UNIPOLARITY
A Structural Perspective

By ROBERT JERVIS

Introduction

To say that the world is now unipolar is neither to praise American power, let alone its leadership, nor to accuse the United States of having established a worldwide empire. It is to state a fact, but one whose meaning is far from clear, as we have neither a powerful theory nor much evidence about how unipolar systems operate. A central difficulty for sorting this out entails determining the extent to which behavior and outcomes we have seen stem from structure, rather than from other levels of analysis, such as idiosyncratic aspects of the international environment, the American domestic system, and the role of individual leaders. How might the system function if the unipole were Nazi Germany, Stalin's USSR (or Brezhnev's), or a traditional autocracy? Or if it were the United States in a different era? There would surely be major differences, but we should still start our analysis with structure. In fact, this takes us quite far and, as well, to some unexpected places. Realism indicates that the unipole is likely to be difficult to restrain, no matter how benign its intentions or domestic regime. Furthermore, it is far from clear that it should seek to maintain existing arrangements. Both normal ambitions and, in the current context, American values and beliefs may lead the superpower to seek to change the system rather than preserve it.

World Politics and the Study of World Politics

Academic analyses are influenced both by events in the world and by scholars' political outlooks and preferences. The growth of realism was obviously entangled with the cold war; revisionism about the origins of this conflict was sparked by the war in Vietnam (although this approach in fact was unable to explain the self-defeating American policy); the subfield of international political economy (IPE) developed rapidly in the wake of the American abandonment of the gold standard, the

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growth of OPEC, and the oil boycott following the 1973 Mideast War. The other side of this coin is that things that are not happening lead to subjects being ignored. The role of religion in international politics, for example, received little attention until the emergence of "political Islam." Similarly, civil wars are important and interesting analytically but were intensively studied in the U.S. only during the Vietnam conflict (when the subject was considered under the topics of "counterinsurgency" or "internal war"), falling back into quiescence until such types of conflicts returned in the 1990s.

It is therefore no accident (to borrow a phrase from a different intellectual tradition) that we do not have a large body of work on unipolarity. Despite the popularity of systems theorizing, only Morton Kaplan devoted more than a few sentences to this configuration, although, like everyone else, he paid most attention to bipolar systems.[1] Who until the end of the cold war would have written an article on unipolarity or encouraged a graduate student to work on this topic?

A stronger claim is that what scholars think as well as what they think about is influenced by the politics of the day. Discussions of bipolarity provide a nice example. At first glance, nothing could be further from policy than Kaplan's highly abstract if not impenetrable discussion of systems. But much of it concerns a bipolar system in which one side is internally disciplined and the other is not. He argues that the latter is at a great disadvantage, and it does not take long to see that the integrated pole corresponds to the Soviet bloc and the less disciplined one to the American side. Clearly, Kaplan's analysis of this abstract system was derived from his view of the cold war and the handicap that he saw the West as laboring under due to the diversity of opinions within and among its members and the difficulty weak states have in following the national interest. Waltz's well-known view was different, and what is important here is that one strand of his argument was that the superpowers did not have to care about the peripheries, and that this in turn implied that the U.S. did not have to fight in Vietnam, which corresponded to Waltz's own policy preference.[2]

It is a safe prediction that analyses of unipolarity, which are only just beginning to appear, will be influenced both by contemporary world events and by the authors' attitudes toward American policy. Constructivists and liberals will be particularly critical, not because of something deeply embedded in those theoretical frameworks, but rather because

[1] He did not use the term but referred to "universal" and "hierarchical" systems; Morton Kaplan, *System and Process in International Politics* (New York: Wiley, 1957), 45–50.

[2] See Waltz, "The Politics of Peace," *International Studies Quarterly* 11 (September 1967).

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most scholars of these persuasions want to minimize the use of force and are on the political left. Realists span the political spectrum and if for no other reason their analyses are likely to be diverse. The influence of political preferences is easier to detect in retrospect but will be significant, especially because opinion on current U.S. foreign policy is so polarized.[3] It should not be taken as capitulation to full subjectivity to say that our political theories are touched by our politics.

Definitions

The best definitions do a great deal of theoretical work, as is true of Waltz's definition, or rather redefinition, of bipolarity. Earlier scholars had considered bipolar systems to be ones in which the bulk of the power was concentrated in two camps. Thus, pre-1914 Europe as well as the postwar era qualified. Waltz showed that this conceptualization was flawed because the actors were individual states, not alliances among them. Once this simple point was grasped, not only was the analogy between the pre-World War I "bipolarity" and the post–World War II system seen as faulty, but the instability of the former could also be used to show why the latter was stable. Because under bipolarity states balanced through mobilizing their own economies and populations (internal balancing) rather than through alliances (external balancing), small allies could not drag their partners into war and the latter could not shirk their responsibilities and try to pass the buck to others, which were major causes of war under multipolarity.

In retrospect we can see that this definition also pointed toward the way in which the cold war would end. If the superpowers had to rely on internal balancing, then if one of them were significantly more efficient than the other, the other would not be able to keep up the pace and, unlike the situation in multipolarity, would not be able to compensate by seeking allies. The Soviet Union was unusually maladapted to winning allies, but even without this handicap the weakness in its domestic economy meant that it would have been hard pressed to compete.

It would be nice if a definition of unipolarity could incorporate this much analytical power. Even if it does not, however, exploring definitional questions leads us to several significant issues. We can start with a negative: although unipolarity and empire are sometimes conflated (and the latter is not without its definitional problems as well), they are different because unipolarity implies the existence of many juridically

[3] See Snyder, Shapiro, and Bloch-Elkon, in this issue.

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equal nation-states, something an empire denies. Empire also implies that the unipole is receiving tribute; under unipolarity the flows can go either way.

There are two obvious related definitions of unipolarity. One is adopted by Ikenberry, Mastanduno, and Wohlforth, as well as by other contributors to this literature: a system in which one state has significantly more capabilities than any other.[4] Another is a system in which the unipole's security and perhaps other values cannot be threatened by others, just as in bipolarity except that in bipolarity the other superpower along poses a fundamental threat. The two definitions are linked through the assumption that such a privileged position leads to security. Both this assumption and the proposed definitions raise questions. Should we compare the capabilities of the superpower to other individual states or to possible coalitions? If the latter, can we determine what coalitions are serious possibilities without assuming a theory of behavior under unipolarity? How should we characterize a system in which only a very large coalition could threaten the unipole? What kinds of threats concern scholars (and the superpower)? What level of security satisfies it? Is it only security or other values that are of concern? Even if threats from other states are limited, what about the menace from nonstate actors, obviously of concern today?

The most clear or extreme case of unipolarity would be one in which the superpower could not be matched if the entire world united against it. Indeed, today American military spending is almost as great as that of all the others nations combined. But the United States does not have half the world's GDP (the figure is roughly one-quarter), and the American military preponderance is produced by a combination of its large economy and a military spending rate that is high compared to others (but not compared to past rates). Were the rest of the world to unite, it could easily mount a much larger military than that of the U.S., and even a united Europe would return the world to bipolarity, although presumably one that would be very different from the hostility of the cold war (which reminds us that structure influences but does not determine patterns of behavior).

It is even more difficult to measure and generalize about other forms of capability, often summarized under the heading "soft power."[5] It

[4] For related definitions of unipolarity, see Ikenberry, Mastanduno, and Wohlforth, in this issue; William C. Wohlforth, "The Stability of a Unipolar World," *International Security* 21 (Summer 1999); Robert Pape, "Soft Balancing against the United States," *International Security* 30 (Summer 2005), 11–13.

[5] Joseph Nye, *The Paradox of American Power: Why the World's Only Superpower Can't Go It Alone* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002).

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seems likely, however, that the distribution of most forms of soft power will roughly correlate with the distribution of economic and military resources. Soft power matters but by itself cannot establish or alter the international hierarchy. Some small countries are widely admired (for example, Canada), but it is unclear whether this redounds to their benefit in some way or helps spread their values. Although states that lose economic and military strength often like to think that they can have a disproportionate role by virtue of their culture, traditions, and ideas, this rarely is the case. Intellectual and cultural strength can feed economic growth and perhaps bolster the confidence required for a state to play a leading role on the world stage, but material capabilities also tend to make the state's ideas and culture attractive. This is not automatic, however. As I will discuss further below, economic and military power are not sufficient to reach some objectives, and a unipole whose values or behavior are unappealing will find its influence reduced.

The preceding discussion should not be taken as implying that power is a simple concept.[6] Even capability is not entirely straightforward. In the military arena, for example, it is a complex compound, involving skill and motivation in addition to hardware. More important, what we (and the actors) care about are the outcomes of international interactions, and moving from capabilities to influence is a major challenge for national leaders and central to analyzing politics. Here it may be particularly difficult to talk about unipolarity in general rather than the current unipolarity, and I will return to the topic in this context.

One way to pose the question of the relationship between capabilities and power is to ask whether the unipole can get most of what it wants. Putting it this way has the advantage of highlighting the fact that the answer turns in part on what it is that the superpower wants. Although I argue that desires are likely to expand with capabilities, there is no reason to expect unipolar systems to be identical in this regard, because much depends on the particular characteristics of the superpower. Whether others will comply also depends on nonstructural factors, especially the coincidence or discrepancy between the worlds they prefer and the one sought by the superpower. Of course the actors' preferences may themselves be subject to influence, and we would expect the unipole to make serious efforts to persuade or coerce (and the line between the two is often blurred) the others to develop goals, values, and beliefs that are compatible with its own. Indeed, inducing

[6] See the classic set of essays by David Baldwin, *Paradoxes of Power* (New York: Basil Blackwell, 1989).

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such a consciousness (false or otherwise) is over the long run the cheapest and most secure form of influence.[7] Whether these efforts will succeed depends in large part on how compatible the unipole's objectives are with those of the others and the skill with which it acts.[8]

A related question is what kinds of threats can challenge the security of the unipole and which ones cannot. Standard theories of the rise and fall of great powers point out that the leading power is often brought low because the relative strength of its economy wanes as the cost of protecting its position increases and because the public goods of peace and an open economic system that it provides allow others to grow faster than it does.[9] If the burden of being a sole superpower is similarly great, unipolarity could erode, but, conversely, if it is able to profit from its position, the structure can be self-sustaining. In the contemporary system, the U.S. is running large budget and current account deficits, but it would be wrong to conclude that this shows the hallmarks of imperial overstretch. The defense and associated burdens are small as a percentage of GDP and the deficits could be wiped out by slightly higher taxes. It is domestic and idiosyncratic factors rather than structural factors that are at work here.

Unipolarity is no guarantee against economic shocks, widespread disease, or environmental degradation. These might be more likely under unipolarity if the absence of peers leads the unipole to act without restraint and induces irresponsibility in other actors. But the contrary argument that concentration of power makes it more likely that the superpower will produce public goods was the central claim of hegemonic stability theory (HST) in the economic area, and while the theory has been battered by encounters with evidence, it still retains enough life so that a recovery is possible. On balance, then, we are left with only the milder conclusion that even if unipolarity almost by definition involves

[7] Steven Lukes, *Power: A Radical View* (New York: Macmillan, 1974); John Gaventa, *Power and Powerlessness: Quiescence and Rebellion in an Appalachian Valley* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1980). The *dependencia* literature argues that in the postcolonial era the developed countries maintained their control by influencing the social structure of the Third World states and the interests and values of their elites, and today many scholars stress the actual or potential role of legitimacy in unipolarity: see Finnemore, in this issue.

[8] For the argument that attempts by Germany to secure dominance in the twentieth century were fatally flawed because it was unwilling or unable to contemplate a world that provided a place for diversity and others' interests, see David Calleo, *The German Problem Reconsidered: Germany and the World Order, 1870 to the Present* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1978). By contrast, a major source of ancient Rome's power was its willingness to incorporate other units and elites into its polity; see Arthur Eckstein, *Mediterranean Anarchy, Interstate War, and the Rise of Rome* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006), 244–57.

[9] Robert Gilpin, *War and Change in World Politics* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1981); Paul Kennedy, *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers* (New York: Random House, 1987); Arthur Stein, "The Hegemon's Dilemma," *International Organization* 38 (Spring 1984).

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security against other state actors in the system, it is not necessarily stable against all forms of threat.

At the extreme, then, unipolarity takes states out of anarchy and transforms if not dissolves international politics in two related ways. First, security concerns are greatly reduced for the unipole and for others it protects (although the superpower itself may be a source of threat as well as of protection). Since such concerns are the main drivers of traditional international politics, the implications are likely to be far-reaching. Second, some of the relations under unipolarity will embody a degree of hierarchy. Although seen in the past within empires and non-democratic alliances, hierarchies have been little studied by IR scholars since they represent the antithesis of what makes international politics distinct.[10] The unipole cannot dictate, but it can set at least some of the rules and can enforce agreements among others (although it itself cannot be bound). If it chooses to do so, it can then provide a significant degree of security for others while also limiting their autonomy. Although unipolarity does not constitute the end of international history, it may represent a bigger break from other systems than was the emergence of bipolarity, which left security fears and anarchy intact. A unipole that exerts itself in this way will produce a system that is stripped of many of the unique characteristics associated with international politics. This raises the question of how many of our traditional ideas can be carried over into the new world.

Dependent Variables

One question that has bedeviled the study of international systems is the identity of the relevant dependent variables; that is, what is it that we are trying to explain? In the 1950s and 1960s, when systems theories developed, the dependent variables were peace and stability, which were seen as identical—but which are not identical. It is a conceptual mistake prompted by the fact that the use of nuclear weapons would destroy the system.[11] Under other technologies and conditions, stability

[10] For examples, see Kaplan (fn. 1); Alexander Wendt and Daniel Friedheim, "Hierarchy under Anarchy: Informal Empire and the East German State," *International Organization* 49 (Autumn 1995); Katja Weber, *Hierarchy amidst Anarchy: Transaction Costs and Institutional Choice* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2000); David Lake, *Entangling Relations: American Foreign Policy and Its Century* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999); Paul Macdonald, "Hierarchic Realism and Imperial Rule in International Politics" (Ph.D. diss., Columbia University, 2006).

[11] Robert Jervis, *System Effects: Complexity in Political and Social Life* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), 94–102; Kenneth Waltz, "The Emerging Structure of International Politics," *International Security* 18 (Fall 1993), 45.

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can be maintained through the exercise of force, as many theorists argue is true in a balance of power system.

With unipolarity, world war is less of a problem and more obviously separated from instability. Since no other state, and perhaps no likely coalition, can threaten the security of the superpower, war is no longer the means for challenging it and changing the structure of the system. Other factors unique to the contemporary system also push great power war further from central concern, as will be discussed below. Of course this does not tell us about the expected patterns for other kinds of war under unipolarity, and the determinants here probably lie outside of the polarity of the system in such factors as local dynamics and the choices the superpower makes. It has the capability to intervene and limit if not prevent many wars, but whether it will do so depends on its values and outlook, combined with the behavior of the local actors. It is also possible that the lack of wars among the major powers would lead to the spread of norms conducive to peace throughout the world, but although structure would play a role here, it would at most be an enabling one.[12]

Another dependent variable of interest is the provision of public goods, the other side of the coin of the unipole as a threat to others.[13] We can find a parallel in the discussion of HST, which comes in both benign and malign versions.[14] Are general world problems more likely to be solved when there is one dominant power than when there are two or more? Does power bring with it responsibility or does it permit exploitation? It is more than a generalization from the current situation that leads to the expectations that the superpower will provide what it sees as public goods and at the same time that there will be much room for hypocrisy and disagreements over whether something is a public good or a private one—or perhaps even a public bad. Even more than in bipolarity, others have reason to engage in free riding. This does not mean they will be inactive, but many of their efforts will be directed at influencing the superpower by pricking its conscience, exploiting its domestic politics, or otherwise prodding it into action. As this implies, the unipole will have a great deal of discretion in determining the extent and the nature of the goods it provides. Domestic politics and values are likely to play a large role here.

[12] The best statement is John Mueller, *The Remnants of War* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2004).

[13] See Ikenberry, Mastanduno, and Wohlforth, in this issue (pp. 13–15).

[14] Duncan Snidal, "The Limits of Hegemonic Stability Theory," *International Organization* 25 (Autumn 1985).

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Linked to the question of whether the unipole will provide public goods is the question of whether it is likely to produce international justice or perhaps of what kind of international justice it is likely to produce. This question too arises in part because of current concerns, but this does not mean that it is without theoretical import. Unipolarity brings the international system closer to the domestic one in distancing it from anarchy and enabling the emergence of justice, law, and morality. Indeed, since threats and bribes are expensive ways to achieve compliance, one might expect the superpower to try spreading its principles of justice and, at least at the margins, to be willing to accept adverse judgments in order to seduce others into supporting the unipolar system. Values as well as structure play a role; this form of institutionalization would not occur under a Nazi superpower.

The different schools of IR thought generate different expectations here. Classical liberalism would argue that to the extent that unipolarity leads to more extensive economic intercourse, it will not only spread incentives and values conducive to peace and cooperation but it will also encourage common rules, procedures, and understandings. The superpower, having such a large stake in the system, should play the leading role here. Constructivists (and some modern liberals) would go further and expect the unipole to come to believe its own arguments about acting impartially. It should become socialized as much as it socializes others, its form of discourse should develop a life of its own and shape much of the way the superpower thinks and acts, and the role of justice and principle should grow and that of power conventionally conceived should decrease.[15]

By contrast, a more realist view would lead us to expect the only form of justice to be victor's justice: the hegemon would do what is needed to maintain its position ("the strong do what they will"), and unipolarity should be characterized by double standards. The obvious and cynical explication is that the temptations for the superpower to act on narrow self-interests are too strong to be resisted. The fact that it has great ability to act on its own will militate against its being bound by impartial justice and meaningful standards of appropriate behavior. But there is a less cynical side to this argument in the claim that it would make no sense for states differently positioned in the international sys-

[15] For a related discussion, see G. John Ikenberry and Charles Kupchan, "Socialization and Hegemonic Power," *International Organization* 44 (Summer 1990). Psychological grounding for this argument is provided by Daryl Bem's self-perception theory; Bem, "Self-Perception Theory," in Leonard Berkowitz, ed., *Advances in Experimental Social Psychology*, vol. 6 (New York: Academic Press, 1972); for an application to IR, see Deborah Larson, *Origins of Containment: A Psychological Explanation* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985).

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tem to follow the same rules. The superpower is not morally better than others, but it does have special responsibilities.[16] In this light the Bush administration's claim that the preventive war doctrine is not for others and its rejection of the International Criminal Court (ICC) make a great deal of sense. Only the superpower can nip problems (including others' problems) in the bud, and the very fact that it acts preventively means that others need not do so, indeed, must not do so. Hegemony similarly requires the use of military force in a way that exposes the unipole to ICC action. Its forces are the ones engaged in the most difficult activities, and its status makes it a target for those whose motives range from jealousy to domestic ambitions to regional aspirations. Given the difficulties of the task the unipole has undertaken, it is unlikely that it can live by any predefined set of rules since such cannot possibly anticipate all the unforeseen circumstance in which it will have to act.

Perhaps the obvious dependent variable is the system's durability. This is often linked to stability, as it refers to how long the system will last and as stability is the system's ability to preserve itself in the face of shocks and forces for change. My earlier contention that war will not end unipolarity does not mean that it will last indefinitely. To analyze this question, we turn first to the dynamics of unipolarity and then to the special circumstances that characterize the current era.

Dynamics

The central dynamic of the system stems from its structure. If the characteristic error of states in a multipolar world is to underreact to threats or allow themselves to be drawn into others' quarrels and if the characteristic error in bipolarity is to overreact and engage in unnecessary conflicts along the peripheries, then the characteristic error—or vice, as Waltz calls it—of unipolarity is excessive expansion, although not necessarily involving the annexation of territory.[17] The causes are a permissive structure combined with human nature, a factor omitted by neorealism but stressed by classical realism. When asked how he explained his affair with Monica Lewinsky, Bill Clinton said: "I did [it] for the worst possible reason—just because I could."[18] This is not to say

[16] This was true during the cold war, and American leaders annoyed their European counterparts by pointing it out, as when Kissinger declared: "The United States has global interests and responsibilities. Our European allies have regional interests"; quoted in Jussi Hanhimaki, *The Flawed Architect: Henry Kissinger and American Foreign Policy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 276.

[17] Waltz, "Structural Realism after the Cold War," *International Security* 25 (Summer 2000), 13.

[18] Interview with Dan Rather, "Clinton Cheated 'Because I Could,'" June 17, 2004, at http://www.cbsnews.com/ stories/2004/06/16/eveningnews/printable.

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that the unipole will try to do everything, but the ability to press others and expand is more than a background condition; rather, it is likely to be acted on at some point.

Although I will consider some of the particularities of the current American hegemony, much U.S. behavior is consistent with what realism would lead us to expect from any state that is a unipole (even though most realist scholars prefer a more restrained policy).[19] There are four facets to this argument. First and most general is the core of the realist outlook that power is checked most effectively, if not only, by counterbalancing power. This view provided the bedrock for the U.S. Constitution, and it applies even more to international politics. Thucydides puts these words into the mouths of the Athenians in the famous Melian dialogue, and while he disapproves and knows the attitude will bring ruin, he probably agrees with the generalization:

> Our opinion of the gods and our knowledge of men lead us to conclude that it is a general and necessary law of nature to rule wherever one can. This is not a law that we made ourselves, nor were we the first to act upon it when it was made. We found it already in existence, and we shall leave it to exist for ever among those who come after us. We are merely acting in accordance with it, and we know that you or anybody else with the same power as ours would be acting in precisely the same way.[20]

It follows from the propensity of states to use the power at their disposal that those who are not subject to external restraints tend to feel few restraints at all. As Edmund Burke put it, in a position endorsed by Hans Morgenthau: "I dread our *own* power and our *own* ambition; I dread our being too much dreaded. It is ridiculous to say that we are not men, and that, as men, we shall never wish to aggrandize ourselves."[21]

[19] This discussion is drawn from Jervis, *American Foreign Policy in a New Era* (New York: Routledge, 2005), chap. 4. See also Christopher Layne, "The War on Terrorism and the Balance of Power: The Paradoxes of American Hegemony," in T. V. Paul, James Wirtz, and Michel Fortmann, eds., *Balance of Power: Theory and Practice in the 21st Century* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2004), 109–15; and idem, "The 'Poster Child for Offensive Realism': America as a Global Hegemon," *Security Studies* 12 (Winter 2002–3). For realists who describe America similarly but evaluate it positively, see Robert Lieber, *The American Era: Power and Strategy for the 21st Century* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005); Robert Kaufman, *In Defense of the Bush Doctrine* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2007); Stanley Renshon, *The Bush Doctrine and the Future of American Foreign Policy* (forthcoming).

[20] *The Peloponnesian War*, trans. Rex Warner (Harmondsworth, Middlesex, U.K.: Penguin, 1954), 363. I should note that this generalization, although apparently secure, rests to a considerable extent on our searching on the dependent variable. That is, we are drawn to cases of such expansion because they are dramatic, especially when they come to grief, but we lack a systematic way of looking for instances in which a state had the ability to expand its sphere of influence but declined to do so.

[21] Quoted in Hans Morgenthau, *Politics among Nations*, 5th ed. rev. (New York: Knopf, 1978), 169–70, emphasis in original; see also Arnold Wolfers, *Discord and Collaboration* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1962), 121.

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For Waltz this was a driving idea: as soon as the cold war ended, he drew on structure to predict the likelihood of America's current behavior:

> The powerful state may, and the United States does, think of itself as acting for the sake of peace, justice, and well-being in the world. But these terms will be defined to the liking of the powerful, which may conflict with the preferences and the interests of others....With benign intent, the United States has behaved, and until its power is brought into a semblance of balance, will continue to behave in ways that annoy and frighten others.[22]

Without a requirement to do otherwise, not only will the unipole resolve the conflict between its views and interests and those of others in favor of the former, but it will also fail to see that there is any tension at all.

Second and relatedly, states' definitions of their interests tend to expand along with their power.[23] Increasing capabilities make it possible to pursue a whole host of objectives that were out of reach when the state's security was in doubt and all efforts had to be directed at achieving primary objectives. Unipolarity presents the state with a great opportunity to seek what Arnold Wolfers called "milieu goals" and to try to remake the world in its own image.[24] The unipole can pursue luxuries, and once a state has started to do so, it, like an individual, soon comes to see them as necessities.

The unipole also feels a compulsion to seek more because increased power brings with it new fears. As major threats disappear, people elevate ones that previously were seen as quite manageable.[25] But there

[22] Kenneth Waltz, "America as a Model for the World? A Foreign Policy Perspective," *PS: Political Science and Politics* 24 (December 1991), 69; for Waltz's discussion of the Gulf War in these terms, see Waltz, "A Necessary War?" in Harry Kriesler, ed., *Confrontation in the Gulf* (Berkeley, Calif.: Institute of International Studies, 1992), 59–65. See also Bruce Cronin, "Paradoxes of Hegemony: America's Ambiguous Relationship with the United Nations," *European Journal of International Relations* 7 (March 2001). Charles Krauthammer expected this kind of behavior but believed that it would serve world interests as well American interests; Krauthammer, "The Unipolar Moment," *Foreign Affairs, America and the World, 1990–91* 70, no. 1 (1971).

[23] See, for example, Fareed Zakaria, "Realism and Domestic Politics: A Review Essay," *International Security* (Summer 1992); Robert Tucker, *The Radical Left and American Foreign Policy* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1971), 69–70, 74–77, 106–11; Stephen Van Evera, *Causes of War: Power and the Roots of Conflict* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1999), 86; Nicholas Spykman, *America's Strategy in World Politics* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1942), 25. This process is also fed by the psychological resistance to giving up any position once it is gained; see Jeffrey Taliaferro, *Balancing Risks: Great Power Intervention in the Periphery* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2004). For a discussion of alternative possibilities suggested by American history, see Edward Rhodes, "The Imperial Logic of Bush's Liberal Agenda," *Survival* 45 (Spring 2003).

[24] Wolfers (fn. 21), chap. 5.

[25] John Mueller, "The Catastrophe Quota: Trouble after the Cold War," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 38 (September 1994); see also Frederick Hartmann, *The Conservation of Enemies: A Study in Enmity* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1982). And see the classic essay by Arnold Wolfers, "National Security as Ambiguous Symbol," in Wolfers (fn. 21).

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is more to it than psychology. A dominant state acquires interests throughout the globe. Most countries are primarily concerned with what happens in their neighborhoods, but the world is the unipole's neighborhood, and it is not only hubris that leads it to be concerned with everything that happens anywhere. The growth of power and influence establishes new positions to be defended. Thus colonialism expanded in part through the dynamic of the "turbulent frontier." As European powers gained an enclave in Africa or Asia, they also gained an unpacified boundary that had to be policed. This led to further expansion of influence and often of settlement, and this in turn produced a new area that had to be protected and a new zone of threat.[26] This was a process with few natural limits.

The fourth facet can be seen as a broader conception of the previous point. As realists stress, even states that are content with the status quo must worry about the future. Indeed, the more an actor sees the current situation as satisfactory, the more it will expect the future to be worse. Psychology is important here, too: prospect theory argues that actors are prone to accept great risks when they believe they will suffer losses unless they act boldly. The adoption of a preventive war doctrine may be a mistake, especially if taken too far, but it is not foreign to normal state behavior and it appeals to states that have a valued position to maintain. However secure states are, only rarely can they be secure enough, and if they are currently very powerful they will feel strong impulses to act now to prevent a deterioration. The same refusal to accept losses can operate with interests other than security, so even if the unipole is not in danger it may seek to expand rather than accept a loss.

Unipolarity, Current Unipolarity, or American Unipolarity?

One difficulty with analyzing unipolarity is that we have mainly the current case, although examining Rome and ancient China could be illuminating.[27] We should then note aspects of the current system that

[26] John S. Galbraith, "The 'Turbulent Frontier' as a Factor in British Expansion," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 2 (January 1960); idem, *Reluctant Empire: British Policy on the South African Frontier, 1834–1854* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1963). See also Ronald Robinson and John Gallagher with Alice Denny, *Africa and the Victorians: The Official Mind of Imperialism* (London: Macmillan, 1961); John LeDonne, *The Grand Strategy of the Russian Empire, 1650–1831* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004). A related imperial dynamic that is likely to recur is that turning a previously recalcitrant state into a client usually weakens it internally and requires further intervention.

[27] For three excellent collections of essays on the current unipolar system, see G. John Ikenberry, ed., *America Unrivaled: The Future of the Balance of Power* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2002); Ethan Kapstein and Michael Mastanduno, eds., *Unipolar Politics: Realism and State Strategies after the Cold War* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999); Paul, Wirtz, and Fortmann (fn. 19).

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would not necessarily characterize other unipolar ones. Some of these concern the nature of the unipole; others deal with the situation it finds itself in. To start with the latter, the current era is distinguished by four factors: a security community among the leading states, the existence of nuclear weapons, the prevalence of liberal norms, and the menace of terrorism.

Current Circumstances

Today the leading states in the system (the U.S., Western Europe either as a unit or as individual states, and Japan) do not fear war with each other. They form what Karl Deutsch called a security community.[28] This is a revolutionary development at least as striking and unprecedented as unipolarity itself. Of course it can be argued that it is the latter that has produced the former, but several other factors are at work as well: the high costs of war, the great benefits of peace (most obviously economic benefits), and the changes in values that have turned away from honor and glory and made war at best a necessary evil. The security community does not include China or Russia, but the basic point remains that a unipolar system would be very different from the current one if the leading states in the second tier wanted to fight the superpower, if they thought that it might conquer them, or if they were preparing to fight each other. The latter characteristic is particularly important. It means that the unipole has less influence because the tactic of divide and rule is less available to it and the leading states have less need of it for their protection. But it also relieves the unipole of the burden of keeping these states from going at one another.[29]

One reason for the existence of the security community is the high cost of war, something that is guaranteed by nuclear weapons. (Although Germany and Japan do not have a nuclear stockpile, they could

For imperial China, see John Fairbanks, ed., *The Chinese World Order: Traditional China's Foreign Relations* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1968); Alastair Iain Johnston, *Cultural Realism: Strategic Culture and Grand Strategy in Chinese History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995); Mark Mancall, *China at the Center: 300 Years of Foreign Policy* (New York: Free Press, 1984). For Rome, Eckstein (fn. 8); Edward Luttwak, *The Grand Strategy of the Roman Empire* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976); Andrew Lintott, *Imperium Romanum: Politics and Administration* (New York: Routledge, 1993). For a comparison of the current system and others that are arguably unipolar, see William Thompson, "Systemic Leadership, Evolutionary Processes, and International Relations Theory: The Unipolar Question," *International Studies Review* 8 (March 2006); and David Wilkinson, "Unipolarity without Hegemony," *International Studies Review* 1 (Summer 1999).

[28] Karl Deutsch, Sidney Burrell, Robert Kann, Maurice Lee, Jr., Martin Lichterman, Raymond Lindgren, Fancis Loewenheim, Richard Van Wagenen, *Political Community and the North Atlantic Area: International Organization in the Light of Historical Experience* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1957); for a further discussion, see Jervis (fn. 19), chap. 1; for a more radical view, see Mueller (fn. 12).

[29] For further discussion, see Walt, in this issue.

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build one in less time than it would take for a major threat to emerge.) At the present time, unipolarity does not seem deeply affected by nuclear weapons, but if other countries build them the results would be more significant, as I will explore at the end of this article.

A third important circumstance not directly linked to unipolarity is the dominance of liberal if not capitalist values. When President Bush said that "[t]he great struggles of the twentieth century between liberty and totalitarianism ended with a decisive victory for the forces of freedom—and a single sustainable model for national success: freedom, democracy, and free enterprise,"[30] he was not bragging, or at least was not only bragging. Fundamentalist Islam has appeal for some populations, but by its nature it can be adopted by only a few. Almost all states now pay at least lip service to democracy, human rights, and a fairly open economic system, and few espouse violence as a tool for political change. Talk of "Asian values" has subsided, and while many states and large numbers of people reject the imposition of a Western form of society and polity, none presents a comprehensive alternative.

The implications for international politics include the encouragement of the transformationalist policy being pursued by the U.S. discussed below, a degree of integration of the global economy that goes beyond what would follow from unipolarity alone, and the potential for cooperation among states because they are like-minded. The liberal consensus may also be an irritant for the unipole, however, as others will be quick to complain about unfair double standards and seek to hold it to its liberal values.

These values, furthermore, may not be fully compatible with unipolarity. International liberalism implies juridical equality among the states, but under unipolarity states differently positioned claim different rights and responsibilities. In an earlier era with different norms the American overthrow of Saddam Hussein would hardly have been remarked on by countries whose interests were not directly harmed.

[30] White House, "The National Security Strategy of the United States" (Washington, D.C.: September 2002), i, 1. Bush's West Point speech similarly declared: "Moral truth is the same in every culture, in every time, and in every place. . . . We are in a conflict between good and evil." "When it comes to the common rights and needs of men and women, there is no clash of civilizations"; "Remarks by the President at 2002 Graduation Exercise of the United States Military Academy," White House Press Release, June 1, 2002, 3. After a standard recitation of American values, Colin Powell similarly declaimed: "These ideals aren't ours alone. They are born of the experience of all mankind, and so they are the endowment of all mankind. These ideals are cherished on each and every continent. . . . These ideals are a blueprint for the brotherhood of man." In an irony that he probably missed, he said this in a speech commemorating George Kennan's one hundredth birthday, from which Kennan was fortunately absent; Powell, "Remarks on the Occasion of George Kennan's Centenary Birthday," Princeton, February 20, 2004, at http:www.princeton.edu/robertson/documents/docs/Sec_Colin_Powell_speech_2-20-04.pdf.

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But in 2003 the U.S. had to offer justifications in terms of accepted standards, especially self-defense. Neither punishment for past sins, grievous as they were, nor the goal of establishing democracy, as desirable as that was, constituted acceptable reasons. The U.S. had to argue that Saddam's programs to develop weapons of mass destruction (WMD) constituted a pressing danger to the U.S. and others, in part because of his previous record of aggressive behavior and in part because of the danger that he might pass on these weapons to terrorists. For similar reasons, the Bush administration characterized its general policy as one of "preemption" rather than prevention because acting against threats that are latent rather than imminent does not fit with current the notion of self-defense.[31] In earlier eras—and perhaps in subsequent ones as well—looking further into the future would be acceptable and so leaders could openly say that they were fighting a preventive war. But they cannot say it now.

Another and perhaps related feature of the current system that accompanies the current unipolarity but is not a necessary part of such a system is the rise of nonstate actors. This important area is still lacking in satisfactory theories, and they may not even be possible given the diverse nature of the phenomena, which include Amnesty International and Hezbollah. The relationship between nonstate actors and the state system is complex, with the former largely depending on the latter and strengthening its members in some ways while weakening them in others. Nonstate actors increased before the emergence of unipolarity but may now assume a greater role, or at least a higher public profile, because unipolarity decreases the prominence of other state challengers. Nonstate actors are also likely to focus attention on the unipole, both criticizing and seeking to influence it, which could have the unintended consequence of underlining rather than undermining the unipole's position.

The nonstate actors that have had the most impact recently have been terrorists. Even if many people exaggerate the magnitude of the threat,[32] it has shaped the current world yet is not a defining characteristic of unipolarity. The rise of terrorism is not entirely divorced from it, however. The enormous power in the hands of the unipole encourages terrorism in part by taking so many weapons out of others' hands, in

[31] For the changing American perspective, see Scott Silverstone, *Preventive War and American Democracy* (New York: Routledge, 2007); see also George Quester, "Two Hundred Years of Preemption," *Naval War College Review* 60 (Autumn 2007).

[32] For a strong argument to this effect, see John Mueller, *Overblown: How Politicians and the Terrorism Industry Inflate National Security Threats, and Why We Believe Them* (New York: Free Press, 2006).

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part by making it the target of discontent almost anywhere, and in part by its intrusive presence throughout the world.[33] But it would be going too far to say that terrorism is an automatic concomitant of this kind of system. Instead, it is largely the product of the particular circumstances of the current world, and indeed is a significant menace only because it coexists with modern technologies, especially WMD.

It was of course the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, that triggered an enormous change in American policy. In the interval between the end of the cold war and 9/11, U.S. withdrawal or shirking was seen as likely, and Bush's campaign and first nine months in office made clear that American military forces were to be used only against military threats to vital national interests, that peacekeeping and nation building were to be left to others, and that maintaining order was not of prime concern. Had terrorism not intervened, we might be talking about decaying or potential unipolarity rather than real unipolarity, as awkward a distinction as this is from the standpoint of structure.

America as the Unipole

If it is hard to separate the general analysis of unipolarity from the current unipolar system, it is even harder to determine the impact of the American values, outlook, and political system (which in turn are hard to separate from the characteristics of the current president). The strongest structuralist claim would be that any unipole would behave as the U.S. has. This is unlikely. Clearly, the current world would be very different if it had been the U.S. and Western Europe rather than the USSR that had collapsed. Indeed regime and leadership characteristics are likely to matter more in unipolarity than in other systems because of the weakness of external restraints.

What is most striking about American behavior since 9/11 is the extent to which it has sought not to maintain the international system but to change it.[34] One might think that the unipole would be conservative, seeking to bolster the status quo that serves it so well. But this has not been the case. Three linked elements are central to the U.S. outlook and policy, and although they are consistent with the general forces and incentives highlighted by realism that I discussed earlier, it is doubtful that they would operate as strongly in any unipole. First, the international system can and must be transformed; it is futile and dangerous

[33] Richard Betts, "The Soft Underbelly of American Primacy: Tactical Advantages of Terror," *Political Science Quarterly* 117 (Spring 2002).

[34] For a more detailed discussion, see Robert Jervis, "The Remaking of a Unipolar World," *Washington Quarterly* 29 (Summer 2006). For the best analysis of alternative American approaches, see Robert Art, *A Grand Strategy for America* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2003).

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to try to keep the system functioning as it is. Second, a vital instrument is prevention, including preventive war. Deterrence is passive and of doubtful efficacy; problems cannot be permitted to fester and grow but must be met decisively while they are still manageable. Third, peace and cooperation will come when and only when all important states are democratic. A country's foreign policy reflects the nature of its domestic regime, which means that states that rule by law and express the interests of their people will conduct benign foreign policies and that tyrannies will inflict misery abroad as they do at home. American policy is now guided by second-image thinking, which has always been more influential in the U.S. than in Europe.[35]

The second element in this trilogy can perhaps be squared with a conservative role for the superpower; the other two cannot. The three together argue that even if the status quo is satisfactory, it cannot last. World politics will change drastically, but will this change be for the better or for the worse? In a strong version of bandwagon thinking,[36] Bush and his colleagues believed that if the U.S. is complacent, dangers and alternative power centers will increase. The U.S. then has to master them. In the extreme case, as in Iraq, preventive wars are necessary.

But preventive actions will be a stopgap only if international politics proceeds on its normal trajectory. To bring lasting peace and stability, a transformation is needed. The key is to lead other states and societies to become liberal democracies, respecting individual rights, law, and their neighbors. This makes the U.S. a truly revolutionary power, since it seeks not only to shape international politics but, as both a means to that end and a goal in itself, also to remake domestic regimes and societies around the world. Although in his second term Bush avoided calling for overthrowing the regimes in North Korea and Iran, the logic of his policy clearly pointed in that direction. Even the most effective antiproliferation policies leave room for cheating, and the only sure way to ensure that the mullahs of Iran or the dictator of North Korea do not get nuclear weapons and menace their neighbors if not the U.S. itself is to remove them from power. This view of course has deep roots in American antirealist thinking that sees foreign policy behavior as

[35] Kenneth Waltz, *Man, the State, and War* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1959); Wolfers (fn. 21), chap. 15; Louis Hartz, *The Liberal Tradition in America* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, and World, 1955). More recently, Tony Smith has traced the Bush Doctrine not only to the neoconservatives, but also to liberal thinking about the importance of democracy for a state's foreign policy and of the possibilities for making other countries democratic; Smith, *A Pact with the Devil* (New York: Routledge, 2007).

[36] Jack Snyder, *Myths of Empire: Domestic Politics and International Ambition* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1991).

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reflecting domestic arrangements. During the cold war the U.S. vacillated between accepting a heterogeneous world and believing that the USSR would be a threat as long as it was communist. The current lack of a superpower competitor has not made the U.S. comfortable with other kinds of regimes.[37]

Transformation can be sought because of unipolarity, the lack of a competing model as noted above, and the galvanizing effect of September 11. A week after the attacks, Bush is reported to have told a close adviser: "We have an opportunity to restructure the world toward freedom, and we have to get it right."[38] This perception perhaps is particularly liberal or even particularly American. It embodies the belief in progress if not in the perfectibility of human affairs, which is what Hans Morgenthau saw as the crucial failing in the American view of life, with its failure to understand the limits of knowledge, the evil that remained within people even if they lived in democratic regimes, and the tragic core of politics.[39] Bush's faith in the possibility of international transformation probably also stemmed from his experience in having his own life transformed—indeed saved—by his religious conversion. It would be hard to convince him that only incremental changes are possible in human affairs.[40]

Limits on American Power, Balancing, and Proliferation

In discussing the final set of questions of how others will react to unipolarity and the limits on the power of the unipole, it is even harder to separate what is general about unipolarity from what is particular about

[37] For discussions of heterogeneous and homogeneous systems, see Raymond Aron, *Peace and War*, trans. Richard Howard and Annette Baker Fox (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1966), 99–114, 373–403; Stanley Hoffmann, "International Systems and International Law," in Klaus Knorr and Sidney Verba, eds., *The International System* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1961), 207–9; Henry Kissinger, "Domestic Structure and Foreign Policy," *Daedalus* 95 (Spring 1966), 503–6. For critiques, see Waltz, *Theory of International Politics* (Reading: Addison-Wesley, 1979), 43–49; and Jervis (fn. 11), 99–102. During the cold war, international politics scholars and American policymakers vacillated between believing that the U.S. could be secure and the international system could be stable despite being composed of heterogeneous units and believing that only homogeneity would bring with it safety. Homogeneity was generally sought, but heterogeneity was accepted, albeit often grudgingly.

[38] Quoted in Frank Bruni, "For President, a Mission and a Role in History," *New York Times*, September 22, 2001; see also "President Thanks World Coalition for Anti-Terrorism Efforts," White House Press Release, March 11, 2002, 3–4; "President Bush, Prime Minister Koizumi Hold Press Conference," White House Press Release, February 18, 2002, 6.

[39] Hans Morgenthau, *Scientific Man vs. Power Politics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1946).

[40] For the role that religion plays, see Bruni (fn. 38); Steve Erickson, "George Bush and the Treacherous Country," *LA Weekly*, February 13, 2004, 28–33. For a discussion of the utopian strain in Bush's thinking, see Michael Boyle, "Utopianism and the Bush Foreign Policy," *Cambridge Review of International Affairs* 17 (April 2004) ; Michael Mazarr, "George W. Bush, Idealist," *International Affairs* 79 (May 2003).

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the current era. Rather than having sections on each, I will treat them together, indicating the special considerations they raise.

WILL UNIPOLARITY LAST? THE CHANGED ROLE OF BALANCING

If the most pressing question about the bipolar system that emerged after World War II was whether it would lead to superpower war, the obvious question today is whether unipolarity will last.[41] One position is that it will not, that following balance of power reasoning others will unite to contest American dominance.[42] But while balance of power theory argues that states will unite in the face of a *potential* hegemon, it does not speak to what to expect once unipolarity is established. It makes sense for states to join together even in the face of the collective goods problem if they think that doing so can contain or defeat the would-be unipole, but once there *is* a dominant state the chances of unseating it are much less. Balance theory tells us that states will do what appears effective in order to protect their positions; it does not lead us to expect them to adopt policies that are costly and futile. In the wake of the Bush's reelection, France's Chirac declared: "It is evident that Europe, now more than ever, must strengthen its unity and dynamism when faced with this great world power." Britain's Blair replied, however, that "[t]here's a new reality, so let's work with that reality," rather than remain in "a state of denial."[43] If Blair's reasoning prevails, a countervailing coalition will not form, and its absence would not contradict balance of power theory.

What is equally crucial is that balance of power dynamics arise in the context of the use, threat, and fear of force. But as we have seen, the leading powers now form a security community. The incentives to try to overturn unipolarity are much less when states do not fear that the superpower will invade them or greatly diminish their sovereignty. Indeed, if they believe that the unipole will provide a degree of order and public goods and that rivalry would be destabilizing, they may actively support unipolarity.[44] While self-interest may underlie the Bush

[41] Ikenberry, Mastanduno, and Wohlforth, in this issue (pp. 23–24).

[42] Waltz (fn. 11), 44–79; Waltz (fn. 17), 5–41, but also note the discussion on p. 38; Christopher Layne, "The Unipolar Illusion: Why New Great Powers Will Rise," *International Security* 17 (Spring 1993); idem, "The Unipolar Illusion Revisited: The Coming End of the United States' Unipolar Moment," *International Security 31* (Fall 2006); idem, "US Hegemony and the Perpetuation of NATO," *Journal of Strategic Studies* 23 (September 2000); Charles Kupchan, *The End of the American Era* (New York: Knopf, 2002); Walt, in this issue.

[43] Quoted in Graham Bowley, "Chirac Issues Call for Strong Europe," *International Herald Tribune*, November 6, 2004.

[44] For discussions of secondary powers supporting the leader in the economic area in previous international systems, see David Lake, *Power, Protection, and Free Trade: International Sources of U.S.*

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administration's argument that the rise of any other country or group of countries to challenge the U.S. would lead to conflict if it failed and to instability if it succeeded, the claim may be correct and/or may be seen as such by many other countries. The record of bipolarity and multipolarity is not attractive, and while I have argued that the forces now conducive to peace and cooperation among the major powers would remain if the system were not unipolar, cautious men and women might not opt to run the experiment.[45]

Some classical balance thinking still applies, however. States have a variety of security concerns that require influencing or acting independently from the superpower, and they have interests that extend beyond security that may call for a form of counterbalancing. Even if others do not fear attack from the unipole, they may believe that the latter's behavior endangers them, a worry that parallels that of traditional alliance entrapment.[46] Thus today some states believe that the way the U.S. is pursuing its "war on terror" increases the chance they will be the victim of terrorist attacks and decreases stability in the Middle East, an area they depend on for oil. So there is reason for them to act in concert to restrain the U.S.[47] The point is not to block the U.S. from conquering them, as in traditional balancing, but to increase their influence over it. Although such efforts will not be automatic and their occurrence will depend on complex calculations of costs, benefits, and the possibilities of success, these concerns provide an impetus for trying to make it harder for the unipole to act alone.

Others may also fear that the unipole will refuse to act when their security, but not its own security, is at stake. As Waltz notes, "absence of threat permits [the superpower's] policy to become capricious."[48] It is not surprising that American policy has changed more from one ad-

Commercial Strategy, 1887–1939 (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1988); Richard Rosecrance and Jennifer Taw, "Japan and the Theory of International Leadership," *World Politics* 42 (January 1990).

[45] Jervis (fn. 19), chap. 1.

[46] Michael Mandelbaum, *The Nuclear Revolution: International Politics before and after Hiroshima* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1981), chap. 6; Glenn Snyder, *Alliance Politics* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1997).

[47] Pape (fn. 4); T. V. Paul, "Soft Balancing in the Age of U.S. Primacy," *International Security* 30 (Summer 2005). For doubts that such attempts are being made, see Stephen Brooks and William Wohlforth, "International Relations Theory and the Case against Unilateralism," *Perspectives on Politics* 3 (September 2005); Brooks and Wohlforth, "Hard Times for Soft Balancing," *International Security* 30 (Summer 2005); Keir Lieber and Gerard Alexander, "Waiting for Balancing: Why the World Is Not Pushing Back," *International Security* 30 (Summer 2005). See also the exchange between Robert Art and these authors in *International Security* 30 (Winter 2005–6).

[48] Waltz (fn. 17), 29; see also Waltz, *Foreign Policy and Democratic Politics: The American and British Experience* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1967), 16; Walt, this issue. Note the assumption that threat more than any other stimulus produces constancy of behavior. I believe this is reasonable.

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ministration to the next after the cold war than it did during it, and the fear of abandonment may be the main motive behind the Europeans' pursuit of a rapid reaction force. With it they would have the capability to act in the Balkans or East Europe if the U.S. chose not to, to intervene in small humanitarian crises independently of the U.S., and perhaps to trigger American action by starting something that only the U.S. could finish. This is not balancing against American power, but, rather, is a hedge against the possibility that the U.S. would withhold it, perhaps in response to European actions of which the U.S. disapproved.[49]

The struggle for influence then continues under unipolarity, and as Paul Schroeder has shown, alliances can be a means by which a state gains sway over its partner.[50] Thus by providing the U.S. with specialized and effective military forces, Great Britain is taken inside the American decision-making processes, although it has lost some leverage by being unwilling to break from the U.S. even when the latter pays little heed to British advice. Similarly, other states may accept American bases in the hope that they bring with them not only a veto over operations for which they might be used but also a voice in a range of American policies.[51]

Perhaps some unipoles would welcome others' ability to act alone as reducing the burdens on it and would cede to them some influence in order to bind them to the unipolar system.[52] The U.S. has not done so, however. It has looked askance at an independent European force, seeing it as weakening NATO, which the U.S. dominates, and possibly as having the potential to develop into a rival. Indeed, the draft of the Defense Guidance produced at the end of George H. W. Bush's administration called for the U.S. to handle others' problems so that they would not have any need for such military forces, and although Clinton

[49] For a related view, see Barry Posen, "European Union Security and Defense Policy: Response to Unipolarity?" *Security Studies* 15 (April–June 2006).

[50] Paul Schroeder, "Alliances, 1815–1945: Weapons of Power and Tools of Management," in Schroeder, *Systems, Stability, and Statecraft: Essays on the International History of Modern Europe*, ed. David Wetzel, Robert Jervis, and Jack Levy (New York: Palgrave, 2004), chap. 9; see also Patricia Weitsman, *Dangerous Alliances: Proponents of Peace, Weapons of War* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2004); Jeremy Pressman, *Warring Friends: Alliance Restraint in International Politics* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2008); and, for the current situation, Galia Press-Barnathan, "Managing the Hegemon: NATO under Unipolarity," *Security Studies* 15 (April–June 2006).

[51] Albert Hirschman's classic analysis can be applied to relations between allies; Hirschman, *Exit, Voice, and Loyalty* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1970).

[52] For a related argument focused on postwar settlements, see G. John Ikenberry, *After Victory: Institutions, Strategic Restraint, and the Rebuilding of Order after Major Wars* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001).

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did not endorse this stance, his actions in the Balkans were consistent with it.[53]

LIMITS ON POWER: CHANGE IN OR OF THE SYSTEM?

To say that the system is unipolar is not to argue that the unipole can get everything it wants or that it has no need for others. American power is very great, but it is still subject to two familiar limitations: it is harder to build than to destroy, and success usually depends on others' decisions. This is particularly true of the current system because of what the U.S. wants. If Hitler had won World War II, he might have been able to maintain his system for some period of time with little cooperation from others because "all" he wanted was to establish the supremacy of the Aryan race. The U.S. wants not only to prevent the rise of a peer competitor but also to stamp out terrorism, maintain an open international economic system, spread democracy throughout the world, and establish a high degree of cooperation among countries that remain juridically equal. Even in the military arena, the U.S. cannot act completely alone. Bases and overflight rights are always needed, and support from allies, especially Great Britain, is important to validate military action in the eyes of the American public. When one matches American forces, not against those of an adversary but against the tasks at hand, they often fall short.[54]

Against terrorism, force is ineffective without excellent intelligence. Given the international nature of the threat and the difficulties of gaining information about it, international cooperation is the only route to success. The maintenance of international prosperity also requires joint efforts, even leaving aside the danger that other countries could trigger a run on the dollar by cashing in their holdings. Despite its lack of political unity, Europe is in many respects an economic unit, and one with a greater GDP than that of the U.S. Especially because of the growing Chinese economy, economic power is spread around the world much more equally than is military power, and the open economic sys-

[53] See the stories in the *New York Times*, March 8, and May 24, 1992. See also Zalmay Khalilzad, *From Containment to Global Leadership? America and the World after the Cold War* (Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND, 1995); and Robert Kagan and William Kristol, eds., *Present Dangers: Crisis and Opportunity in American Foreign and Defense Policy* (San Francisco: Encounter Books, 2000). Although the draft guidance was too bellicose for public taste and had to be modified once it was leaked to the press, it reflected the views of both Bush presidents: see, for example, Condoleezza Rice, "Remarks delivered to the International Institute for Strategic Studies," June 26, 2003, at www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2003/06/20030626.html. For a different but not entirely incompatible approach, see Michael Mastanduno, "Preserving the Unipolar Moment: Realist Theories and U.S. Grand Strategy after the Cold War," in Kapstein and Mastanduno (fn. 27).

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

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tem could easily disintegrate despite continued unipolarity. In parallel, on a whole host of problems such as AIDS, poverty, and international crime (even leaving aside climate change), the unipole can lead and exert pressure but cannot dictate. Joint actions may be necessary to apply sanctions to various unpleasant and recalcitrant regimes; proliferation can be stopped only if all the major states (and many minor ones) work to this end; unipolarity did not automatically enable the U.S. to maintain the coalition against Iraq after the first Gulf War; close ties within the West are needed to reduce the ability of China, Russia, and other states to play one Western country off against the others.

But in comparison with the cold war era, there are fewer incentives today for allies to cooperate with the U.S. During the earlier period unity and close coordination not only permitted military efficiencies but, more importantly, gave credibility to the American nuclear umbrella that protected the allies. Serious splits were dangerous because they entailed the risk that the Soviet Union would be emboldened. This reason for avoiding squabbles disappeared along with the USSR, and the point is likely to generalize to other unipolar systems if they involve a decrease of threats that call for maintaining good relations with the superpower.

This does not mean that even in this particular unipolar system the superpower is like Gulliver tied down by the Lilliputians. In some areas opposition can be self-defeating. Thus for any country to undermine American leadership of the international economy would be to put its own economy at risk, even if the U.S. did not retaliate, and for a country to sell a large proportion of its dollar holding would be to depress the value of the dollar, thereby diminishing the worth of the country's remaining stock of this currency. Furthermore, cooperation often follows strong and essentially unilateral action. Without the war in Iraq it is not likely that we would have seen the degree of cooperation that the U.S. obtained from Europe in combating the Iranian nuclear program and from Japan and the PRC in containing North Korea.

Nevertheless, many of the American goals depend on persuading others, not coercing them. Although incentives and even force are not irrelevant to spreading democracy and the free market, at bottom this requires people to embrace a set of institutions and values. Building the world that the U.S. seeks is a political, social, and even psychological task for which unilateral measures are likely to be unsuited and for which American military and economic strength can at best play a supporting role. Success requires that others share the American vision and believe that its leadership is benign.

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Failure would not mean that the system will soon cease being unipolar, however. Only if Europe truly unites (an increasingly distant prospect) could bipolarity be restored. Barring drastic internal instability, the PRC is likely to continue to rise but cannot be a global challenger in the foreseeable future. The most likely system-changing force is proliferation, and ironically unipolarity gives many states good reasons to seek nuclear weapons. Although allies sometimes doubted the American commitment during the cold war, the very strength of the Soviet Union meant that the U.S. would pay a high price if it did not live up to its promises to defend them. The unipole has more freedom of action. Even if the unipole's costs of protecting others are lower, those states have less reason to be confident that it will stand by them forever. The existence of a security community does not entirely displace the fear of an uncertain future that is the hallmark of international politics. American enemies like North Korea and Iran face more immediate incentives to defend themselves, incentives that were increased but not created by the overthrow of Saddam's regime. Indeed, the U.S. has spurred proliferation by stressing the danger posed by "rogue" states with nuclear weapons, treating North Korea much more gingerly than Iraq, and indicating that it can be deterred by even a few atomic bombs. Its very efforts to stop other countries from getting nuclear weapons imply that the consequences of their succeeding will be great, a belief that is questionable but could easily be self-fulfilling. Furthermore, regional domino effects are likely: a growing North Korean nuclear force could lead Japan to develop nuclear weapons, and if Iran continues its program others in the region may follow suit. Thus both American overexpansion and the fear that it will eventually withdraw will encourage others to get nuclear weapons.

This raises the question of what would remain of a unipolar system in a proliferated world. The American ability to coerce others would decrease but so would its need to defend friendly powers that would now have their own deterrents.[55] The world would still be unipolar by most measures and considerations, but many countries would be able to protect themselves, perhaps even against the superpower. How they would use this increased security is far from clear, however. They might intensify conflict with neighbors because they no longer fear all-out war, or, on the contrary, they might be willing to engage in greater co-

[55] The 1998 Rumsfeld Commission argued that the spread of missile technology would be greatly contrary to U.S. interests; "Executive Summary of the Report of the Commission to Assess the Ballistic Missile Threat to the United States," at http://www.fas.org/irp/threat/bm-threat.htm.

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operation because the risks of becoming dependent on others would be reduced. In any event, the polarity of the system may become less important. Unipolarity—at least under current circumstances—may then have within it the seeds if not of its own destruction, then at least of its modification, and the resulting world would pose interesting challenges to both scholars and national leaders.

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