role that credibility plays in contemporary alliances. Thus, because the unipole has less need for allies, its partners have more reason to doubt any pledges it does make. During the cold war, for example, U.S. allies in Asia and Europe could be fairly certain that Washington would come to their aid if they were threatened, because it was manifestly in America's interest to prevent Soviet gains. Today, however, other states cannot be as certain that the United States would back them out of its own self-interest and must therefore work harder to keep U.S. commitments intact. This tendency may create certain complications for the United States when it seeks to reassure allies, but it also means that the United States should be able to exact a higher price for the support it does provide.

A corollary to the above argument is that medium and small powers will have less influence and leverage than they enjoyed under bipolarity. During the cold war medium and small powers gained leverage with

[30] This conclusion would not follow if the United States faced potential peer competitors in the Western Hemisphere. Security competition between the United States and any serious hemispheric rivals would be intense, and would undoubtedly include efforts by both sides to recruit allies to their cause from around the world, just as the Confederacy tried to obtain allied support from Britain during the American Civil War.

[31] As Wohlforth points out, geography and power reinforce each other in the present global context. If any Eurasian power tries to balance the United States by mobilizing its internal capabilities, this action will alarm its neighbors and encourage them to seek help from the United States. Even a concerted effort by several Eurasian powers to increase their own strength and ally more closely together might be self-defeating if it encouraged others to shift toward the United States. See Wohlforth (fn. 19), 107–8.

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Washington (or Moscow) by playing the two superpowers off against each other. Thus, states like India and Egypt sometimes managed to get benefits from both superpowers simultaneously or were able to use the threat of realignment to extract additional concessions or benefits from their current patron.[32]

Under unipolarity, by contrast, weaker states are less able to influence the dominant power's conduct by threatening to realign or by warning that they may be defeated or overthrown if not given sufficient support by their patron. Not only do weaker states lack an attractive alternative partner, but the unipole needs them less and thus will worry less about possible defection or defeat.

This situation does not mean that weaker partners have no leverage at all. The unipole's position of primacy does not give it complete control; that could be obtained only by conquest and occupation. (And as the U.S. experience in Iraq shows, there are real limits to a unipole's ability to compel obedience even under these conditions.) Even if the structural distribution of capabilities enhances the unipole's leverage, much weaker states may still control unique assets and may therefore gain some capacity to bargain with the dominant state. For example, a weak state that happens to occupy a critical strategic location may be able to extract concessions from the unipole, as Uzbekistan and Pakistan did after September 11.[33]

On average, however, the shift to unipolarity will reduce the leverage available to medium and smaller powers and, as discussed below, will encourage them to rely on alternative strategies of alliance maintenance.

Thus, unipolarity fundamentally alters the tension between the twin dangers of abandonment and entrapment. Weaker clients have to worry more about abandonment—because the unipole needs them less—and the unipole will be less likely to be dragged into conflict by reckless or adventuristic allies. Unipolar powers may be more likely to fight foolish wars, of course (in part because they need not fear great power opposition), but they will not be doing so because they are worried that a strategically vital ally may defect or be defeated if they remain aloof. For great powers, in short, the abandonment/entrapment dilemma will

[32] On this pattern, see Alvin Z. Rubinstein, *Red Star on the Nile: The Soviet-Egyptian Influence Relationship since the June War* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1977); Warren Bass, *Support Any Friend: Kennedy's Middle East Policy and the Making of the U.S.-Israeli Alliance* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), chap. 3; and Walt (fn. 10), chap. 8.

[33] Afghan president Hamid Karzai has also been able to extract various concessions from the United States, largely by threatening to collapse and thereby re-create a safe haven for the Taliban and possibly a resurgent al-Qaeda.

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be most intense under multipolarity, somewhat diminished under bipolarity, and least worrisome under unipolarity.

By contrast, the recent Iraq war suggests that weaker states are *more* vulnerable to entrapment in unipolarity, because the unipole can put great pressure on them to join any coalitions of the willing it sees fit to promote. But if the unipole's judgment is faulty (as it was in Iraq), its reluctant partners will find themselves paying costs they had not anticipated.

## Distraction or Disengagement?

A final feature of unipolarity is the tendency for the unipole to be distracted by a wide array of foreign policy problems. If the unipole chooses to try and mold the system to its liking or to play an active role as the residual provider of collective goods, then it will inevitably be involved in many issues and will find it difficult to keep its attention focused on any single one. For instance, the U.S. invasion of Iraq gave North Korea the opportunity to advance its nuclear ambitions, and the current U.S. preoccupation with the war on terror has made it easier for China to expand its influence in Asia.[34] Weaker states, by contrast, will focus their attention on a small number of vital problems, including efforts to manipulate the unipolar power. Thus, although there is much to be said for being number one, being the dominant power also entails a number of pitfalls.[35]

This possibility is not structurally ordained, however. As noted above, unipolarity implies fewer structural constraints on the unipole and thus grants it greater freedom of action. In theory, therefore, a unipole could choose to refrain from direct efforts to manage or shape the system, because it was confident that it enjoyed a considerable margin of safety and was convinced that letting other states deal with emerging security threats would conserve its power and its unipolar status for as long as possible. In other words, one can imagine a unipole choosing to pass the buck (or free ride) on various regional powers, instead of letting them pass the buck to it, and a number of scholars have recently advocated that the United States move in this direction.[36]

[34] See Dana Dillon and John J. Tkacic, Jr., "China's Quest for Asia," *Policy Review* 134 (December–January 2005–6); and Bruce Vaughn and Wayne Morrison, *China-Southeast Asia Relations: Trends Issues, and Implications for the United States* (Washington, D.C.: Congressional Research Service, April 2006).

[35] See Stephen M. Walt, "American Primacy: Its Prospects and Pitfalls," *Naval War College Review* 55, no. 2 (Spring 2002).

[36] See especially Barry R Posen, "A Strategy of Restraint," *American Interest* 3, no. 2 (November–December 2007). For similar arguments, see Walt (fn. 8), chap. 5; Mearsheimer (fn. 11), chap. 10;

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The United States has not pursued this course since the advent of unipolarity, however; that is, it did not try to disengage from its earlier cold war alliances. In fact, Washington has if anything become more energetic in trying to shape the system: expanding NATO, putting pressure on rogue states, and actively trying to export democracy. But the assertive nature of U.S. policy is not solely the result of its structural position as the unipole. In addition to the outward thrust of liberal ideology (with its built-in universalism), the U.S. effort to exert active global leadership is also an artifact of the particular historical circumstances in which unipolarity emerged. Having established a global military position in the context of the cold war, the United States decided not to liquidate it once the cold war ended. Had the United States achieved unipolar status directly from multipolarity (for example, had it become the unipole in 1920), then it might well have refrained from the sort of global military role that it built during the cold war and has maintained ever since.

## III. Alliance Strategies in Unipolarity

What forms will unipolar alliances take and what strategies are the member states likely to pursue? As discussed above, most alliances in unipolarity will reflect either an effort to align against the unipole or an attempt to accommodate it and exploit its power. The responses, depicted in Figure 1, range from extreme opposition to the unipole to formal alignment with it.

### Hard Balancing

As discussed above, one obvious reaction to unipolarity would be the formation of a countervailing coalition to contain the strongest state. This response is what classical balance of power theory would lead us to expect, and a number of scholars have predicted precisely this outcome over the past decade.[37]

In Waltz's classic formulation, states can balance either by internal effort or by cooperating with others. In either case, the aim is to strengthen one's ability to defend one's interests in the uncertain world of anarchy. Both internal and external balancing can be directed against very specific threats (for example, as in a defensive alliance that com-

and Christopher Layne, "The Unipolar Illusion Revisited: The Coming End of the United States' Unipolar Moment," *International Security* 31 (Fall 2006).

[37] See Waltz, "Structural Realism after the Cold War," *International Security* 25 (Summer 2000); Layne (fn. 6); and Charles A. Kupchan, "Life after Pax Americana," *World Policy Journal* 16 (Fall 1999).

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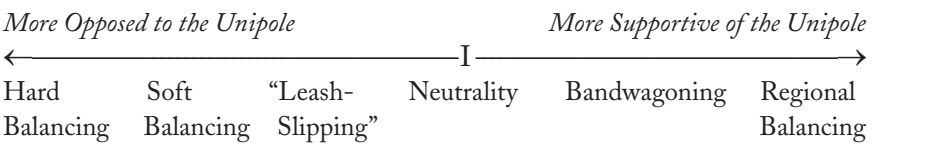



FIGURE 1

mits the members to war if either is attacked by a particular enemy), but it can also consist of more general treaties of mutual support regardless of the precise identity of the threat.[38]

Although the focus in this article is on alliance strategies, there are a number of examples of states seeking to balance the unipole (the United States) via internal effort. For example, it is likely that efforts by Iran and North Korea to gain nuclear weapons are inspired in part by the desire to deter a U.S. attack or deflect U.S. pressure.[39] In addition, several recent accounts suggest that part of the motivation behind A. Q. Khan's successful effort to spread nuclear technology was a desire to constrain American power and that Khan's objective was shared by prominent Pakistani officials.[40] Similarly, part of the motivation behind China's military buildup is almost certainly the desire to counter U.S. military dominance in the Far East, even if it does not yet involve an explicit attempt to alter the global balance of power.[41]

[38] In their critique of the concept of soft balancing, Wohlforth and Brooks suggest that balancing should be confined to "action taken to check a potential hegemon" and that "balance of power theory is not relevant to state behavior unrelated to systemic concentrations of power." See Stephen G. Brooks and William Wohlforth, "Hard Times for Soft Balancing," *International Security* 30 (Summer 2005), 78. Yet this formulation would eliminate any alignments that were not counterhegemonic but still entailed two or more states agreeing to combine their capabilities in ways that would enhance their security, including their security vis-à-vis the unipole. This conception would also eliminate alliances formed when there was no potential hegemon in sight, but when states nonetheless faced security problems that they wished to address by joining forces with others.

[39] As Iranian reformist politician Mostafa Tajazadeh observed just before the war in Iraq: "It is basically a matter of equilibrium. If I don't have a nuclear bomb, I don't have security." Quoted in Ray Takeyh, "Iran's Nuclear Calculations," *World Policy Journal* 20 (Summer 2003), 24.

[40] Thus, Gordon Corera argues that a primary motivation for Pakistan's clandestine nuclear exports was the belief that it was in "Pakistan's national interest for more countries to have bombs, thereby . . . reducing the power of the United States." General Mirza Azlam Beg, former chief of staff of the Pakistani Army, reportedly believed that the global spread of nuclear weapons would hasten the arrival of a multipolar world and facilitate the formation of an alliance of "strategic defiance" linking Iran, Pakistan, and China. Similarly, Khan himself argued that his efforts had "disturbed all their [U.S.] strategic plans, the balance of power and blackmailing potential in this part of the world." See Corera, *Shopping for Bombs: Nuclear Proliferation, Global Insecurity, and the Rise and Fall of the A. Q. Khan Network* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 74–76; and Matthew Kroenig, "The Enemy of My Enemy Is My Customer: Why States Provide Sensitive Nuclear Assistance" (Ph.D. diss., University of California, Berkeley, 2007).

[41] For competing perspectives on the purposes of China's buildup, see Thomas J. Christensen, "Posing Problems without Catching Up: China's Rise and Challenges for U.S. Security," *International*

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Turning to external efforts, one can in fact find a few examples of hard balancing against the American unipole, although even these examples fall short of the classic balance of power ideal. Security cooperation between Syria and Iran increased markedly following the U.S. invasion of Iraq, and American officials have accused both countries of aiding the Iraqi insurgents. While obviously contrary to U.S. interests, this response is hardly surprising, given America's stated desire for "regime change" in both countries. Although clearly less than a formal alliance, this sort of collusion still fits the standard definition of balancing. By strengthening the insurgency in Iraq, Syria and Iran sought to keep the United States bogged down and thus unable to put direct military pressure on them.[42] Other oft-cited examples include the continuing security partnership between Russia and China, the multilateral Shanghai Cooperation Organization (which brought Russia, China, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan together in 2001 for the purpose of "strengthening mutual trust and good-neighborly friendship among the member states . . . [and] devoting themselves jointly to preserving and safeguarding regional peace, security and stability"), or earlier security cooperation between rogue states such as Saddam Hussein's Iraq and Slobodan Milosevic's Serbia.[43] Each of these efforts seems to have been intended either to strengthen the parties vis-à-vis the United States or to limit U.S. influence in particular regions (for example, Central Asia). Such actions should be seen as a form of balancing (that is, states are seeking to enhance their security through combined or coordinated action) even if they lack the capabilities necessary to create a true counterpoise to the current unipole.

Yet as several scholars have noted previously, what is striking about these efforts is how tentative and half-hearted most of them are, especially when one considers the other major powers. There have been no attempts to form a formal alliance whose explicit purpose is to contain the United States (even though leaders like Venezuela's Hugo Chávez

*Security* 25 (Spring 2001); Brooks and Wohlforth (fn. 38), 87; Lieber and Alexander (fn. 20); Robert J. Art, Stephen Brooks, William Wohlforth, Keir Lieber, and Gerard Alexander, "Correspondence: Striking the Balance," *International Security* 30 (Winter 2005–6).

[42] See Michael Slackman, "Wary of U.S, Syria and Iran Strengthen Ties," *New York Times,* June 25, 2006.

[43] As a Pentagon spokesman put it: "These are two countries, both subject to attack by forces within NATO. They both have primarily Soviet-built or purchased air-defense systems, and they are both subject to international embargoes. So they obviously might look for ways to work together." See Philip Shenon, "Crisis in the Balkans: the Iraqi Connection," *New York Times*, April 1, 1999, A16. See also "Shanghai Cooperation Organization," at http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/int/sco.htm; and "Declaration on Establishment of Shanghai Cooperation Organization" (2001), at www.sectsco.org/html/00088.html.

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have called for such arrangements), and even the most far-reaching informal efforts have been fairly modest.[44] Equally important, these efforts do not appear to be driven largely by structural concerns (that is, by the distribution of capabilities), and there has been little or no effort to assemble a countervailing coalition of even approximately equal capabilities.

The relative dearth of hard balancing is consistent with the view that alliances form not in response to power alone but in response to the level of threat. States will not want to incur the various costs of balancing (increased military spending, loss of autonomy, punishment by the unipole, and so on) unless they believe doing so is truly necessary. In particular, states will not engage in hard balancing against the unipole if its power is not perceived as posing an imminent threat to their security. If the unipole happens to be geographically distant from the potential balancers (and thus poses less of a threat to them) and if it is not believed to have aggressive intentions (that is, does not appear eager to conquer them), then potential balancers will be unlikely to form an overt hard balancing alliance.

This discussion explains why even an administration as unpopular as that of George W. Bush nonetheless has not triggered the formation of a hard balancing coalition. Although other states worry about U.S. power, and states in some regions (for example, the Middle East) have reason to fear U.S. attack, most of the world's major powers do not fear an American invasion. Europeans may dislike U.S. policies, Asians may worry about U.S. judgment, and Chinese leaders may see the United States as a rival over the longer term, but they do not perceive the United States as having expansionist ambitions on a par with those harbored in the past by Napoleonic France, Wilhelmine and Nazi Germany, or the Soviet Union. If the United States were to acquire such ambitions and were it to begin to act upon them, a hard balancing coalition would almost certainly form. Absent such aims or behaviors, however, hard balancing will remain rare.

## Soft Balancing

Instead of hard balancing, efforts to join forces to counter U.S. power or limit U.S. influence have generally taken the form of soft balancing. These actions have been directed against specific U.S. policies rather

[44] See Stephen M. Walt, "Keeping the World 'Off-Balance': Self-Restraint and U.S. Foreign Policy," in Ikenberry (fn. 5); also Brooks and Wohlforth (fn. 38); and Lieber and Alexander (fn. 20).

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than against the overall distribution of power itself.[45] Hard balancing usually focuses on the overall balance of power and seeks to assemble a countervailing coalition that will be strong enough to keep the dominant power in check, no matter what policies it decides to pursue. By contrast, soft balancing accepts the current balance of power but seeks to obtain better outcomes within it, by assembling countervailing coalitions designed to thwart or impede specific policies. In the current era of U.S. dominance, therefore, soft balancing is the *conscious coordination of diplomatic action in order to obtain outcomes contrary to U.S. preferences, outcomes that could not be gained if the balancers did not give each other some degree of mutual support*. Instead of combining military forces or conducting joint operations, soft balancers combine their diplomatic assets in order to defend their interests. By definition, soft balancing seeks to limit the ability of the United States to impose its preferences on others.

Critics of soft balancing have argued that it is indistinguishable from the normal bargaining that is a constant feature of world politics. They also point out that what might appear to be a balancing response—an increase in military spending, for example—might be the exact opposite, if it were in fact encouraged and welcomed by the unipole, and thus suggest that studies emphasizing the role of soft balancing are inherently nonfalsifiable.[46] These criticisms do not invalidate the concept, but they highlight the importance of gauging motivations when trying to label or explain different alliance responses. If states are in fact choosing to coordinate action, augment their power, and take on new commitments with others, because they are worried about the unipole's dominant position and/or are alarmed by the actions it is undertaking, it is appropriate to regard such behavior as a form of balancing.[47]

If they are coordinating action or taking on new commitments because the unipole has encouraged them to do so, however, then that is obviously not a case of balancing *against* the unipole. Judging whether a particular response is properly seen as balancing requires careful in-

[45] Analyses of soft balancing include Robert A. Pape, "Soft Balancing against the United States," *International Security* 30 (Summer 2005); T. V. Paul, "Soft Balancing in an Age of U.S. Primacy," *International Security* 30 (Summer 2005); Walt (fn. 8); Jeremy Pressman, "If Not Balancing, What?" *Discussion Paper 2004-02* (Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs, Harvard University, 2004); and Kai He and Huiyun Feng, "If Not Soft Balancing, Then What? Reconsidering Soft Balancing and U.S. Policy toward China," *Security Studies* 17 (April–June 2008). Dissenting views are found in Brooks and Wohlforth (fn. 38); and Lieber and Alexander (fn. 20).

[46] See Brooks and Wohlforth (fn. 38); and Art et al. (fn. 41), 190.

[47] He and Feng (fn. 45) contains a useful counter to the critiques of "soft balancing" offered by Wohlforth, Brooks, Lieber, and Alexander (pp. 365–70).

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terpretation, but this qualification hardly means the concept is neither useful nor falsifiable.

The Bush administration's failed effort to obtain UN Security Council authorization for its preventive war against Iraq in 2003 illustrates soft balancing nicely. Although there was broad agreement that Saddam Hussein was a brutal tyrant and broad opposition to Iraq's efforts to obtain weapons of mass destruction, the United States was able to persuade only three other Security Council members to support a second resolution to authorize the use of force. This failure was due in part to growing concerns about U.S. power and the Bush administration's heavy-handed diplomacy, but it was also the result of the ability of France, Russia, and Germany to formulate and maintain a unified position.[48]

The antiwar coalition did not balance in the classic sense (that is, it did not try to resist U.S. armed forces directly or send military support to Iraq), but its collective opposition made it safer for lesser powers such as Cameroon or Mexico to resist U.S. pressure during the critical Security Council debate. The result was classic soft balancing: by adopting a unified position, these states denied the United States the legitimacy it had sought and thereby imposed significantly greater political and economic costs on Bush's decision to go to war.

Yet the diplomacy of the Iraq war also illustrates the limits of soft balancing. The coalition in the Security Council fell far short of a formal alliance, and the defeat suffered by the United States in the Security Council did not prevent it from going to war. Moreover, the Bush administration was able to obtain political support (as well as symbolic military participation) from Great Britain, Spain, Italy, Poland, Hungary, Bulgaria, Romania, and a number of other countries.[49] These successes remind us that NATO expansion has made it easier for the United States to employ a divide-and-conquer strategy within the alliance, because expansion has brought in a set of new members that were especially interested in forging close ties with the United States. Rumsfeld's dismissive remarks about "old Europe" and his praise for "new Europe"

[48] As a former U.S. official, Stephen Sestanovich, later commented: "The anti-American stance is a familiar French thing. . . . After they'd been French for awhile, they'd stop being French. People thought they understood the limits of the game and it would be over at a certain point. And then it wasn't. And it turned out that the Russians were prepared to be French, *as long as the French were being French.*" Quoted in Nicholas Lemann, "How It Came to War," *New Yorker*, March 31, 2003, emphasis added.

[49] See Richard Bernstein, "Poland Upstages, and Irks, European Powerhouses," *New York Times*, May 13, 2003; and Ian Fisher, "Romania, Wooed by U.S., Looks to a Big NATO Role," *New York Times*, October 23, 2002.

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may have been undiplomatic, but his comments contained more than a grain of truth.

This last point offers several additional clues about the forms that balancing takes under the condition of unipolarity. First, states that are worried about the sole superpower may tend to engage in covert, tacit, or informal forms of security cooperation, to make it less likely that the sole superpower is aware of their actions or in the hopes that it will choose not to react. U.S. leaders would almost certainly try to disrupt a formal anti-U.S. coalition, for example, but they might be less willing or able to interfere with informal or tacit arrangements that nonetheless have an anti-American dimension. Thus, the sharing of nuclear and missile technology by North Korea, Pakistan, and Iran might offer an example of this sort of behavior: while falling well short of a formal alliance, it is also more than a purely commercial transaction.[50] Collaboration between sympathetic terrorist groups offers another example of this phenomenon, albeit one operating between nonstate actors. Finally, as the Iraq case suggests, soft balancing may also be undertaken to constrain the sole superpower from taking actions that the balancers oppose and thus to force it to adjust its policies along the lines preferred by the balancers.

More recent responses to U.S. power are consistent with these conjectures. Both the Six-Party Talks on North Korea's nuclear program and the EU3 negotiations with Iran served a dual purpose: on the one hand, they sought to bring greater pressure to bear on the suspected proliferators; on the other hand, they also make it more difficult (at least in the short term) for the United States to take unilateral action. In each case, the effectiveness of this constraining effort is magnified by coordination among the non-U.S. members: if the EU3 had not taken a unified position and stuck to it, the United States might have adopted policies that are even more confrontational than those it has adopted to date.[51] Indeed, the inability of the United States to obtain sufficient backing from the EU3, China, and Russia eventually forced the Bush administration to take a more forthcoming position vis-à-vis direct negotiation with Tehran, a position it had previously rejected strenuously.[52]

[50] This is a central theme in Kroenig (fn. 40).

[51] Of course, having persuaded the United States to try negotiations without success (so far), the EU3 may be unable to convincingly oppose a subsequent U.S. decision to use force.

[52] For a brief summary, see Paul Kerr, "U.S. Offers Iran Direct Talks," *Arms Control Today* 36 (June 2006); and Matt Dupuis, "U.S. Shifts Policy on Iran," *Arms Control Today* 36 (April 2006).

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## "Leash-Slipping": Alignments Intended to Enhance Autonomy

Under unipolarity states may also form an alliance not to balance or constrain the unipole but to reduce their dependence on the unipole by pooling their own capabilities. The objective is not to balance the unipole in the near term but to gain a measure of autonomy and hedge against future uncertainties. Layne has termed this response "leash-slipping," which he describes as "a form of insurance against a hegemon that might someday exercise its power in a predatory and menacing fashion."[53] Along with Jones, Posen, and Art, Layne sees the European Unions's recent efforts to develop a common foreign and security policy—and especially the European Security and Defense Policy (ESDP) adopted in 1999—as an initiative designed to enable European states to protect their security interests without having to depend on U.S. military assets (and thus on U.S. approval). In part this desire reflects growing disagreements with some elements of U.S. foreign policy, but it also reflects the awareness that the United States may not always be willing to act on Europe's behalf. To increase its own leverage and autonomy, therefore, the EU has been enhancing its own defense production capability and increasing its capacity to impose effective multilateral economic sanctions.[54]

This motivation for enhanced alignment is not purely structural, however. As the EU case illustrates, the desire to gain greater autonomy is most likely to arise when a group of states has become too dependent on the unipole's assets. Having allowed their military capabilities to atrophy during the cold war (because U.S. protection could be taken for granted and free riding was easy), the European states now find themselves in a position where they must develop autonomous military capabilities or eschew a major global role and remain dependent on U.S. leadership.

As Posen has emphasized, Europe's future course is not preordained.[55] A significant improvement in European defense capabilities will be expensive, and Europeans will undoubtedly be tempted to let Uncle Sam do most of the heavy lifting. The replacement of German chancellor Gerhard Schroeder and French president Jacques Chirac by

[53] See Layne (fn. 36), 29–30.

[54] Although some of these scholars use the language of balancing, leash-slipping should be seen as a distinct alternative to either soft or hard balancing. See in particular Seth G. Jones, *The Rise of Europe: Great Power Politics and Security Cooperation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006); Layne (fn. 36), 34–36; Barry R. Posen, "ESDP and the Structure of World Power," *International Spectator* 39 (January 2004), 5–17; Robert J. Art, "Europe Hedges Its Security Bets," in Paul, Wirtz, and Fortmann (fn. 5), 179–213; and idem, "Correspondence: Striking the Balance" (fn. 41).

[55] Posen (fn. 54), 8–9.

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Angela Merkel and Nicolas Sarkozy has already produced a distinct warming in transatlantic relations, and this trend is reinforced by the chastening effects of America's Iraq debacle, Russia's reemergence as a more consequential and assertive power, and the unanticipated difficulties that NATO and the United States have encountered in Afghanistan. Under these conditions, European elites worry less about American power and its possible misuse and may be less interested in developing joint capabilities that would reduce dependence on Washington. It therefore remains to be seen whether Europe will actually strive to build truly autonomous capabilities.[56] Given America's long-standing ambivalence about the entire EU project, we should expect the United States to subtly discourage Europe from becoming a peer competitor and to insist that European efforts to increase their defense capabilities occur within the NATO framework, where they remain subject to U.S. control.

## Bandwagoning with the Unipole

Bandwagoning occurs when a state chooses to align with the strongest or most threatening state it faces. It is essentially a form of appeasement: by bandwagoning, threatened states seek to convince the dominant power to leave them alone.[57] Bandwagoning behavior has been historically rare and has generally been confined to very weak and isolated states. The reason is simple: the decision to bandwagon requires the weaker side to put its fate in the hands of a more powerful state whom it suspects (usually with good reason) of harboring hostile intentions. By bandwagoning with the main source of danger, a threatened state accepts greater vulnerability in the hope that the dominant power's appetites are sated or diverted.

Wohlforth suggests that bandwagoning will be more common in unipolarity, both because it is harder to balance against the unipole and because the unipole is in a better position to punish opponents and reward clients.[58] This view has been echoed by neoconservatives

[56] For a detailed argument suggesting that ESDP is not an example of soft balancing but rather is an attempt to develop complementary capabilities within a complex institutional context, see Jolyon Howorth and Anand Menon, "Complexity and International Institutions: Why the European Union Isn't Balancing the United States" (Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Political Science Association, Chicago, September 1–4, 2007).

[57] For detailed discussions of bandwagoning behavior, see Walt (fn. 10), chaps. 2, 5; and Mearsheimer (fn. 11), 162–64. A slightly different conception can be found in Randall K. Schweller, "Bandwagoning for Profit: Bringing the Revisionist State Back In," *International Security* 19 (Summer 1994).

[58] See Wohlforth (fn. 5), where he suggests that today's "second tier states" (all major powers save the United States) "face structural incentives similar to lesser states in a region dominated by one power, such as North America" (p. 25). In other words, these states are likely to bandwagon in unpolarity, just as Canada and Mexico have done in the Western hemisphere.

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and other hard-liners in the United States, who predicted that various states would bandwagon once the United States demonstrated its power and resolve by conquering Iraq.[59] To date, however, examples of genuine bandwagoning—that is, pro-U.S. alignments induced primarily by fear—are difficult to find. The United States gave convincing demonstrations of its military dominance on several occasions between 1990 and 2003, yet the targets of subsequent U.S. threats—Iraq, North Korea, Serbia, and, to a lesser extent, Syria, China, and Iran—were not visibly cowed by these actions. For example, the stunning U.S. victory over Iraq in 1991 did not convince Saddam Hussein to kowtow to the United States and did not make leaders like Slobodan Milosevic or Hafez el-Assad more compliant with U.S. preferences. Similarly, Saddam's ouster in 2003 did not trigger the wave of pro-American shifts that advocates of the war had forecast. Although a number of neighboring countries muted their anti-American rhetoric temporarily, there are few unambiguous instances where states abandoned well-established policy positions because they feared U.S. pressure.[60] Desert Storm, the Kosovo War, the ouster of the Taliban, and Operation Iraqi Freedom all demonstrated that the United States had unmatched military power—as if anyone had real doubts—but these actions did not provoke a wave of realignments toward the United States.

True bandwagoning will be rare—even in unipolarity—because it requires weak states to place their trust in a stronger power with which they have significant conflicts of interest and which is probably directing latent or overt threats at them. In general, bandwagoning is most likely to occur when a weak state believes that aligning with the dominant power will eliminate or deflect the threat and thereby advance

[59] Some two years before the invasion of Iraq, neoconservative Richard Perle predicted that a successful war would cause other states in the Middle East to cave in to U.S. demands. As he put it in 2001: "After we've destroyed the last remnants of the Taliban in Afghanistan . . . and we then go on to destroy the regime of Saddam Hussein . . . I think we would have an impressive case to make to the Syrians, the Somalis and others. We could deliver a short message, a two-word message: 'You're next. You're next unless you stop the practice of supporting terrorism.'. . . I think there's a reasonable prospect that . . . they will decide to get out of the terrorist business." See Richard Perle, "Should Iraq Be Next?" *San Diego Union-Tribune,* December 16, 2001. The *Wall Street Journal* invoked the same logic after Baghdad fell; see "Those Dictator Dominos," *Wall Street Journal,* April 15, 2003.

[60] Syria did not abandon its claims to the Golan Heights, North Korea did not become more forthcoming in the multiparty negotiations over its nuclear program, and Iran has remained defiant with regard to its own nuclear development efforts as well. Iran did make an indirect offer to negotiate with the United States in the immediate aftermath of Operation Iraqi Freedom, but the overture was rejected by the Bush administration and led nowhere. See Seymour Hersh, "The Syrian Bet," *New Yorker,* July 28, 2003; Gary Samore, "The Korean Nuclear Crisis," *Survival* 45 (Spring 2003); Gareth Porter, "Burnt Offering," *American Prospect,* May 21, 2006; Flynt Leverett, *Dealing with Tehran: Assessing U.S. Diplomatic Options with Iran* (Washington, D.C.: New America Foundation, 2006), 12–13; and Kamal Nazer Yasin, "U.S. Hard-line Policies Helped Bring about Reformists' Demise in Iran," *Eurasia Insight*, March 8, 2004, at www.eurasianet.org.

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its main interests. Yet such circumstances will be rare, because serious military threats generally do not arise unless conflicts of interest are pronounced and compromise is therefore elusive. Put differently, if the conflict of interest were small and if it were easy for a weaker power to adjust its policies, the stronger power would not have to resort to overt threats in order to induce compliance. Overt threats arise when the clash of interests is more substantial and when regimes whose interests are sharply at odds with those of the United States are unlikely to abandon their core goals, even if they may occasionally back down over minor issues.

Libya's decision to abandon its anti-Western position and give up its unconventional weapons programs illustrates this basic logic well. Although fear of American power played a role in Libyan decision making, the primary motivation for the decision was Libya's deteriorating economic condition and the concomitant need to escape the highly effective set of multilateral sanctions imposed after the bombing of Pan Am flight 103 in 1988.[61] As Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi's son, Saif ul-Islam Gaddafi, explained: "The first reason (for the decision to give up WMD) is political, economic, cultural, and military gains that were promised by the Western party. . . . The temptation was really great." Libya realigned primarily to end sanctions and obtain economic benefits and only in part because it feared the direct application of U.S. military power.[62] Equally important, convincing Gaddafi to abandon WMD, terrorism, and other "rogue state" policies required the United States to formally abandon the goal of regime change and to agree that Gaddafi would remain in power.[63] U.S. capabilities clearly played a role

[61] See Ronald Bruce St. John, "Libya Is Not Iraq: Preemptive Strikes, WMD, and Diplomacy, *Middle East Journal* 58 (Summer 2004); Flynt Leverett, "Why Libya Gave Up on the Bomb," *New York Times*, January 23, 2004; and Martin Indyk, "The Iraq War Did Not Force Gadaffi's Hand, *Financial Times*, March 9, 2004.

[62] Libyans clearly saw long-term benefits to associating with the West. As Gaddafi's son put it: "If you have the backing of the West and the United States, you will be able to achieve in a few years what you could not achieve in 50." See "Qadhafi's Son Says Libya Was Promised Economic, Military Gains for WMD Disarmament," *Global Security Newswire*, Nuclear Threat Initiative, March 10, 2004, at www.nti.org/d_newsire/issues/2004_3_10.html (accessed on September 12, 2008). According to a comprehensive study by Wyn Q. Bowen: "The decision to disarm was the result of the Gaddafi regime's decade-long quest to end the UN and American embargoes imposed on Libya as a result of its past terrorist related activities. . . . [T]he Iraq war in 2003 and the interception of nuclear technology en route to Libya later that year were not principal driving factors in the decision to forego WMD. Nevertheless, both appeared to increase the pressure on the Gadhafi regime and in doing so may have cemented the decision that had already been taken on WMD, and possibly accelerated the process." See Bowen, "Libya and Nuclear Proliferation: Stepping Back from the Brink," *Adelphi Paper 380* (London: International Institute of Strategic Studies, 2006).

[63] See the superb analysis in Bruce W. Jentleson and Christopher A. Whytock, "Who 'Won' Libya?: The Force-Diplomacy Debate and Its Implications for Theory and Policy," *International Security* 30 (Winter 2005–6), esp. 72–75.

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in Gaddafi's decision—in this sense, he was choosing not to resist the dominant global power—and thus qualifies as bandwagoning. But the case is not as clear-cut as it is sometimes portrayed, and it is hard to think of other examples.

To be sure, many states are mindful of U.S. power and wary of incurring Washington's wrath. But being prudent in the face of U.S. power is a far cry from bandwagoning, and such states do not endorse U.S. positions or lend direct support to U.S. foreign policy efforts.

### Regional Balancing

Under unipolarity, an alternative motivation for close ties with the dominant power is the desire for protection, normally against some sort of regional threat. Thus, what might at first glance appear to be bandwagoning (that is, more and more states aligning with the unipole) may actually be a specific form of balancing, where the threat to be countered is a neighboring power or some other local problem.

This motivation for alignment is not new, of course. Throughout the cold war local powers sought help from one of the superpowers (and occasionally both) in order to deal with nearby challengers. North and South Korea, North and South Vietnam, Israel, Angola, Cuba, Pakistan, Ethiopia, Somalia, and a host of others sought U.S. or Soviet support to meet a threat from a nearby power (or in some cases, to quell an internal challenge). These concerns made the United States an especially attractive ally for the medium powers of Europe and Asia: it was strong enough to provide an effective deterrent against the Soviet Union, but it was also far enough away not to pose an equally serious danger. Here the distribution of capabilities and the geographic location of the major powers combined to make alignment with the United States especially attractive for states on the periphery of the Soviet empire. As a result, the United States was able to bring together the industrial powers of Western Europe and Japan (and to some degree China) in an anti-Soviet coalition, while the USSR was forced to rely on weak and unpopular regimes such as Angola, Ethiopia, South Yemen, and North Korea.[64]

Similar motivations remain evident today, with geography once again making U.S. power both less threatening and more highly valued. In Europe, U.S allies continue to favor an American military presence as an insurance policy against any future renationalization of foreign policy, a development that could turn Europe back toward rivalry and

[64] See Walt (fn. 10), chap. 8.

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conflict. Although this possibility might seem remote, the fear has been real enough to convince many Europeans that keeping the American "night watchman" in place is still worth it.[65] Similarly, a desire to enhance their security against regional threats (including a resurgent Russia) explains why East European states like Poland, Hungary, and the Baltic countries were so eager to join NATO and so willing to curry favor with Washington by backing the Iraq war. According to Piotr Ogrodzinski, director of the America department of the Polish Foreign Ministry: "This is a country that thinks seriously about its security. There's no doubt that for such a country, it's good to be a close ally of the United States." Or as a leading Polish newspaper opined in 2001: "Poland has a tragic historical experience behind it, and it needs an ally on which it can depend."[66] It is therefore not surprising that new Europe remains more pro-American than old Europe, given that the former has a more obvious reason to worry about a resurgent great power to the East.

In Asia, the end of the cold war did not eliminate the desire for U.S. protection. In addition to general concerns about the stability of governments in North Korea, Indonesia, and elsewhere, a number of Asian countries share U.S. concerns about the long-term implications of Chinese economic growth. If China continues to grow and develop, it is likely to translate that increased economic strength into greater military power and regional influence. In addition to Taiwan (which has long sought U.S. protection against pressure from the PRC), Asian countries like Japan, Singapore, Vietnam, Malaysia, Indonesia, the Philippines, and India continue to welcome a close strategic partnership with the United States. Thus, when the United States lost access to its military bases in the Philippines in the late 1980s, Singapore signed a memorandum of understanding giving the U.S. access to facilities there and constructed berthing space (at its own expense) large enough to accommodate U.S. aircraft carriers. Prime Minister

[65] See Robert J. Art, "Why Europe Needs the United States and NATO," *Political Science Quarterly* 111 (Spring 1996); and Christoph Bertram, *Europe in the Balance: Securing the Peace Won in the Cold War* (Washington, D.C.: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 1996).

[66] Quoted in Richard Bernstein, "Poland Upstages, and Irks, European Powerhouses," *New York Times*, May 13, 2003; and "The U.S. and Its Leader Are Popular with Poles," *New York Times*, June 16, 2001, A6.

[67] Lee also said: "If the Americans are not around, [the Japanese] cannot be sure who will protect their oil tankers. So they have to do something themselves. That will trigger the Koreans, who fear the Japanese, then the Chinese. Will India then come down to our seas with two aircraft carriers?" To avoid a regional competition, Lee wanted to "stick with what has worked so far"—the U.S. military presence—which he regarded as "*essential* for the continuation of international law and order in East Asia." Quoted in Yuen Foon Khong, "Coping with Strategic Uncertainty: The Role of Institutions and Soft Balancing in Southeast Asia's Post-Cold War Strategy," in Allen Carlson, Peter Katzenstein, and J. J. Suh, eds., *Rethinking Security in East Asia: Identity, Power, and Efficiency* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004).

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Lee Kwan Yew justified this policy by saying that "nature does not like a vacuum. And if there is a vacuum, somebody will fill it."[67] Malaysia endorsed Singapore's decision and eventually offered the U.S. access to some of its own military installations as well. As one senior Malaysian official commented: "America's presence is certainly needed, at least to balance other power with contrasting ideology in this region . . . the power balance is needed . . . to ensure that other powers that have far-reaching ambitions in Southeast Asia will not find it easy to act against countries in the region."[68] Even Vietnam increasingly sees U.S. power as a useful counterweight to China's looming presence, with the vice chairwoman of the National Assembly's Foreign Affairs Committee declaring that "everyone know[s] we have to keep a fine balance" and emphasizing that Vietnam will neither "lean over" toward Washington nor "bow" to Beijing.[69] Finally, the United States and India have recently signed a far-reaching but controversial agreement for strategic cooperation (including cooperation on nuclear energy) that also reflects shared concerns about China's rise and the overall balance of power in Asia.[70]

The desire for U.S. protection is also evident throughout the Middle East. This motivation is most obvious in the case of Israel—which has depended on a de facto alliance with the United States since the mid-1960s—but it is also central to U.S. relations with Jordan, Saudi Arabia, and Egypt, as well as with a number of smaller Persian Gulf states. Although security cooperation with the United States creates domestic political difficulties for these regimes, they still see it as valuable protection against a variety of internal and external challenges. Indeed, America's military role in the Persian Gulf and Middle East has grown dramatically since the 1991 Gulf War, with the smaller Gulf states (Kuwait, Qatar, Oman, Bahrain) using U.S. power to enhance their freedom of action vis-à-vis their larger neighbors and to help quell potential domestic dissidents. According to Edward Walker of the Middle East Institute: "By seizing on the reform agenda the US has empowered these countries and given them the courage to stand up to the bigger countries."[71]

[68] Quoted in Amitav Acharya, "Containment, Engagement, or Counter-dominance? Malaysia's Response to the Rise of China," in Alastair Iain Johnston and Robert Ross, eds., *Engaging China: The Management of an Emerging Power* (London: Routledge, 1999), 140.

[69] See Jane Perlez, "U.S. Competes with China for Vietnam's Allegiance," *New York Times,* June 19, 2006, A3.

[70] See R. Nicholas Burns, "America's Strategic Opportunity with India," *Foreign Affairs* 86 (November–December 2007); and C. Raja Mohan, "India and the Balance of Power," *Foreign Affairs* 85 (May–June 2006).

[71] Walker adds: "This [trend] started some time ago and Qatar led the way. . . . It capitalized on this to set up a counterforce with other small countries because everyone had suffered under the shadow of the big boys." Saudi political analyst Jamal Khashoggi adds: "They're all trying to score points with

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Last but not least, the heightened fear of international terrorism in the wake of September 11 provides smaller states with yet another incentive for close collaboration with the world's most powerful country. Whatever their other differences may be, most governments are understandably hostile to nonstate movements whose avowed aim is to overthrow existing regimes and foment international conflict and whose preferred tactic is mass violence against innocent civilians. Cooperation against al-Qaeda or its affiliates may fall well short of full alignment, but the shared fear of terrorism does provide another reason for states to overlook their concerns about U.S. power and their reservations about U.S. policies and instead to collaborate with Washington against the shared terrorist danger.[72]

Regional balancing may be a common motivation for alliances with the unipole, but the willingness to ally with the unipole will depend heavily on its geographic proximity and its ability to provide the collective good of security at low cost and risk. As noted above, states often seek alignment with the United States because it is both powerful and far away; they would be much less inclined to form a balancing alliance with a unipole located closer to home. Had the Soviet Union won the cold war and emerged as the unipole, for example, the medium powers in Europe and Asia would have been unlikely to seek it out as a potential balancing partner. Their choice would have been either to try to balance the Soviet colossus themselves (which would not have been easy) or to bandwagon with it, in effect giving Moscow hegemony over all of Eurasia. The fact that regional balancing was a common strategy before the advent of unipolarity underscores the importance of the particular ways that power is distributed in different parts of the globe; indeed, this feature of world politics may be just as significant as the number of poles.

## Summary

When will these different responses be chosen? As discussed above, hard balancing against the United States remains unlikely, partly for geopolitical reasons and partly because the United States, despite its worrisome emphasis on preemption and unilateralism, is not trying to conquer large swaths of the world and so does not pose an existential

the U.S. at the expense of Saudi Arabia." Quoted in Roula Khalaf, "Arab Minnows Make Waves by Defying Big Neighbours," *Financial Times*, April 5, 2004, 5. See also Craig G. Smith, "A Tiny Gulf Kingdom Bets Its Stability on Support for U.S.," *New York Times*, October 24, 2002, A14.

[72] Such efforts include the Proliferation Security Initiative (which seeks to interdict WMD components), a large-scale effort to track the illegal money flows that fund terrorist operations, and other forms of law enforcement and intelligence sharing.

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threat to most countries. In the unlikely event that it did launch an all-out imperial endeavor (or if the other major powers became convinced that it might), hard balancing would be the likely outcome. But so long as that danger is nonexistent or remote, other states will not want to incur the costs and risks entailed in hard balancing.

Instead, medium powers seeking to constrain particular U.S. initiatives through concerted action will rely on some form of soft balancing. We are likely to see soft balancing whenever the United States contemplates preventive war, for example, unless the object of such a policy was seen as equally threatening by the other major powers. Leash-slipping and other attempts to enhance autonomy are likely to occur when weaker states are concerned about the unipole's ability to manage security problems effectively, and thus seeking a way to distance themselves from its initiatives. Thus, the UAE's recent decision to allow France to establish a small military base on its territory can been seen as an effort to make its dependence on U.S. protection less overt in the wake of the U.S. debacle in Iraq and its counterproductive policy of confrontation with Iran. As Gulf expert Shahram Chubin put it: "Most of the states in the Gulf are not terribly happy (with)—but have no alternative to reliance on—the U.S., and this diversifies it, or at least gives the appearance of diversifying it."[73]

States will opt for neutrality (1) when they face multiple threats that appear to pose equal dangers, (2) when they foresee no imminent threats at all, or (3) when they are simply trying to remain aloof (or inoffensive) in the face of great power competition. Apart from a few special cases, however (Switzerland comes to mind), true neutrality is likely to be rarer in unipolarity than in other system structures, if only because the unipole is likely to force others to declare their positions openly. President Bush's post-9/11 statement that "either you are with us, or you are with the terrorists" illustrates the unipole's aversion to neutrality on the part of others and its desire to force others to align with it or bear the full costs of opposition.

Bandwagoning may be slightly more common in unipolarity than in other systems (due to the unipole's increased capacity to pressure others), but it will remain conditional on the unipole's willingness to make credible pledges of restraint. States bandwagon with a threatening power when they believe that resistance will be very costly and that realigning will spare them the threatening power's wrath. As discussed

[73] Quoted in "France Signs UAE Base Agreement," at http://news.yahoo.com/s/ap/20080115/ap_on_re_mi_ea/france_mideast_base.

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above, Libya's decision to abandon WMD and reengage with the West offers a perfect illustration: coercive diplomacy worked with Libya (but not with Iran, Iraq, or North Korea) because the United States eventually made it clear that it was willing to leave Gaddafi in place as long as he changed his policies.

Lastly, regional balancing will be the preferred course for most states, particularly when they face imminent local threats and are convinced that the single superpower shares their perceptions of the danger. As noted, regional balancers will also go to some lengths to reinforce these perceptions, to convince the strongest state to see the world as they do. But if the unipolar power is smart and clear-eyed, it will recognize the opportunity that the desire for protection affords. The main effect of unipolarity will be to make weaker states more concerned about abandonment and thus more prone to being entrapped, while the unipole will be unconcerned about the former and largely invulnerable to the latter. In unipolarity, the dominant power can play hard to get most of the time and insist that the allies that crave its protection be willing to follow its lead.

These various strategies offer a fairly complete menu of the most common motivations for alliance in a unipolar world. These responses are ideal types, of course, and reality will usually be considerably more complex. States may align with the United States as regional balancers (as Japan has clearly done) but then engage in various forms of soft balancing (as in the Six-Party talks) in order to pressure the United States to act as it wishes. Similarly, one can see major powers such as China collaborating with the United States on certain issues (such as counterterrorism), while simultaneously trying to build relationships intended to enhance its influence over time (and reduce that of the United States).

## IV. Managing Unipolar Alliances

Members of any alliance are usually tempted to shift the burdens of providing security on to others, while simultaneously seeking to maximize their own influence within the alliance itself. Small and medium powers will try to free ride on the unipole whenever possible, while insisting on alliance norms that retain their voice in alliance decision making. Thus, one would expect them to favor highly institutionalized arrangements aimed at ensuring that the unipole (or other strong allies) do not simply impose their preferences on the weak.

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A unipole, by contrast, will try to use its unfettered position to play potential allies off against one another. Instead of favoring highly institutionalized, multilateral arrangements that can tame its power within a web of formal procedures, norms, and rules, the unipole will prefer to operate with ad hoc coalitions of the willing, even if forming each new arrangement involves somewhat greater transaction costs. In assembling these coalitions—which are needed less for the capabilities they produce than for the appearance of legitimacy they convey—the unipole will naturally prefer to include states it believes will be especially loyal or compliant. And the stronger the unipole is relative to others, the more selective it can be and the greater the premium it can place on loyalty.

U.S. policy since the end of the cold war is generally consistent with these predictions, and this behavior is especially significant given America's prior commitment to multilateralism.[74] As the chief instigator and alliance leader in the 2003 Gulf War, the United States led the combined military forces, controlled the occupation almost completely, and paid scant attention to the opinions of the other members of its coalition of the willing.[75] This degree of control comes at a price, of course; not only does the United States have to shoulder most of the costs of these wars, but it also ends up solely responsible for anything that goes wrong.

Even so, states that choose to align *with* the United States do not do so passively. Aware that the United States is no longer bound by the need for solidarity against a peer competitor (as it was during the cold war), America's weaker partners will try to cement relations with Washington in several interrelated ways. Some leaders will try to *bond* with U.S. elites, in effect trying to establish close personal ties with influential Americans and thus gaining greater influence over U.S. actions.[76] Another option is to try to ingratiate one's self with Washington by adopting (or at least appearing to adopt) America's own strategic agenda. During the cold war some U.S. allies won favor by convincing

[74] See John Ruggie, *Winning the Peace: America and World Order in the New Era* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996); and Ikenberry (fn. 16).

[75] On U.S. control over the war and occupation, see Michael R. Gordon and Bernard E. Trainor, *Cobra II: The Inside Story of the Invasion and Occupation of Iraq* (New York: Pantheon, 2006); George Packer, *The Assassin's Gate: America in Iraq* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2005); and Thomas E. Ricks, *Fiasco: The American Military Adventure in Iraq* (New York: Penguin Books, 2006).

[76] On bonding, see G. John Ikenberry, "Strategic Responses to American Preeminence: Great Power Politics in the Age of Unipolarity," Report to the National Intelligence Council, July 28, 2003, at www.cia.gov/nicconfreports.stratereact.html; and Walt (fn. 8), 191–94.

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Americans that they were battling communism (even when this was not true); today friendly regimes try to get U.S. help by emphasizing that they too are battling "terrorism." As Israeli prime minister Ariel Sharon put it in 2001, after the attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon: "You in America are in a war against terror. We in Israel are in a war against terror. It's the same war."[77] In a particularly brutal and bizarre example of this sort of ingratiation, government officials in Macedonia reportedly tried to curry favor with the United States by murdering a group of refugees and claiming that they had in fact exposed a nascent terrorist cell within their own country.[78]

A third option is to deliberately manipulate American domestic politics, either through formal lobbying efforts or by exploiting sympathetic groups (such as ethnic diasporas) within the United States itself. In addition to well-known cases like the Israeli, Greek, or Armenian lobbies, other governments have recently come to appreciate the influence that a sympathetic diaspora can exert in Washington.[79] In 2002, for example, an Indian government commission noted that "Indo-Americans have effectively mobilized on issues ranging from the nuclear test in 1998 to Kargil, have played a crucial role in generating a favourable climate of opinion in the (U.S.) Congress. . . . For the first time, India has a constituency in the United States with real influence and status. *The Indian community in the United States constitutes an invaluable asset in strengthening India's relationship with the world's only superpower.*"[80] Not surprisingly, Indian American political groups were especially active lobbying Congress to approve the 2006 security treaty between the United States and India, including its controversial provisions for nuclear cooperation.[81] Many other examples of such efforts

[77] Quoted in William Safire, "Israel or Arafat," *New York Times*, December 3, 2001.

[78] See Nicholas Wood, "A Fake Macedonian Terror Tale That Led to Deaths," *New York Times,* May 17, 2004; and Juliette Terzief, "A War against Terror That Went Very Wrong: Fabricating Terrorism to Win U.S. Approval," *San Francisco Chronicle*, June 20, 2004.

[79] See Tony Smith, *Foreign Attachments: The Power of Ethnic Groups in the Making of U.S. Foreign Policy* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000); John J. Mearsheimer and Stephen M. Walt, *The Israel Lobby and U.S. Foreign Policy* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2007).

[80] See *Report of the High Level Committee on the Indian Diaspora* (New Delhi: Government of India, January 2002), xx–xxi, emphasis added. As former prime minister Atal Vajpayee told a conference of representatives of the Indian diaspora in February 2000: "We would like you to play the role of our unofficial ambassadors by communicating the reality of a new and resurgent India to the political, cultural, business, and intellectual establishments in your host countries. Whenever the need and the occasion arise, we would like you to strongly articulate India's case to the various constituencies in your adopted countries." See Prime Minister Atal Vajpayee, "Address to the Conference on the Contributions of Persons of Indian Origin, New Delhi, February 2000, at www.indianembassy.org/special/cabinet/Primeminister/pm_feb_12_2000.htm.

[81] See Mike McIntire, "Indian-Americans Test Their Clout on Atom Pact," *New York Times,* June 5, 2006, 1.

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predate the advent of unipolarity, but in light of the current absence of strong structural constraints on the United States, domestic influences are able to exert relatively greater weight.

Thus, although unipolarity confers real advantages on the United States in its relations with other states, other states do have ways of challenging these structural benefits. Their efforts are facilitated by the permeable nature of the U.S. political system—which makes it easier for special-interest groups to influence policy; by contrast, a different "single superpower" with a less open political system might easily be immune to many forms of manipulation. In any case, the key point is that even when states do seek a genuine alliance with the United States, they do so out of self-interest and will therefore try to get the best deal they can. If U.S. leaders are not careful, U.S. power may end up doing more for its allies than it does for itself.

## V. Conclusion

Unipolarity is a new phenomenon in world politics, and it is not surprising that scholars and policymakers are just beginning to grasp its essential characteristics. It is equally unsurprising that there is as yet no clear consensus on its implications. With respect to alliance relations, however, the main features of unipolarity are gradually becoming clear. First, the alliance structures inherited from the cold war are now in flux and are unlikely to persist in their present form. Instead of relying on fixed, multilateral, and highly institutionalized structures that depend on permanent overseas deployments, the United States, as the unipolar power, is likely to rely more heavily on ad hoc coalitions, flexible deployments, and bilateral arrangements that maximize its own leverage and freedom of action. Efforts to constrain U.S. power will occur but will not take the form of formal countervailing coalitions unless the United States adopts an extremely aggressive approach to several different parts of the world. Given the debacle in Iraq, such a course seems unlikely in the near-to-medium term. When states do balance U.S. power, they will do so through internal effort (such as the acquisition of WMD) or through various forms of soft balancing or leash-slipping. Medium and small powers will compete for influence in Washington, either to prevent U.S. power from being used against them or to encourage its deployment on their behalf.

The record of the past fifteen years also underscores the limits of purely structural explanations. Although unipolarity inevitably heightens concerns about the preferences and actions of the unipole, the dis-

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tribution of capabilities does not dictate how other states will respond. It matters who the unipole is, where it is located, and how it chooses to use its power. If the unipole is geographically distant, reasonably restrained in its ambitions and conduct, and, most importantly, does not try to conquer others, it is likely to face no more than occasional episodes of soft balancing and may still attract many allies who appreciate the order that the unipole provides and want to use its power to address their own concerns. Their desire for protection will give the unipole considerable influence—including the capacity to restrain others—especially if it shows a decent respect for the interests and amour propre of its weaker partners.

If the unipole is geographically near a number of weaker but still consequential powers, if it is openly committed to imposing its preferences on others, and, most importantly, if it is willing to use force to do so, then hard balancing cannot be ruled out, bandwagoning will be even rarer, and the unipole will be much less likely to retain wide-ranging allied support.

For the United States, being the unipole confers many advantages, which is why U.S. leaders have long sought this position and will not relinquish it voluntarily. One of the most important benefits is greater freedom of choice in the conduct of foreign policy. Paradoxically, a unipolar structure means that purely *structural* constraints on the unipole are sharply reduced. Given the range of choice, therefore, a key question is whether U.S. leaders will decide that the best course is to reduce America's present level of global engagement in order to husband U.S. resources, force other states to bear greater burdens, and reduce other states' concerns about U.S. power. Alternatively, will the U.S. government try to maintain (or even increase) America's current global commitments, as part of a continuing effort to mold the world according to U.S. preferences? The choice that is ultimately made will have powerful implications for how other states respond, but the decision will depend less on structure and more on internal developments within the United States itself.

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