

Strategic Reactions to American Preeminence: Great Power Politics in the Age of Unipolarity

G. John Ikenberry

28 July 2003

The views expressed in this and other papers associated with the NIC 2020 project are those of individual participants. They are posted for discussion purposes only and do not represent the views of the US Government.

Strategic Reactions to American Preeminence: Great Power Politics in the Age of Unipolarity

G. John Ikenberry

28 July 2003

The National Intelligence Council recently engaged a group of leading international relations theorists in a series of discussions about “power politics” in the “age of unipolarity.” At the end of the discussions, the group’s chair, Professor John Ikenberry of Georgetown University, drafted a paper on strategic reactions to American preeminence. The views in this paper are Professor Ikenberry’s alone and do not represent official US Government positions or views.

INTRODUCTION

American global power – military, economic, technological, cultural, and political – is one of the great realities of our age. Never before has one country been so powerful and unrivaled. The United States began the 1990s as the world’s only superpower and its advantages continued to grow through the decade. After the Cold War, the United States reduced its military spending at a slower rate than other countries and its economy grew at a faster pace. The globalization of the world economy has reinforced American economic and political dominance. No ideological challengers are in site. More recently, in response to terrorist attacks, the United States has embarked on a massive military buildup. In the recent National Security Strategy, the Bush administration has articulated an ambitious and provocative global military role for the United States in confronting new-age threats. Overall, American power advantages are multidimensional, unprecedented, and unlikely to disappear any time soon.

The world has taken notice of these developments. Indeed, the post-Cold War rise of American power -- what might be called the rise of American “unipolarity” -- has unsettled world politics. Governments everywhere are worried about the uncertainties and insecurities that appear to flow from such extreme and unprecedented disparities of power. The shifting global security environment – triggered by the terrorist attacks of September 11th –also has conspired to upset old relationships and expectations. The American invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq have put American power on display and raised far-reaching questions about the use of force, alliances, weapons of mass destruction, sovereignty and interventionism. The world is in the midst of a great geopolitical adjustment process. Governments are trying to figure out how an American-centered unipolar order will operate. How will the United States use its power? Will a unipolar world be built around rules and institutions or the unilateral exercise of American power? This global worry about how a unipolar world will operate – in which the most basic questions about the character of world politics are at stake, namely, who benefits and who

Discussion paper -- does not represent the views of the US Government

commands – is the not-so-hidden subtext of all the recent controversies in America’s relations with the rest of the world.

The question posed in this report is: how are the major countries around the world responding to American global preeminence? Overall, strategies and policies are mostly still in flux around the world. Responses up to now have been mostly ad hoc. Governments are learning, adapting, negotiating, and reacting – thus it is not possible to identify fixed “strategies of response.” This report seeks to help us understand these evolving responses in two ways: first, it will provide conceptual tools to identify and track strategic responses by major states to American preeminence, and second, it will offer some preliminary characterizations of the patterns of response, particularly by Western Europe, Russia, and China. This report might be seen as a sort of “field guide” to global reactions rather than a definitive theoretical and empirical statement on the subject.^{1[1]}

I begin by offering a summary of the findings. After this, I look at the rise of American unipolar power and the variety of ways that American power is “experienced” around the world. In the next section, I survey the deeper sources and multifaceted character of American unipolar power. Next I explore the limits of the basic strategies of response to concentrated power – balancing, bandwagoning and binding. In the next section, I explore some of the emerging strategies that are appearing among the major countries. Finally, in the conclusion I return to the issue of unipolar power and rule-based order.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

1. American unipolar power is unlikely to trigger a full-scale, traditional balance of power response. The major powers – Russia, China, Germany, France, Britain and Japan – will attempt to resist, work around, and counter American power -- even as they also engage and work with American power. But they are not likely to join in an anti-American countervailing coalition that will break the world up into hostile, competing camps. The balance of power is the most time-honored way of thinking about politics among the great powers.^{2[2]} In this classical view, when confronted with a rising and dominant state, weaker states flock together and build an alternative power bloc. The circumstances for this type of dramatic, order-transforming move do not exist -- and they are not likely to exist even if American power continues to rise relative to other major states and even if American policy antagonizes other states in the way that it has recently over the Iraq war.

^{1[1]} Scholars and policy analysts are just beginning to explore the character and consequences of a unipolar distribution of power. See Ethan B. Kapstein and Michael Mastanduno, eds., Unipolar Politics: Realism and State Strategies after the Cold War (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999); and G. John Ikenberry, ed., America Unrivaled: The Future of the Balance of Power (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2002).

^{2[2]} The modern classical statement of this view is Kenneth Waltz, Theory of International Politics (Reading, Mass.: Addison-Wesley, 1979).

Discussion paper -- does not represent the views of the US Government

There are a variety of reasons why this is so. One is simply that a bloc of major states with sufficient power capabilities to challenge the United States is not possible to assemble. Another is that American power itself is not sufficiently threatening to provoke a counter-balancing response. To be sure, American power – and the policies and roles that this power enables – does worry other major states. Responding to it is their major geopolitical challenge. But counter-balancing responses – manifest in separate and competing security alliances and systematic policies of opposition – are both not feasible and not responsive to the distinctive challenges posed by unipolarity. What troubles the other major countries about American power cannot be remedied by the classic geopolitical tool of the balance of power.

2. Governments are adjusting and learning – as they are trying to figure out how to deal with American unipolar power. A world with a single superpower is new. We do not have a great deal of historical experience and policy relevant theories that states can use in making strategic decisions in how to deal with the United States. The big question that the major states are asking is this: will a unipolar America abandon its postwar approach to global leadership-- leadership that operated through multilateral rules and institutions and close partnerships? Scholars might pose the question this way: is unipolarity inconsistent with rule-based international order? Some French and other European foreign policy officials, for example, believe that the rise of American unipolarity has triggered a radical break in America's global leadership approach. The United States will increasingly resist entanglements in formal rule-based institutions and move instead toward a freer and more imperial grand strategic orientation. Others – such as the Japanese – think that there is more continuity in the American global posture. The big question in all the major capitals is: is a unilateral, neo-imperial turn emerging in American foreign policy, and if so, is it rooted in deep forces of power or the result of more circumstantial (and therefore passing) factors? Overall, the judgments by foreign officials about how the rise of American unipolarity does or does not alter America's grand strategic orientation are critical for how major states around the world think about their strategies of response.

3. A variety of strategies are emerging. Scholars of international relations tend to think about two basic strategies that are available to states as they confront a predominant state: balancing and bandwagoning. One is the classic strategy of counter-balancing alliance. The other is the strategy of appeasement and acquiescence. But today, strategies for coping with a preeminent America tend to fall in between these extremes. Specifically, there are two basic types of strategies. One type are strategies of resistance -- which entail policies that seek to loosen ties and undercut or block American power and policy. The other type are strategies of engagement – which entail building cooperative ties in the hope of gaining opportunities to influence how American power is exercised. Most of the major states are pursuing both strategies at the same time. But these states also differ in their assessment of the relative merits of the strategies.

4. Although the major states are not attempting to directly confront or balance against American unipolar power, domestic political opinion in many of the major countries has shifted dramatically against the United States – and this new circumstance of world public opinion is perhaps the most important unknown dynamic that could quickly and unexpectedly lead to dramatic shifts in state strategies toward the United States. Recent public opinion data gathered from dozens of countries indicates that while many people around the world admire America –

Discussion paper -- does not represent the views of the US Government

its ideals and open society – they have growing misgivings about its policies and role in the world. Anti-Americanism also has become part of presidential elections in various parts of the world. Election victors Schroeder in Germany, Lula in Brazil, and Roh in South Korea all drew upon themes that involved opposition to the United States and its policies. Political leaders in key countries increasingly have opportunities to use opposition to the United States in domestic politics. How this new situation will spill over into the “high politics” of America’s unipolar order is still unknown.

5. The United States has a great capacity to influence how other states respond to its unipolar power. In particular, the more that the United States signals that it intends to operate through mutually agreed rules and institutions, the more other countries will choose to engage rather than resist the United States. The more that the United States signals that it will disentangle itself from rule-based order and act unilaterally on a global scale, the more other countries will choose to resist rather than engage the United States. That is, the United States has two basic approaches to international order today. One might be called hegemony with “liberal characteristics.” This is international order built around multilateralism, tight alliance partnership, strategic restraint, cooperative security, and agreed-upon institutions. The other might be called hegemony with “imperial characteristics.” This is international order built around unilateralism, coercive domination, and a reduced commitment to shared commitment to mutually agreeable rules of the game. How the outside world responds to American power will depend on which of these two alternatives the United States tends to emphasize.

6. The emerging politics of unipolarity will entail a distinctive mix of power politics and a security community. It seems likely that the United States will not choose to go very far down a neo-imperial path – the costs are too great and it is ultimately not an unsustainable grand strategic orientation for the United States. It seems also likely that the basic character of the order that exists between the democratic great powers – Western Europe, the United States, and Japan – will persist even under conditions of unipolarity. That is, these countries will continue to inhabit a “security community” where the disputes between them will ultimately be settled peacefully. In a security community the resort to violence or war is unthinkable as a tool of policy between countries within the community. Even the worst disputes between the United States and, say, France are not ones that will spiral toward war. At least within the “democratic core” of great powers, the responses to unipolarity will be consistent with the general characteristics of a security community. But relations among these democratic countries are also likely to be more hard-nosed and infused with power politics. Without the common Cold War threat of the Soviet Union, disagreements – and how they are handled – are likely to be more intense than in the past. American power does generate or reinforce differences between the United States and the outside world. So the “politics of unipolarity” is likely to be a new form of power politics played out within a foundation of security community. The United States has a huge opportunity to influence what the rules of the game will be for this unipolar order.

THE RISE OF AMERICAN UNIPOLARITY

The United States has turned into a unipolar global power without historical precedent. The 1990s surprised the world. Many observers expected the end of the Cold War to usher in a

Discussion paper -- does not represent the views of the US Government

multipolar order with increasingly equal centers of power in Asia, Europe, and America. Instead the United States began the decade as the world's only superpower and proceeded to grow more powerful at the expense of the other major states. Between 1990 and 1998 the United States' GNP grew 27 percent, Europe's 16 percent, and Japan's 7 percent. Today the American economy is equal to the economies of Japan, United Kingdom, and Germany combined. The United States military capacity is even more in a league of its own. It spends as much on defense as the next fourteen countries combined. It has bases in forty countries. Eighty percent of world military R&D takes place in the United States.^{3[3]} What the 1990s wrought is a unipolar America that is more powerful than any other great state in history.^{4[4]}

Various factors intensify these power disparities. First, the other great powers have all lost ground in the last decade. Russia collapsed after the Cold War and now has an economy the size of a medium sized European country. China is still a developing country with the political and economic problems that come with modernization. Japan has had a decade of economic decline. Western Europe has been focused inward on integration and the resulting political controversies.

Second, the loss of the Cold War threat has removed bipolar restraints on American power. During the Cold War, the United States had to restrain itself for two reasons. One was that it needed its alliance partners in the global bipolar struggle, so it had to attend to the interests and preferences of alliance partners. It was more willing than it needs to be today to make concessions – adjust its policies, make commitments, and listen closely to alliance partners' views – than it needs to today where the allies are (arguably) less critical to American security and the realization of its interests. Second, the Soviet Union also disciplined the exercise of American power because the risks of war were so high. The United States needed to worry about Soviet reactions and acted accordingly. With the collapse of the Soviet Union and the end of bipolarity, there is no other great power that threatens the United States and less need for alliance cooperation. These disciplining restraints on American power have fallen away.

Third, there is no other rival global ideology to the American liberal vision. Other countries may not like specific features of America's ideological commitment to democracy, open markets, and the globalization of the world system, but alternative worldviews are not yet in sight. No other state offers a vision of world order that would facilitate the creation of a counter-American global coalition.

Fourth, the recent exercise of American military power – in Afghanistan and Iraq – has shown the world how extraordinary and effective that power is. In effect, the exercise of power has created even more power – or at least revealed that power to the world. The United States

^{3[3]} Economic comparisons calculated from OECD statistics (July 1999 web edition). GNP measures are figured at 1990 prices and exchange rates. In military capacity, see International Institute for Strategic Studies, The Military Balance 1999/2000 (London: Oxford University Press, 1999).

^{4[4]} The best description of American unipolarity is William Wohlforth, "The Stability of a Unipolar World," International Security, 24, No. 1 (Summer 1999).

Discussion paper -- does not represent the views of the US Government

can take down entire regimes without sustaining high costs of manpower or national treasure. The cost of war has gone down, particular in the areas where war is most likely. This expands the realms in which American military power can be projected. The inability of other great powers to do the same further intensifies the power disparities.

Finally, although the Cold War is over, the American system of client states and security ties is still in place across Europe and East Asia. Many of these security protection agreements grew out of the bipolar struggle with the Soviet Union, but they were not disassembled with the collapse of the Soviet Union. This means that there is an entire global system of formal and informal security ties that continue to make states dependent on the United States for protection. These states – who exist in all regions of the world – have reasons to remain tied to the United States. There are no good substitutes for military junior partnership. Japan is a good example. It may not like to be so tied to the United States for security protection but it is in a security box. All the other alternatives are more risky and costly. This legacy of the Cold War reinforces the structure of hierarchy inherent in a unipolar order.

The main conclusion to draw from this discussion is two-fold. First, the global distribution of power can rightly be described as unipolar. The disparities of power between the lead state and the secondary powers are extreme and multifaceted. Second, this is a unique power distribution. The modern state system – which dates to 1648 – has never seen such a configuration of power.

It is not surprising, therefore, that states – including the United States -- are in a process of assessing and adjusting to this new power reality. It is in this context that we look more closely at the components of American power and the ways in which this power is “experienced” around the world.

CHARACTERISTICS OF AMERICAN POWER

At the outset, we can make four general observations about American unipolar power. These observations help frame the discussion of how major states around the world are perceiving and responding to American power.

First, the United States is a unique sort of global superpower. That is, it has a distinctive cluster of capabilities, institutions, attractions, and impulses. Indeed, American power is manifest in complex and paradoxical ways. For example, during the 20th century, the United States was the greatest champion of rule-based order. It pushed onto the global stage a long list of international institutions and rules – the League of Nations, the United Nations, GATT, human rights norms, and so forth. But the United States also has been unusually ambivalent about actually operating itself within legal and institutional constraints. Also, the United States has used military force more than any other state in the last fifty years (with and without UN or NATO backing). Yet it also has an anti-imperial political culture and a strong isolationist tradition. My point here is that it is difficult for other countries to simply decide that American power is manifest in any one way. American power is sometimes menacing, but at other times it helps provide global public goods and at other times it turns inward. American power is

Discussion paper -- does not represent the views of the US Government

sufficiently complex and multifaceted that it is difficult for countries to simply decide to counter or work against US power. American power is complex and because of this there are reasons for other states to have complex views of and strategies for dealing with the United States.

Second, countries and peoples “experience” American unipolar power in different ways. A threat to some is an opportunity to others. This is true across states – some states find American power more useful and easy to accommodate than others. For example, Japan finds America’s security role in East Asia more useful to it than France finds America’s security role in Europe. Likewise, people in particular states see American power differently. In most states there is a range of views, and these views can be directed at American policy or more generally at America as a global power.

Third, in this regard, it is useful to distinguish at least three levels or types of American power that are generating reactions around the world. At the most basic level, American power is manifest as the underwriter of American capitalism and globalization. This is where America gets implicated in the protests over the WTO and the IMF. At another level, American power is manifest as the leader of a global political and military alliance system. This is where people in countries such as South Korea or Germany seek to push the United States out of their country. Some people attack or oppose the United States because it is the alliance partner that is supported by their own government. American power is challenged because that power – in some countries such as Pakistan or Saudi Arabia – helps perpetuate unwanted regimes. A final level of American power is manifest in specific policies or issues. For example, some people – such as South Koreans -- oppose the United States because of specific Status of Forces agreements in their country that protect American soldiers from local justice. Others oppose the United States because of its decisions on the use of force, such as in the recent invasion of Iraq. Governments and peoples can oppose the United States because of its new doctrine of preemption.

Fourth, the “face” that the United States shows the world matters. I would argue that there are two general faces that the United States can show. One is American hegemonic power with “liberal characteristics.” This is America as it promotes order organized around multilateralism, close alliance partnerships, strategic commitment and restraint, and extensive jointly agreed upon institutions and rules for managing relationships. Another face is American hegemonic power with “imperial characteristics.” This is America as it acts unilaterally against the goals and interests of other states, engages in coercive domination to get its way, and degrades global rules and institutions. My hypothesis is that the greater the United States tilts toward liberal hegemony, the greater the incentives these states will have to engage in cooperative behavior with the United States. The greater the United States tilts toward imperial hegemony, the more incentives states will have to resist or move away from the United States.

Finally, most of the great power responses to American unipolarity seem to be falling between the extremes of balancing and bandwagoning. States can resist without balancing and they can engage without simply acquiescing. During the Iraq war, British Prime Minister Tony Blair pursued a strategy of getting as close as possible to the Bush administration. The strategy was to be so close and supportive of the American exercise of power that Britain would ultimately get some say in how policy unfolds. French President Chirac pursued a different policy – attempting to build an opposing political coalition to the Bush administration’s Iraq

Discussion paper -- does not represent the views of the US Government

policy. Both were attempting to deal with a difficult reality: the United States was powerful enough to go on its own. How to get some leverage over American exercise of power is the challenge. The two leaders chose different strategies. In the aftermath of the war, the effectiveness of the two strategies are being debated across Europe. How this debate unfolds will say a lot about the future resort to the strategies. Again, it is useful to see the present moment as one where governments are making judgments, experimenting with strategies, learning lessons, and adapting their behavior.

FOUR FACETS OF AMERICAN POWER

Four facets of American power reinforce unipolarity and undercut incentives to resist or balance against the United States. These four facets of power are: traditional power assets; geography and historical timing; democracy and institutional restraint; and modernization and civic identity. Together these multiple dimensions of American power suggest that unipolarity is likely to persist and that the other major states are likely to continue to have incentives to engage and work with the United States -- even as they devise new strategies to cope with unipolarity.

Traditional Power Assets

The first facet of American power is its traditional power assets – material capabilities that allow it to pursue its objective and get other states to go along with it. One aspect of material capabilities is the sheer size of the American military establishment. As mentioned earlier, American military expenditures are greater than the next fourteen countries combined – and if current trends continue, the United States military expenditures will be equal to the rest of the world combined by 2007. The advanced technological character of much of this military power makes this power disparity even greater.

This mass of military power makes it difficult if not impossible for a group of states to develop capabilities that could balance or counter the United States. But other considerations further increase the difficulties of organizing a counter-balancing coalition. First, there are collective action problems. States might like to see the formation of a counter-unipolar coalition but they would prefer other states do the work of organizing it and covering its costs. This is the problem of “buck passing” – the collective action problem that makes it less likely that a coalition will form. There is also the problem of regional blocking problems. If particular great powers do decide to amass greater military power to challenge the United States, other major states in their region are likely to be threatened by this move and challenge it. For example, if Japan were to undertake military mobilization to counter the United States, it would find a hostile East Asian neighborhood awaited it. These considerations make counter-balancing unlikely.^{5[5]}

Other material power assets also work to America’s advantage – namely, security protection, markets, and nuclear weapons. Alliance security protection that the United States has

^{5[5]} This is argued in William Wohlforth, “The Stability of a Unipolar World,” International Security, 24, No. 1 (Summer 1999).

Discussion paper -- does not represent the views of the US Government

the capacity to extend to states in all four corners of the world provides a positive incentive to cooperate with the United States. This incentive is of two sorts. One is simply that American security protection reduces the resources that these countries would otherwise need to generate to cover their own protection. It is a cost-effective way to deal with the elemental problem of national security. If it means working with the United States and not offering opposition to it, the forgoing of this option of opposition is a cost that is more than compensated by the value of the security protection itself. The second benefit of security protection, at least for some states, is that it means that these states won't need to face the regional challenges that might come if they provided for their own security. Germany and Japan are the best examples of this. By positioning themselves under the American security umbrella, Germany and Japan were able to reassure their worried neighbors that they would not become future security threats to their respective regions. The United States is able to provide security to so many countries because it has the economic and military capabilities to do so on a worldwide basis. Indeed, it might well be that economies of scale exist for a versatile and high-tech military power such as the United States.

Another aspect of American material power is its large domestic market. Both Europeans and East Asians depend mightily on access to the American market. Of course, the United States relies heavily on both regions for its own economic prosperity. But the simple point here is that East Asia and Western Europe have incentives not to resist American unipolarity in such a way as to break apart the open markets that cut across the Pacific and Atlantic.

American unipolarity is also sustained by nuclear weapons. Even if the other major powers wanted to overturn the existing order, the mechanism of great-power war is no longer available. As Robert Gilpin has noted, great-power war is precisely the mechanism of change that has been used throughout history to redraw the international order. Rising states depose the reigning – but declining – state and impose a new order.^{6[6]} But nuclear weapons make this historical dynamic profoundly problematic. On the one hand, American power is rendered more tolerable because in the age of nuclear deterrence American military power cannot now be used for conquest against other great powers. Deterrence replaces alliance counterbalancing. On the other hand, the status quo international order led by the United States is rendered less easily replaceable. War-driven change is removed as an historical process, and the United States was lucky enough to be on top when this happened.

Geography and Historical Setting

The geographic setting and historical timing of America's rise in power also have shaped the way American primacy has been manifest. The United States is the only great power that is not neighbored by other great powers. This geographical remoteness made the power ascent of the United States less threatening to the rest of the world and it reinforced the disinclination of American leaders to directly dominate or manage great power relations. In the twentieth century, the United States became the world's preeminent power but the location and historical entry point of that power helped shaped how this arrival was greeted.

^{6[6]} Robert Gilpin, War and Change in World Politics (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1981).

Discussion paper -- does not represent the views of the US Government

When the United States was drawn into European power struggles, it did so primarily as an offshore balancer.^{7[7]} This was an echo of Britain's continental strategy which for several centuries was based on aloofness for European power struggles, intervening at critical moments to tip and restore the balance among the other states. This offshore balancing role was played out by the United States in the two world wars. America entered each war relatively late and tipped the balance in favor of the allies. After World War II, the United States emerged as an equally important presence in Europe, Asia, and the Middle East as an offshore military force that each region found useful in solving its local security dilemmas. In Europe, the reintegration of West Germany into the West was only possible with the American security commitment. The Franco-German settlement was explicitly and necessarily embedded in an American-guaranteed Atlantic settlement. In Joseph Joffe's apt phrase, the United States became "Europe's pacifier."^{8[8]} In East Asia, the American security pact with Japan also solved regional security dilemmas by creating restraints on the resurgence of Japanese military power. In the Middle East a similar dynamic drew the United States into an active role in mediating between Israel and the Arab states. In each region, American power is seen less as a source of domination and more as a useful tool.

Because the United States is geographically remote, abandonment rather than domination has been seen as the greater risk by many states. As a result, the United States has found itself constantly courted by governments in Europe, Asia, and elsewhere. When Winston Churchill advanced ideas about postwar order he was concerned above all in finding a way to tie the United States to Europe.^{9[9]} As Geir Lundestad has observed, the expanding American political order in the half century after World War II has been in important respects an "empire by invitation."^{10[10]} The remarkable global reach of American postwar hegemony has been at least in part driven by the efforts of European and Asian governments to harness American power, render that power more predictable, and use it to overcome their own regional insecurities. The result has been a durable system of America-centered economic and security partnerships.

Finally, the historical timing of America's rise in power also left a mark. The United States came relatively late to the great power arena, after the colonial and imperial eras had run their course. This meant that the pursuit of America's strategic interests was not primarily based on territorial control but on championing more principled ways of organizing great power relations. As a late-developing great power the United States needed openness and access to the regions of the world rather than recognition of its territorial claims. The American issuance of its Open Door policy toward China reflected this orientation. American officials were never fully

^{7[7]} On the notion of offshore balancing, see Christopher Layne, "From Preponderance to Offshore Balancing," International Security, Vol. 22, No. 1 (Summer 1997).

^{8[8]} Joseph Joffe, "America: Europe's Pacifier," The National Interest. See also Robert Art, "Why Western Europe Needs the United States and NATO," Political Science Quarterly, Vol. 111 (1996), pp. 1-39.

^{9[9]} See Ikenberry, After Victory, Chapter Six.

^{10[10]} Geir Lundestad, "Empire by Invitation? The United States and Western Europe, 1945-1952," The Journal of Peace Research, Vol. 23 (September 1986), pp. 263-77.

Discussion paper -- does not represent the views of the US Government

consistent in wielding such principled claims about order and they were often a source of conflict with the other major states. But the overall effect of this alignment of American geo-strategic interests with enlightened normative principles of order reinforced the image of the United States as a relatively non-coercive and non-imperial hegemonic power.

Democracy and Institutional Restraints

The American unipolar order is also organized around democratic polities and a complex web of intergovernmental institutions – and these features of the American system alter and mute the way in which hegemonic power is manifest. One version of this argument is the democratic peace thesis: open democratic polities are less able or willing to use power in an arbitrary and indiscriminate manner against other democracies.^{11[11]} The calculations of smaller and weaker states as they confront a democratic hegemon are altered. Fundamentally, power asymmetries are less threatening or destabilizing when they exist between democracies. American power is “institutionalized” – not entirely, of course – but more so than in the case of previous world-dominating states. This institutionalization of hegemonic strategy serves the interest of the United States by making its power more legitimate, expansive, and durable. But the price is that some restraints are indeed placed on the exercise of power.^{12[12]}

In this view, three elements matter most in making American power more stable, engaged, and restrained. First, America’s mature political institutions organized around the rule of law have made it a relatively predictable and cooperative hegemon. The pluralistic and regularized way in which American foreign and security policy is made reduces surprises and allows other states to build long-term, mutually beneficial relations. The governmental separation of powers creates a shared decision-making system that opens up the process and reduces the ability of any one leader to make abrupt or aggressive moves toward other states. An active press and competitive party system also provide a service to outside states by generating information about US policy and determining the seriousness its seriousness of purpose. The messiness of democracy can frustrate American diplomats and confuse foreign observers. But over the long term, democratic institutions produce more consistent and credible policies than autocratic or authoritarian states.

This open and decentralized political process works in a second way to reduce foreign worries about American power. It creates what might be called “voice opportunities” – it offers opportunities for political access and, with it, the means for foreign governments and groups to influence the way Washington’s power is exercised. Foreign governments and corporations may not have elected officials in Washington but they do have representatives. Looked at from the perspective of the stable functioning of American’s unipolar order, this is one of the most functional aspects of the United States as a global power. By providing other states opportunities

^{11[11]} See Bruce Russett and John Oneal, Triangulating Peace: Democracy, Interdependence, and International Organizations (New York: Norton, 2001).

^{12[12]} This is the argument of G. John Ikenberry, After Victory: Institutions, Strategic Restraint, and the Rebuilding of Order after Major War (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001).

Discussion paper -- does not represent the views of the US Government

to play the game in Washington, the United States draws them into active, ongoing partnerships that serve its long-term strategic interests.

A final element of the unipolar order that reduces the worry about power asymmetries is the web of institutions that mark the postwar order. After World War II, the United States launched history's most ambitious era of institution building. The UN, IMF, World Bank, NATO, GATT, and other institutions that emerged provided the most rule-based structure for political and economic relations in history. The United States was deeply ambivalent about making permanent security commitments to other countries or allowing its political and economic policies to be dictated by intergovernmental bodies. The Soviet threat was critical in overcoming these doubts. Networks and political relationships were built that -- paradoxically -- both made American power more far-reaching and durable but also more predictable and malleable.

Modernization and Civic Nationalism

American power has been rendered more acceptable to the rest of the world because the United States "project" is congruent with the deeper forces of modernization. The point here is not that the United States has pushed other states to embrace its goals and purposes but that all states are operating within a transforming global system -- driven by modernization, industrialization, and social mobilization. The synchronicity between the rise of the United States as a liberal global power and the system-wide imperatives of modernization create a sort of functional "fit" between the United States and the wider world order. If the United States were attempting to project state socialist economic ideas or autocratic political values, its fit with the deep forces of modernization would be poor. Its purposes would be resisted around the world and resistance to American power would be triggered. But the deep congruence between the American model and the functional demands of modernization both boost the power of the United States and make its relationship with the rest of the world more harmonious.

Industrialization is a constantly evolving process and the social and political characteristics within countries that it encourages and rewards --- and that promote or impede industrial advancement -- change over time as countries move through developmental stages. In this sense, the fit between a polity and modernization is never absolute or permanent. Industrialism in advanced societies tends to feature highly educated workforces, rapid flows of information, and progressively more specialized and complex systems of social and industrial organization. These features of industrial society -- sometimes called late-industrialism -- tend to foster a citizenry that is heterogeneous, well educated, and difficult to coerce.^{13[13]} From this perspective it is possible to see why various state socialist and authoritarian countries -- including the Soviet Union -- ran into trouble as the twentieth century proceeded. The old command order impeded industrial modernization while, at the same time, industrial modernization undercut the old command order. In contrast, the American polity has tended to have a relatively good fit with the demands and opportunities of industrial modernization. European and Asian forms of

^{13[13]} See Daniel Dell, The Coming of Post-Industrial Society (New York: Basic Books, 1973).

Discussion paper -- does not represent the views of the US Government

capitalist democracy also have exhibited features that seem in various ways to be quite congruent with the leading edge of advanced industrial development. The success of the American model is partly due to the fact that it used its postwar power to build an international order that worked to the benefit of the American style of industrial capitalism. But the success of the American model – and the enhanced global influence and appeal that the United States has experienced in recent decades – is also due to the deep congruence between the logic of modernization and the American system.

The functionality between the United States polity and wider evolutionary developments in the international system also can be traced to the American political identity -- which is rooted in civic nationalism and multi-culturalism. The basic distinction between civil and ethnic nationalism is useful in locating this feature. Civic nationalism is group identity, which is composed of commitments to the nation's political creed. Race, religion, gender, language, or ethnicity are not relevant in defining a citizen's rights and inclusion within the polity. Shared belief in the country's principles and values embedded in the rule of law is the organizing basis for political order and citizens are understood to be equal and rights-bearing individuals. Ethnic nationalism, in contrast, maintains that an individual's rights and participation within the polity are inherited - based on ethnic or racial ties.^{14[14]}

Because civic nationalism is shared with other Western states it tends to be a source of cohesion and cooperation. Throughout the industrial democratic world, the dominant form of political identity is based on a set of abstract and juridical rights and responsibilities which coexist with private ethnic and religious associations. Just as warring states and nationalism tend to reinforce each other, so too do Western civic identity and cooperative political relations reinforce each other. Political order -- domestic and international -- is strengthened when there exists a substantial sense of community and shared identity. It matters that the leaders of today's advanced industrial states are not seeking to legitimize their power by making racial or imperialist appeals. Civic nationalism, rooted in shared commitment to democracy and the rule of law – provides a widely embraced identity across most of the American hegemonic order. At the same time, potentially divisive identity conflicts – rooted in antagonistic ethnic or religious or class divisions – are dampened by relegating them to secondary status within civil society.

THE LIMITS OF BINDING AND BALANCING

There are two extreme strategies for coping with concentrated power. One is to balance against it and the other is to bind that power to rules and institutions. Balancing entails resisting, pulling away, and forming a counter-concentration of power in cooperation with other weak states. By pulling away from the dominant state, the weaker states remove themselves from the direct reach of the powerful state. By forming a counter-coalition, the dominant state's power is checked by the aggregation of countervailing power. Binding is the opposite strategy. The power of the dominant state is made less threatening to weaker states by embedding that power in rules and institutions that channel and limit the ways that power is exercised. In most historical times

^{14[14]} This distinction is made by Anthony D. Smith, The Ethnic Origins of Nations (Oxford: Blackwell, 1986).

Discussion paper -- does not represent the views of the US Government

and places, power binding has not been an option because the conditions of anarchy make restraints on power non-credible. Some practical restraints may exist – custom, domestic politics, geography, etc. – but they do not have the geopolitical heft to provide the ultimate protections against a dominant power. Balance of power is the most enduring mechanism to restrain power because it is the most reliable; power checks power.

These strategies, of course, are themselves varied and complex. There are many ways that balancing can be manifest and a rich theoretical and historical literature reveals these complexities. Alliance-based, war-time coalitions that seek to stop the territorial aggression of a dominant state – such as the one that eventually took shape to confront Napoleonic France in the early 19th century -- is one manifestation. Balancing coalitions that seek to deny geopolitical influence of a dominant state through resistance and the organizing of counter-spheres of influence is another manifestation. Binding can also vary. The dominant state can be bound to weaker states and the international/regional order in more or less formal ways. German power is tied to Europe in various layers of formal regional and Atlantic mechanisms – including monetary union, the wider EU order, and NATO. The dominant state can be bound in looser ways. The United States is party to a growing array of multilateral treaties and agreements.^{15[15]} In the trade area, American economic power is disciplined by the rules and institutions of the WTO. Binding might also be manifest in informal, political ways, such as through consultations, ad hoc bargaining, and the continuous pulling and hauling of inter-state relations.

But there are limits to these ideal-typical strategies. As a rich literature on balance of power politics shows, balancing is not easy or automatic – even in the face of overwhelming and threatening power.^{16[16]} First, it is often costly to mobilize a counter-coalition, particularly when the threat is not that of immediate territorial conquest. There is a tendency to engage in buck-passing.^{17[17]} Collective action problems reinforce this constraint. Second, balancing can be costly by disrupting economic gains that flow from linkages with the powerful state. Third, it can be dangerous. If balancing is attempted but fails, a cost comes from reprisals. Fourth, even if balancing is successful – and a counter-coalition is created – it might not solve the problem. If the threat is not from the dominant state's hard power but its cultural, economic, or political influence, military balancing is not necessarily the appropriate strategy. How do you balance against soft power? Finally, balancing may actually be impossible. William Wohlforth argues

^{15[15]} Roughly 150 multilateral treaties were in force in 1950, 400 in 1980, and close to 600 in 2000. These agreements deal with the full range of human rights protections, international organizations, trade and investment, and environmental protection. State Department data, reported in Steward Patrick, "Multilateralism and its Discontents," in Patrick and Shepard Forman, eds., Multilateralism and U.S. Foreign Policy: Ambivalent Engagement (Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 2002), pp. 11-12.

^{16[16]} See Stephen M. Walt, The Origins of Alliances (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1987).

^{17[17]} John Mearsheimer stresses this dynamic in The Tragedy of Great Power Politics (New York: Norton, 2001), Chapter Six.

Discussion paper -- does not represent the views of the US Government

that American unipolarity is so extreme there is not a realistic combination of states that could combine to produce a counter-hegemonic bloc.^{18[18]}

Behind these limits on traditional security balancing are other considerations. The presence of nuclear weapons and deterrence alter the logic of balancing among the great powers – it changes the character of the threats that are manifest. If territorial conquest is not a serious security issue among the major states, the most important reason to balance is taken away. American unipolar power may be threatening to China, Russia and other states, but this does not include the fear of invasion or direct imperial domination. In this sense, American power is less worrisome to the other major states than dominant states in the past who were less powerful than the United States is today but more threatening to their neighbors.^{19[19]}

The balancing logic also must confront a second background condition that is emphasized by realist theories of hegemonic stability. Powerful states are not just threats but they can also be providers of international public goods. Robert Gilpin's work reminds us that at least in the age of liberal hegemonic states, the dominant power tends to seek mutually beneficial trade and economic relations. It also can identify its own interests with the provision of stable and open relations. This logic can even lead the hegemonic state to make security calculations – whom to protect in security partnerships – with an eye to the trade and economic growth implications of the security order. The United States may continue to offer security protection to Europe and East Asian partners if it calculates that the resulting system of indivisible security ties reinforces open economic relations and facilitates domestic economic gains.

Finally, another background consideration is the wider structure of convergent and divergent interests. If the threat of territorial conquest and direct political domination is taken out of the system, the question is what are the remaining interest-based rivalries. Presumably, the great powers worry not just about American power but about the interests that are pursued with that power. On the one hand, it is possible to argue that the range of divergent interests between the United States and the other major powers is actually quite narrow by historical standards. Certainly, this is true between the advanced democratic countries. On the other hand, the rise of unipolar power itself has created new, divergent interests. For example, the sheer size of the American economy – and a decade of growth unmatched by Europe, Japan, or the other advanced countries – means that the United States' obligations under the Kyoto protocol would be vastly greater than those of other states. In the security realm, the United States has global interests and security threats that no other state has. Its troops are more likely to be dispatched to distant battlefields than those of other major states – which means that it would be more exposed to the legal liabilities of the International Criminal Court (ICC) than others. The United States must worry about threats to its interests in all parts of the world. American unipolar power makes it a unique target for terrorism. It is not surprising that Europeans and Americans make different

^{18[18]} See Wohlforth, "The Stability of a Unipolar World."

^{19[19]} This focus on the variability of threats is developed in Stephen Walt, "Keeping the World 'Off Balance': Self Restraint and U.S. Foreign Policy," in Ikenberry, ed., American Unrivaled, Chapter Four.

Discussion paper -- does not represent the views of the US Government

threat assessments about terrorism and rogue states seeking weapons of mass destruction than American officials do.

There are also limits and constraints on the binding strategy. The big problem, of course, is that the leading state may not agree to bind itself to rules and institutions. The attraction of this strategy for weak states is that it allows them to realize all the advantages of interacting with the dominant state without risking domination or exploitation. The dominant state operates within a framework of rules and institutions that limit the ways in which that power can be exercised. Arbitrary and indiscriminate actions by the powerful state are reduced. But when the leading state agrees to operate in a multilateral or rule-based order, it is agreeing to reduce its freedom of action. But why would it ever do this? The answer is that there must be something it gets in return. What the other states can offer the lead state is not always clear, particularly when the binding restraints on the powerful state relate to the way it pursues core security and national interests. The United States may be willing to reduce its policy autonomy in trade and other “low politics” realms through commitments to the World Trade Organization (WTO) and other multilateral economic regimes, but it is more reluctant to cede any real autonomy in the areas of arms control and the use of force. Moreover, weaker states also have to calculate what they are willing to give up in order to gain some concessions from the unipolar state. Finally, again, in the background is the question of whether binding, rule-based institutional commitments are ultimately credible. If institutional bargains are too easily violated or overturned, the binding strategy loses its viability.

The usefulness of the binding strategy to both strong and weak states hinges on their assessments of particularly trade-offs. The United States has to ask: how much entanglement in rules and agreements is it worth enduring to get other states organized and locked into a predictable rule-based system? Such an order would be desirable at the right price. The United States also has an interest in not driving other states to abandon cooperation with the dominant state and move toward a strategy of resistance or balancing. If the acceptance of some binding constraints reduces this possibility, this too is desirable – again, at the right price. These are continuous rather than dichotomous variables. The United States is most likely to agree to be bound to rules and institutions that create loopholes, veto rights, weighted voting, and escape clauses. The more it needs cooperative and predictable behavior from other states, the more it presumably will be willing to tighten up these opt-out conditions. The WTO is a good example of this. Weaker states, in turn, need to determine whether loose and conditional binding by the United States nonetheless provides sufficient reduction in the threats of arbitrary and indiscriminate actions to make the compromise of their policy autonomy worthwhile. In the background, these weaker states also need to ask: is the overall reduction in threats and dangers from American power dominance sufficient and credible enough to justify their compliant participation within the order?

The limits and constraints on both balancing and binding strategies suggest that the actual choices and options of the great powers as they confront American unipolar power will be varied and fall in between these extremes. States will need to pursue a variety of strategies depending on the specific situation. They will both resist and engage the United States.

STRATEGIES OF RESISTANCE AND ENGAGEMENT

Strategies are emerging among the major states to deal with American unipolar power. In particular, it is possible to identify strategies that move in two different directions – either toward resistance and the loosening of ties to the unipolar state or toward engagement and cooperation. At the extremes are the two strategies that we have just discussed: balancing and binding. These strategies are not mutually exclusive – and indeed it is the mix of these strategies pursued by the major states that is the hallmark of today’s unipolar order.

Buffering

This strategy entails reducing exposure to the lead state through the development of alternative regional political spheres. The idea is to loosen and reduce direct interaction with – and therefore control by – the lead state. The strategy can be structural: pulling away from and creating an alternative regional order organized around competing ideas and agendas. A state or group of states can try to construct an alternative and separate realm of international order. The strategy can also be more limited: creating regional infrastructure and independent capacity that allows the weaker states to strengthen their ability together to interact with the dominant state.

Regarding structural buffering, some scholars have depicted the post-World War I communist movements in Russia and China as great global ruptures that were driven by vanguards seeking to remove their societies from modern Western development. Japan’s East Asian Co-Prosperity Sphere was an extreme version of regional order building undertaken to counter and protect against the encroachment of a dynamic West. These great historical projects may have been driven in part by calculations by elites that their countries could not compete with or within the Western order. There is no evidence today of anything similar to this type of order-building dynamic.

Another version might simply involve the creation of some independent regional security or political capability. The case being made inside of Europe for a non-NATO, independent security identity is driven in part by a desire to loosen dependence on American military protection.^{20[20]} There is no serious proposal on the European table for a completely separate and equal military force that would allow Europe to end the NATO pact and act as a free-standing regional entity. But proponents of a strengthened European defense capability do seek to gain capacity for independent action and some enhanced ability to influence American security policy. This is the view of Chris Patten, the EU commissioner for external relations, who has argued: “We [Europeans] have to, as football coaches say, dig deeper, . . . if we’re going to be a credible ally and an occasional counterweight.”^{21[21]}

^{20[20]} See discussion of motivations behind the unification of Europe in Charles Kupchan, The End of the American Era: U.S. Foreign Policy after the Cold War (New York: Knopf, 2002).

^{21[21]} Steven Erlanger, “The Need for Cooperation Remains an ‘Old Truth’ In a Changed World,” The New York Times, 13 September 2002.

Discussion paper -- does not represent the views of the US Government

Buffering can take the form of strengthening more limited and functional groupings. The ASEAN plus 3 forum is an example of an effort by East Asian countries to establish some regional identity and capacity so as to reduce the economic vulnerabilities that intrude from the wider global economy. At least some of the inspiration for this nascent grouping came from the Asian economic crisis of 1997-98 that saw the United States resist Japanese efforts to establish a so-called Asian Monetary Fund. The recently released ASEAN plus 3 vision statement advances a notion of regionalism that is compatible with global economic and political institutions – and close American economic and security ties – but which provides a greater measure of regional self-governance.

Baiting

Another strategy entails developing counter-regional or functional groupings that are designed, at least in part, to lure the dominant state into interaction with – and ultimately conformity with – this regional or functional grouping. The strategy is to develop principles and institutions that establish international standards or best practices that over time will become universal in scope. The leading state may resist the initial establishment of the regional or functional grouping but over time it will find it increasingly difficult to avoid or circumvent that alternative cooperative arrangement.

The decision by the Europeans to go forward with the ICC is one example. There are at least some ICC proponents who argue that over time a successfully functioning ICC will be harder for the United States to resist. Change in the American position may come from a shift in administration or from evolving views of the ICC based on experience. The Europeans and other governments also have moved forward with the Kyoto protocol on climate change. There may be less anticipation in this case that the United States will eventually join the agreement but by moving forward with the implication of the Kyoto agreement proponents of this approach to global warming seek to keep pressure on the United States to do something.

Bargaining

The most obvious and prevalent strategy for dealing with the untoward consequences of American unipolarity is simply to bargain with the United States. The United States is preeminent but it is not omnipotent. The power disparities are extreme but the other major states do have assets and some leverage over the United States. This strategy entails attempting to alter the policies of the dominant state through carrots and sticks and it can take a variety of forms.

One is simply to engage in old-fashioned pulling and hauling. Governments can play the bargaining game through inter-governmental channels and working with like-minded domestic groups and politicians in the dominant state. In most policy areas, the entire weight of American power is not on the line. The issues and relative bargaining advantages are more proximate and this means that the outcome will reflect a variety of inputs – the cogency of arguments, the quality of the expertise, the determination of the participants, etc. In effect, this is great power politics under conditions of “complex interdependence.”

Discussion paper -- does not represent the views of the US Government

Second, major states can also play a slightly harder-edged game by threatening to withhold cooperation. This is the main source of leverage for weaker countries facing the United States. In various policy areas, the United States needs the active cooperation of other states to achieve its goals. In the war on terrorism, the United States needs other governments for intelligence sharing and law enforcement. One British member of the House of Lords recently argued that the way to show the Bush administration that there is a cost of acting unilaterally is to withhold cooperation on intelligence sharing in the war on terrorism. "I would switch off U.S.-U.K. intelligence cooperation for three days to make the point of how important cooperation is," remarked Lord William Wallace.^{22[22]} Withholding cooperation can move from the symbolic to the more tangible and consequential. Saudi Arabia, for example, has threatened restrictions on the basing rights of American forces in military operations aimed at Iraq. Threatening to deny the United States use of a strategic asset is a way of getting some leverage into Washington policy making.

Third, weaker states can use economic tariffs and embargoes as a tool to gain some political leverage over American policy. The European response to the American decision to impose high tariffs on imported steel in the spring of 2002 involved EU threats of massive retaliation. Moreover, the proposed counter-tariffs were targeted on American exports from politically sensitive states. Some observers saw this aggressive response as a message to the United States not just on steel tariffs and trade policy but on the Bush administration's more general unilateral foreign policy.

Fourth, bargaining can take the form of old fashioned log rolling. This variation entails seeking to work with the dominant state to seek opportunities for joint gain. Weaker states do not resist the politics of the dominant state but try to adapt them in local circumstances for local advantage. For example, Russian President Putin offered support for America's Iraq policy in exchange for American acquiescence in Russian policies toward its minorities. More generally, governments around the world have sought to find ways to connect their policy agendas to America's war on terrorism and thereby gain support from Washington.

Finally, bargaining may also involve an attempt by weaker states to use a more diffuse source of leverage – the threat to withhold legitimacy for an American action. This is most relevant in the area of the American use of force. The United States is clearly sensitive – some officials in the Bush administration more than others – to the general acceptability of its use of military force. While insisting that it has the right to act unilaterally to preemptively attack threats in Iraq and elsewhere, the administration is also sensitive to the views of other allied governments and – at least to some extent -- foreign public opinion. American domestic opinion is also sensitive to the legitimacy of its use of force and domestic support for such actions when they are seen as generally acceptable by the outside world. In this way, the "legitimacy pressure" is felt indirectly through domestic politics. This sensitivity about the legitimacy of American power – and the use of force – is what ultimately led the Bush administration to seek U.N. Security Council support for its confrontation with Iraq. And it is here that the views of Russia, China, Britain, and France take on more importance than would otherwise be the case.

^{22[22]} Bruce Stokes, "Our Allies' New Slogan: Constrain America," National Journal, 15 June 2002, p. 1803.

Discussion paper -- does not represent the views of the US Government

Bandwagoning

Bandwagoning is a strategy that can encompass a wide range of state behavior but it essentially entails policies that support and accommodate the dominant power.^{23[23]} Weaker states seek to work with rather than resist the dominant state – and they look for opportunities to advance their interests without directly challenging the dominant state. Bandwagoning can take various forms – ranging from simple appeasement to more active attempts to work with and manipulate the policies of the leading state. Today, in one way or another, all the major states – including Russia and China – are pursuing a bandwagoning strategy toward American unipolar power.

In its simplest form, bandwagoning is appeasement. It is a strategy of non-resistance where weaker states accommodate the dominant state by seeking to remove sources of conflict in their relations. In classical European diplomacy, as Gordon Craig and Alexander George note, appeasement referred to “the reduction of tension between [two states] by the methodical removal of the principal causes of conflict and disagreement between them.”^{24[24]} This strategy is particularly useful to the major states that confront the United States if the sources of their conflict are primarily secondary and out of area – such as in the case of American policy toward Iraq. They can soften their opposition or simply get out of the way without compromising their core interests. They are also able to make a calculation that in appeasing the United States they are not encouraging the United States to expand its unipolar ambitions.^{25[25]} This strategy might be used in several ways. One is to play for time until the power disparities change – or until there is a leadership change in Washington. A more sophisticated strategy might involve using appeasement in an effort to alter the domestic coalitions in the dominant state – and thereby alter the policy position of the state itself.

A more general strategy of bandwagoning entails finding ways to gain advantages within an international order dominated by the lead state. This seems to be an attractive option when the lead state is a mature, status quo power that pursues a restrained and accommodating grand strategy. Again, these conditions appear to hold today.

In the last several years, for example, China has moved from a strategy of resistance to a strategy of bandwagoning. As one reporter noted recently, “Exhibiting new self-confidence and unprecedented acceptance of US power in the world, China has embraced a more moderate,

^{23[23]} See Steve Walt, Theory of Alliances; and Randall Schweller, “Bandwagoning for Profit: Bringing the Revisionist State Back In,” International Security, 19, 1 (Summer 1994), pp. 72-107.

^{24[24]} Gordon Craig and Alexander George, Force and Statecraft: Diplomatic Problems of Our Time, 3rd Edition (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997).

^{25[25]} See discussion in Stephen R. Rock, Appeasement in International Politics (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2000).

Discussion paper -- does not represent the views of the US Government

engaged foreign policy than ever before. . .”^{26[26]} Through the 1990s, China articulated a foreign policy that at least in formal, rhetorical terms called for resistance to American “hegemonism.” Summit meetings with Russian and other leaders often culminated in public statements of opposition to a one superpower world. A variety of factors may explain Chinese movement toward more willing acceptance of American unipolar power, including the decision by Russian President Putin to seek closer ties with the West. With Russia in a near-alliance with the United States, a Chinese policy of resistance was increasingly costly – and ultimately not viable. The search for economic growth through expanding trade and investment with the West was also a lure. The opportunities presented to Beijing in the wake of September 11 to align itself with the United States in the war on terrorism and thereby gain great room for maneuver within its own neighborhood might also be a factor. Bandwagoning is all the more attractive to Beijing if it calculates that long-term economic and strategic trends favor China.

Bonding

Another version of bandwagoning might be called bonding – where leaders of weaker states develop close personal and policy ties with the American president. The goal is to become so close, so loyal, and so indispensable that the United States effectively incorporates them into the inner circle of decision making. British Prime Minister Tony Blair is the best example of this strategy. The British leader has tied himself to the American anti-terrorist plan but in doing so he has made it an Anglo-American-based campaign. By bonding itself to the superpower, Britain gains a stake in the struggle but also a voice in the policy.

Promoting Hierarchy, Specialization and Division of Labor

Another engagement-oriented strategy of secondary states in a unipolar order is to seek niche specialties in military and economic realms that make it harder for the dominant state to ignore or exploit these states. Even if weaker states cannot alter their overall position within the international order, they can develop some special capabilities and assets that the dominant state might find useful and necessary. In hierarchical orders, after all, there is a division of labor – the subordinate actors in such an order have secondary functions but their functions and specialties are nonetheless indispensable to the operation of the hierarchical order. The strategy is not to resist subordination or to seek to match the dominant state’s power capabilities, but it is rather to promote division of labor and the sharing of functions.

When the European members of NATO agreed recently to develop a NATO rapid reaction force that would give the alliance capacities useful to the war on terrorism, they were attempting to keep themselves relevant to American security operations and make it more difficult for the Pentagon to by-pass the alliance. By creating assets that Washington finds useful, they are creating incentives for the United States to operate and use force within an alliance-based, multilateral framework where their voices will be heard. At a more operational

^{26[26]} John Pomfret, “China Embraces More Moderate Foreign Policy,” The Washington Post, 23 October 2002, p. A23.

Discussion paper -- does not represent the views of the US Government

level, British special forces are also said to have capacities that the United States cannot fully duplicate – and this gives the British a role – and voice – in some American-led military operations.

CONCLUSION: RESTRAINTS ON UNIPOLAR POWER

In evaluating the emerging great power reactions to unipolarity, the first question that must be asked is: what precisely are the threats that concentrated American power present to the other major states? The fact that the United States does not seek territorial conquest or direct domination of the other states – either because it has no incentives to do so or because nuclear weapons and other factors make it very costly or impossible – sets the parameters for thinking about the reactions to unipolarity.

As noted at the beginning, it can be argued that the greater the willingness of the United States to exercise its power through multilateral, rule-based mechanisms and institutions the less the likelihood of systematic great power resistance to American unipolar power. This hypothesis brings us back to the question posed earlier: to what extent does unipolarity create incentives and pressures for the United States to reduce its willingness to operate in multilateral, rule-based ways? Does the distribution of power increasingly “select” for unilateralism in American foreign policy? Is the United States doomed to act unilaterally and exercise its power in increasingly arbitrary and indiscriminate ways or to act in a coercive and imperial manner? To answer these questions is to determine whether great power reactions to American unipolarity will move in the direction of resistance and loosening of ties or in the direction of engagement and bandwagoning.

There are at least three sources of rule-based, multilateralism in American foreign policy that serve as counter-pressures to unipolar unilateralism. One is simply the functional demand of cooperation in the face of growing economic interdependence. The more economically interconnected that states become, the more dependent they are for the realization of their objectives on the actions of other states. “As interdependence rises,” Robert Keohane argues, “the opportunity costs of not co-coordinating policy increase, compared with the costs of sacrificing autonomy as a consequence of making binding agreements.”^{27[27]} Rising economic interdependence is one of the hallmarks of the contemporary international system. Over the postwar era, states have actively and consistently sought to open markets and reap the economic, social, and technological gains that derive from integration in the world economy. If this remains true in the years ahead, it is easy to predict that the demands for multilateral agreements – even and perhaps especially by the United States – will increase and not decrease.

American support for multilateralism can also stem from a grand strategic interest in preserving power and creating a stable and legitimate international order. This logic is particularly evident at major historical turning points -- such as 1919, 1945, and after the Cold War -- when the United States has faced choices about how to use power and organize inter-state

^{27[27]} Robert Keohane, “Multilateralism: An Agenda for Research,” International Journal (Autumn 1990), p. 742.

Discussion paper -- does not represent the views of the US Government

relations. The support for multilateralism is a way to signal restraint and commitment to other states thereby encouraging the acquiescence and cooperation of weaker states.^{28[28]} This has been a strategy that the United States has pursued to a greater or less degree across the 20th century – and it explains the remarkably durable and legitimate character of the existing international order. From this perspective, multilateralism – and the search for rule-based agreements – should increase rather than decrease with the rise of American unipolarity. It predicts that the existing multilateral order – which itself reflects an older multilateral bargain between the United States and the outside world should “rein in” the Bush administration – and it suggests that the current administration should respond to general power management incentives and limit its tilt toward unilateralism.

A final source of American multilateralism emerges from the United States polity itself. The United States has a distinctive self-understanding about the nature of its own political order - - and this has implications for how it thinks about international political order. To be sure, there are multiple political traditions in the United States that reflect divergent and often competing ideas about how the United States should relate to the rest of the world. These traditions variously council isolationism and activism, realism and idealism, aloofness and engagement in the conduct of American foreign affairs. But behind these political-intellectual traditions are deeper aspects of the American political identity that inform the way the United States seeks to build order in the larger global system. The enlightenment origins of the American founding has given the United States an identity that sees its principles of politics of universal significance and scope.^{29[29]} The republican democratic tradition that enshrines the rule of law reflects a deeper American view that polities – domestic or international – are best organized around rules and principles of order. America’s tradition of civil nationalism also reinforces this notion – that the rule of law is the source of legitimacy and political inclusion. This tradition biases American foreign policy toward multilateralism.

These considerations allow us to specify a variety of mechanisms that reinforce restraint in the exercise of American unipolar power. One restraint mechanism is simply the bi-product of functional bargaining with other states. The United States may be preeminent but it is not omnipotent. It needs other states; thus the United States and the other major states will seek bargains that allow them to achieve mutual gains. Another restraint is a bi-product of the sensitivity of the United States to its international legitimacy. The United States has a great incentive for other states to willingly accept America’s preeminent position rather than resist it. It is not in America’s interest to be the lead state in a coercive order built around the exercise of naked power. The decision by the Bush administration to go back to the UN Security Council to get support for its confrontation with Iraq shows how even an administration that is skeptical of the UN understands the benefits that come from the legitimate use of force. A third mechanism of restraint comes from the inter-government pulling and hauling, which is facilitated, by

^{28[28]} This argument is developed in G. John Ikenberry, After Victory: Institutions, Strategic Restraint, and the Rebuilding of Order after Major War (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001).

^{29[29]} See Samuel Huntington, American Politics: The Promise of Disharmony (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1983).

Discussion paper -- does not represent the views of the US Government

democracy and global institutions. Even a unipolar state is embedded in a larger structure of ongoing political relations and interactions.

A final mechanism of restraint is the deeper processes of modernization. States are not simply interacting power packages – or billiard balls, to use the term of art -- they are also societies undergoing long-term transformations driven by the forces of industrialization and modernization. In this regard, the functionality between the United States and the wider evolutionary developments in the international system will be critical in determining the degree of congruence and incongruence between it and the other major states. To the extent that the United States continues to be at the leading edge of modernization, the other major states will ultimately find reasons to work with and engage the United States. If the United States falls off the cutting edge of modernization and becomes a huge backwater that seeks only to protect its existing gains, great power conflicts will likely re-emerge. American unipolar power built on a 21st century version of the “iron and rye” coalition will have a different foreign policy and global presence than one built on leading edge, internationally oriented socioeconomic interests and coalitions. The world reacts not just to American power but also to its purpose and functionality within the larger system.

