New Great Powers: Who Will They Be, and How Will They Rise?

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This paper is based on the structural-realist expectation that the unipolar international-political system dominated by the United States will one day be replaced by a bipolar or multipolar system. Drawing on structural-realist theory, arguments about the offense-defense-deterrence balance, international-political history, and the current capabilities of the U.S. and several rising powers, I consider how this will occur.

I proceed as follows. First, I define polarity and great power. Then I explain why unipolarity will wane. Next, I consider what it will take for states to balance U.S. power. I argue that this could occur through either a precipitous U.S. decline or an increase in other states' capabilities. I also demonstrate that because policy makers and analysts misunderstand the nature of unipolarity, the meaning of capability, and the ways that nuclear weapons have altered great-power politics, they have overstated what it will take for states to rise. New great powers need not compete with the United States either globally or across the spectrum of its current military and economic dominance. They must simply have the capability to dissuade the United States from intervening in their affairs and trampling on their interests.

DEFINING GREAT POWER

The polarity of the international system is defined by the number of great powers in the world. To determine polarity in a particular era, one counts states of great and roughly equivalent capabilities.[1] If there are three or more powerful states, the system is multipolar. If there are two such states, it is bipolar. If there is one state with unrivaled power, the system is unipolar,

From this definition of polarity, it is clear that a great power is simply a state of great capability. Yet scholars often include a behavioral component in their definitions of great power. Jack S. Levy, for example, argues that great powers are defined not only by their military capabilities but also by their desire to maintain a certain continental or global balance of power, concern with national honor and prestige, aggressive tendencies, and frequent interaction with and recognition by other great powers.[2] Similarly, Richard K. Betts argues that "the breadth of the superpowers' commitments is what distinguishes them from minor powers who can rarely spare much effort beyond guarding their national integrity."[3]

It is not hard to see why scholars rely on behavioral definitions. Great powers *are* more capable than other states of bold, even aggressive, action. Among all international actors, they are the ones most likely to survive and prosper while attempting to influence other actors and act for the sake of the system. Moreover, due to international anarchy, there is no sovereign to dissuade great powers from conquering or exploiting other states.[4]

But there are three reasons to abandon the expectation that great powers will be aggressive and make far-flung commitments. First, the combination of international anarchy and great capability permits both action and inaction.[5] The United States was a great power for several decades before it took center stage in World War I.[6] It

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[1] Kenneth N. Waltz, *Theory of International Politics* (New York: McGraw Hill, 1979), pp. 98-99, 129-131. On the meaning of "capabilities," see below.

[2] Jack S. Levy, *War in the Modern Great Power System, 1495-1975* (Lexington, K.Y.: University Press of Kentucky, 1983), pp. 16-18.

[3] Richard K. Betts, *Nuclear Blackmail and Nuclear Balance* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution, 1987), p. 133.

[4] Waltz, *Theory of International Politics*, pp. 194-195.

[5] Great powers, even more than other states, may do as they like. Waltz, *Theory of International Politics*, p. 92.

[6] Paul M. Kennedy, "The First World War and the International Power System," *International Security* 9:1 (Summer 1984), pp. 7-40. William C. Wohlforth, "The Stability of a Unipolar World," *International Security* 24:1 (Summer

did not *become* a great power because it participated in and helped to win the war. Neither was it courted from the wings because it *might become* a great power. The US *was* already a great power and, as the last one to enter the war, was expected to be a deciding factor.[7] The contemporary analogy is obvious. If American policy makers use a behavioral definition of great power to determine which of today's second-tier states will join the US in the spotlight, they will not know who it will be until that state walks in.

Just as states can be great powers without acting as scholars expect great powers to act, states can exhibit those behaviors without being great powers. China did not become a great power during the Korean War simply because it wanted to (and did) maintain a certain regional balance of power. Similarly, Iraq did not become a great power because it attacked Iran and Kuwait. Again, the lesson is obvious. It is necessary for policy makers and scholars to know the difference between a second-tier state that happens to be caught in the action, one that puts on great power garb before it develops the physique to carry it, and one that has the physique but dresses humbly and stays out of the action until it must protect its interests or is ready to brandish its power. Otherwise, policy and predictions will focus on states that "act like great powers" but fail to make it to the main event, and they will miss states that act in less conventional ways and "come out of nowhere" to dominate the action.

The second reason to drop the expectation that great powers will act in certain ways is that, unless the system is unipolar, great powers face strong structural incentives (in the form of other great powers) to moderate their actions, either veiling the power they accumulate or choosing to restrain themselves. Even in unipolarity, the unrivaled state confronts the problem (recognized or not) of determining just how far is too far when it comes to stretching domestic resources and pressing demands on other states.

Finally, the offense-defense-deterrence (ODD) balance affects the extent to which powerful states act like scholars expect them to. When defensive and, especially, deterrent military operations dominate, great powers attack other states significantly less often than when offensive operations dominate.[8] Incentives to ally with great powers should be sensitive to the ODD balance, as well.

To summarize, the scholarly image of great powers as active, aggressive, and heavily committed ignores the permissive logic of anarchy, as well as the restraining effects of polarity and defense and deterrence dominance. Great powers are simply states of great capability.

Since the demise of the Soviet Union in 1989, the international-political system has been unipolar.[9] This has been the case not because the U.S. has had an expansive definition of its security but because it has had unrivaled capabilities. When other states have the capabilities to balance U.S. power, bipolarity or multipolarity will emerge -- regardless of whether the new powers act aggressively, make global commitments, or are formally recognized by the United States as its peers.

1999), pp. 5-41.

[7]This is not to say that states are great powers when they win wars and get what they want out of negotiations or, conversely, that states cease to be great powers when they lose wars and fail to achieve their goals. Great power can no more be defined in terms of control over outcomes than it can be defined in terms of behavior. Failure to win wars and dominate negotiations may reduce state capabilities. But they cannot be used to indicate great power status because the systemic nature of international politics means that even great powers do not get what they want all of the time. On systems and unintended consequences, see Waltz, *Theory of International Politics*, ch. X.

[8] Karen Ruth Adams, "Attack and Conquer? International Anarchy and the Offense-Defense-Deterrence Balance," *International Security*, Vol. 28, No. 3 (Winter 2003/04), pp. 45-83.

[9] I date the end of bipolarity in 1989 because Soviet gross national product was stagnant from 1985-1989, and by 1989, the U.S.S.R. could not service its hard currency debt on time. Stagnating and declining economic capabilities reduced the USSR's capability to maintain its extensive military posture and domestic political cohesion.

WHY UNIPOLARITY WILL WANE

There are two reasons to expect U.S. power to be balanced. Both derive from the anarchic structure of the international-political system. First, in the absence of an international sovereign, there is no one to adjudicate and enforce solutions to international disputes in ways that respect the interests of all parties. Thus states have a tendency to "flock to the weaker side," for it is "the stronger, not the weaker side [that] threatens them, if only by pressing its preferred policies."[10] In the current, unipolar system, this means that states will tend to balance the power of the United States.

Second, powerful states have a tendency to overstretch, allowing their appetites to run ahead of, and deplete, their capabilities. This, too, is a result of international anarchy. The lack of a higher authority to help states adopt sustainable policies makes it likely that the far-flung interests of powerful states – especially unrivaled powers such as Rome and the United States -- will lead them to "identif[y their] own security with the maintenance of world order." Then, when they go too far, there is no one to help them maintain their status.[11] Thus it is likely that the United States, whose strategy is to maintain the international *status quo* it dominates by preventing the rise of a "peer competitor," will, like great powers before it, decline in both absolute and relative terms.[12]

What Will It Take for Others to Rise?

As U.S. capabilities decline relative to their current levels and relative to the rising capabilities of other states, the international system will shift from unipolarity to bipolarity or multipolarity. But what will it take for states that are currently not great powers to become so? There are two possibilities: first, that U.S. capabilities will decline so much in absolute terms that the U.S. will fall to the level of second-tier states, and second, that others will catch up to the U.S. even if it experiences little or no absolute decline.

Precipitous U.S. Decline

One possibility is that the United States will overstretch so far and for so long that it will deplete its military, economic, and political ability to maintain its unipolar position. If so, bipolarity or multipolarity would emerge without others catching up in absolute terms; they would simply rise relative to the falling fortunes of the United States. This could occur through some combination of military setbacks and economic shocks.

Military Setbacks. Militarily, the U.S. could have such a hard time keeping a lid on insurgencies in Iraq, Afghanistan, or others of the many countries in which it has a military presence that it would draw down its troops in Europe, Japan, and Korea to reinforce its counterinsurgency capabilities.[13] This could diminish U.S. capabilities

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[10] Kenneth N. Waltz, "The Emerging Structure of International Politics," *International Security*, Vol 18, No. 2 (Fall 1998), p. 74. See also Christopher Layne, "The Unipolar Illusion: Why New Great Powers Will Rise," *International Security*, Vol 17, No. 4 (Spring 1993), pp. 11-16.

[11] Waltz, *Theory of International Politics*, pp. 91, 208. Overreaching in a unipolar or bipolar system is more perilous than doing so in a multipolar system. In the latter, a declining states' peers may ally with it to balance the rising power of other states. In a bipolar system, the temptation is for the remaining pole (the only state capable of helping the declining great power) to say "good riddance." As discussed below, whether the dominant state in a unipolar system is helped to maintain its status as it declines seems likely to depend on prevailing military technology and the distribution of capabilities among its closest rivals. For a political-economic analysis of the tendency to overstretch, see Robert Gilpin, *War and Change in World Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), pp. 168-185.

[12] "The National Security Strategy of the United States of America," September 2002, available at http://www.whitehouse.gov/nsc/nss.html. Kenneth N. Waltz, "Structural Realism After the Cold War," *International Security*, Vol. 25, No. 1 (Summer 2000), pp. 36-37. Paul Kennedy, *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers: Economic Change and Military Conflict from 1500 to 2000* (New York: Vintage Books, 1987).

[13] In 2003, the U.S. had active duty military personnel in 138 countries. Department of Defense, "Active Duty Military Personnel Strengths by Regional Area and by Country (309A)," available at

in two ways. First, depending on the level of hostilities and the sophistication of the insurgency, it could erode U.S. military capabilities through attrition. Second, depending on depth and extent of the withdrawals and the character of the ensuing political situation, it could reduce the U.S. ability to dissuade European or Asian states from developing their own capabilities and finding their own solutions to regional problems. The alternatives would also involve a loss of capability. One alternative would be to staff additional American divisions. But economically, this would mean an increase in U.S. debt and thus an increase in European and Asian economic leverage over U.S. foreign policy decisions. Politically, it would affect the stability of U.S. administrations, as well as domestic political will to continue acting as the world's policeman. The other alternative would be to withdraw from countries in which U.S. forces are under attack. Yet this could reduce U.S. ability to dissuade other states from intervening. It could also diminish U.S. ability to "command the commons."[14] Withdrawing from Iraq in particular would reduce the U.S. to manage world oil resources and project power from military bases in the Middle East, now that it has closed its bases in Saudi Arabia.[15]

There are signs that U.S. capabilities are indeed eroding, albeit slowly. To staff the spring 2003 invasion of Iraq, the U.S. pulled forces from Afghanistan. Then, to staff the spring 2004 offensive against Taliban and al-Qaeda forces along the Afghanistan-Pakistan border, the U.S. reversed the flow.[16] Most recently, to prepare for the Iraqi election of January 2005, the Pentagon redeployed a brigade from South Korea, extended the tours of duty of 7-12,000 soldiers, and called up soldiers who have been retired for years.[17] Special Forces units, in particular, have been shifted around because they are staffed at only 92% of authorized strength, due to problems with training, recruitment, and retention.[18] Although the Defense Department has authorized an emergency increase of 30,000 soldiers until 2008, according to defense analysts such as Michael O'Hanlon, this was about half of what the Pentagon needed in the run-up to the election.[19] Henceforth, US troop needs will depend on how many additional

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http://web1.whs.osd.mil/mmid/M05/hst0309.pdf. In 2002, it had military installations in three dozen countries. Barry R. Posen, "Command of the Commons: The Military Foundation of U.S. Hegemony," *International Security*, Vol. 28, No. 1 (Summer 2003), pp. 16-17, n. 42. Posen's calculation is based on Department of Defense, "Summary," *Base Structure Report (A Summary of DoD's Real Property Inventory), Fiscal Year 2002 Baseline*, available at http://www.defenselink.mil/news/Jun2002/basestructure2002.pdf. As Posen points out, a "peculiar" definition of military installation seems to guide the report, as it does not include the U.S. bases in Kuwait and Saudi Arabia.

[14] According to Posen, "command of the commons is the key military enabler of the U.S. global power position." Posen, "Command of the Commons," p. 8.

[15] According to Deputy Secretary of Defense Paul Wolfowitz, replacing U.S. bases in Saudi Arabia with bases in Iraq so that al-Qaeda would have a harder time recruiting was, with concern about weapons of mass destruction and "the criminal treatment of the Iraqi people," one of the three main reasons the administration went to war. Transcript of interview with Vanity Fair reporter Sam Tannenhaus, May 9, 2003, available at http://www.defenselink.mil/transcripts/2003/tr20030509-depsecdef0223.html.

[16] Raymond Whitaker, "American troops patrolling the mountainous Afghan border region near Khost," *Independent* (London), March 7, 2004, p. 8. Moreover, in Spring 2004, in response to domestic political and economic pressure, as well as continuing troop losses, the U.S. reduced the number of troops in Iraq from 130,000 to 100,000 and moved its forces from the center of Baghdad and other cities to bases on their peripheries. Nicholas Blanford, "As US draws down, doubt over Iraqis," *Christian Science Monitor,* February 17, 2004, p. 1. As the insurgency in Iraq intensified in the lead-up to the election, with more sophisticated and more lethal attacks on Iraqi soldiers, police, and civilians, the flow within Iraq was reversed.

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[18] William M. Arkin, "Not a Magic Bullet: In terror war, U.S. relies too heavily on its thinly stretched Special Forces," *Los Angeles Times*, February 22, 2004, p. M1.

[19] Michael O'Hanlon as quoted by Tom Bowman, "Four-year troop increase might continue far longer: Senior Army official says world crises could require maintaining larger force," *Baltimore Sun*, January 30, 2004, p. 3A. See also Michael O'Hanlon, "Do the Math: We Need More Boots on the Ground," *Los Angeles Times*, August 12, 2003, part 2, p. 15.

coalition forces are recalled by their governments,[20] as well as the Pentagon's ability to stem the steady decline in stateside recruitment and in-theatre restiveness due to long tours of duty, lack of armor and spare parts, and continuing casualties.

Economic Crisis. Military setbacks are not the only way U.S. capabilities could decline. In fact, due to nuclear deterrence (discussed below), even a precipitous decline in U.S. military capabilities would not spell the end of unipolarity unless it was accompanied by economic collapse or acute political problems akin to those experienced by the Soviet Union. Due to the size and historical competitiveness of the U.S. economy, it is tempting to dismiss these possibilities. But they are not beyond the realm of the possible. For more than a decade, international anarchy and unipolarity have allowed the U.S. to follow and finance its whims. By devoting just 4% of its GDP to defense, the U.S. is able to outspend all other states in the system. Yet by running deficits to sustain this (and other) spending, the U.S. has run up $7 trillion in public debt (62% of GDP in 2002). Given high levels of household indebtedness and relatively small foreign exchange reserves ($67 billion, just 1% of public debt), this makes the U.S. vulnerable to a balance of payments crisis, and all of the political instability such a crisis entails.[21]

A balance of payments crisis could come about in several ways: a decision by oil exporters and importers to trade oil in euros instead of dollars,[22] a decision by European and Asian governments to express displeasure with U.S. foreign policy by selling dollars, or a worldwide financial panic in which individual, corporate, and public investors dump American treasury bonds and other assets in anticipation of an economic downturn arising from the need to raise taxes and reign in spending to pay for current military commitments and the impending retirement of the baby boomers. If one or all of these events transpired, the U.S. would be tempted to use its foreign exchange reserves to prop up the dollar. Even if successful, this would represent a loss of economic capability. But if it failed, the dollar could fall dramatically, and the U.S. would be faced with the prospect of either defaulting on its obligations (which would cause the foreign capital that once financed military and economic expansion to dry up) or refinancing them at much higher rates (which would squeeze households and businesses, and thus tax revenue). Either way, the result would be a prolonged domestic recession.

Whether a balance of payments crisis would result in the precipitous decline of the U.S. to the level of today's second tier states is hard to say. This would depend on a number of factors, including the origins of the crisis, the extent of economic interdependence, and the number of emerging great powers. If the crisis began with deliberate decisions to dump dollars by one or more rising states, the states in question would be able to time the crisis to their liking, which would reduce their exposure to U.S. decline. But if the crisis began with uncoordinated decisions of investors that culminated in a panic, the collapse of the U.S. market could bring other states down with it. In this case, whether everyone just slid down a peg would depend on the extent of their interdependence. States whose economies were less intertwined with the U.S. would rise relative to both the U.S. and other second tier states, while those more involved with the U.S. would fall.

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[20] Since mid-2004, more than 10 of the original 36 states in the coalition have withdrawn or announced plans to leave. Robin Wright and Josh White, "U.S. Moves To Preserve Iraq Coalition," *Washington Post*, February 25, 2005, p. A1.

[21] "Country Briefing: United States, Economic Data," Economist.com, June 20, 2003, available at http://www.economist.com/countries/USA/profile.cfm?folder=Profile%2DEconomic%20Data. "A phoney recovery: The American economy," *Economist*, February 28, 2004. It is often argued that the U.S. is no more indebted than the large European states and Japan, which have higher debts as a percentage of GDP. Yet this obscures several important indicators of adjustment capability. For example, although in June 2003, Japanese public debt was 644 trillion yen ($6 trillion, or 129% of GDP), Japan had $461 billion in foreign exchange reserves (72% of its public debt). Moreover, the savings rate of Japanese households is five times that of their American counterparts, which means that there is greater potential for domestic belt-tightening and refinancing. Agence France-Press, "Japan's public debt falls to 129 percent of GDP," September 25, 2003, available at http://quickstart.clari.net/qs_se/webnews/wed/bp/Qjapan-economy-debt.RU4u_DSP.html. "Country Briefing: Japan, Economic Data," Economist.com, June 20, 2003, available at http://www.economist.com/countries/Japan/profile.cfm?folder=Profile%2DEconomic%20Data. Japan Institute for Social and Economic Affairs, "Household Savings Rates," http://www.kkc-usa.org/index.cfm/1841.

[22] Under the "oil for food" program, Saddam Hussein insisted on selling Iraqi oil in euros. In Fall 2003, as the dollar fell, Russia and the EU reportedly agreed to trade oil in euros.

Depending on their economic capabilities, geographic position, and other attributes, more vulnerable second tier states might try to help the U.S. recover from the crisis so as to stem their own decline relative to closer rivals. But, then again, they might not. International anarchy means that states are free to do as they like, even it is contrary to their survival and prosperity. Furthermore, even if assistance was forthcoming, it would be unlikely to stem U.S. decline altogether because unipolarity means that no state is capable of lending significant help to the dominant power. Thus the U.S. would have to hope that several second tier states so feared the rise of another that they joined forces to come to the aid of the U.S. Although there is historical precedent for this (*e.g.,* U.S. and Russian aid to Britain and France as Germany rose in power), there are good reasons to doubt it would occur in this case. Britain and France fell, and Germany rose, in power in the conventional era, when it was much harder to deter states from using their capabilities to attack and conquer others.[23] As discussed below, U.S. decline through economic (or other) means would not make second tier states any more vulnerable to attack and conquest than they are at present. Moreover, despite extensive ties to Britain and France, the U.S. hesitated to come to their aid in both World War I and World War II, which meant that both of these states had to absorb the lions share of their own defense and adjustment costs and ultimately fell from great power ranks altogether. Given the global interdependence that unipolarity has fostered, it is likely that today's second-tier states would also wait to see how things settle out before pitching in to help bail the U.S. boat.

Given the chance that the U.S. could lose its unrivaled position essentially over night if it continues on its present economic course, it is possible that the U.S. government will take a proactive approach to its financial problems, raising taxes and reducing spending now to reduce the debt and prepare for future domestic obligations. This would certainly be the prudent thing to do. Yet this, too, would reduce U.S. capabilities. After all, military spending is the largest item in the discretionary budget. Moreover, tackling the problem of funding Social Security and Medicare will require either dramatic cuts in these programs (which would create domestic political problems and reduce the ability of the government to gather the political will to act proactively abroad) or higher taxes and interest rates (which even as seen as legitimate by the American people would have a deflationary effect on the U.S. economy.

Fast or Slow? In light of the current foreign and domestic commitments of the U.S. government, it is hard to see how absolute U.S. decline can be avoided. Since 1989, the U.S. has extended its military presence into more hostile territories, which reduces its allies' inclination to assist it and increases the attrition of its military capabilities. The U.S. has also taken on ever larger levels of debt. These decisions mean that U.S. dominance will wane sooner than it would have if a more modest strategy had been adopted.

Whether unipolarity ends quickly or slowly depends primarily on what the U.S. does henceforth. If it gets its economic house in order and pulls back from its overextended military posture, it is likely that U.S. capabilities will decline only slowly. If it does so with an eye towards future economic competitiveness (*i.e.,* develops a forward-looking industrial policy), it may even rebound.[24] But if the U.S. does not pursue more prudent policies, a precipitous fall is possible.

Others Slowly Catch Up

Even if the United States avoids absolute decline, unipolarity will give way to bipolarity or multipolarity as second-tier states increase their capabilities. The question is just one of time. According to many analysts, this development is decades away, for it will require states to compete militarily and economically on a one-to-one basis with the U.S. But this ignores the nature of unipolarity, the meaning of capability, and the effects of nuclear weapons.

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[23] Adams, "Attack and Conquer?”

[24] Many think marginal growth rates work against the U.S. (and all other great powers). Gilpin. Layne. But it is hard to see that this is inevitable, at least in the 21st century, given the aging of the population in the U.S.' most sophisticated economic competitors (Europe and Japan), the technological lag in its largest competitor (China), and the scientific, entrepreneurial, and educational strengths of the U.S.

The Nature of Unipolarity. When defining the contemporary system as unipolar, most scholars recognize that unipolarity arises from both the absolute capabilities of the United States and the absence of a great power capable of dissuading it from using those capabilities. Yet when they make arguments about what it will take for the system to become bipolar or multipolar, they ignore the second part of the equation. As a result, they set the bar too high.

According to William C. Wohlforth, unipolarity will end only when "regional powers … translate their aggregate economic potential into the concrete capabilities necessary to be a pole: a defense industry and power projection capabilities that can play in the same league as those of the United States."[25] Other scholars make similar claims. For example, Thomas J. Christensen argues that for China to become a peer competitor of the United States, its "economic growth and increasing technological sophistication must allow China to close the gap with the American military in East Asia, and replace the former Soviet Union as a global security threat."[26] The result is that these, and most, scholars expect unipolarity to "last for several more decades at least."[27]

Yet the great power in a unipolar system is, by definition, in a league of its own. U.S. global reach is not only the result of its capabilities. It also reflects the absence of a great power capable of dissuading the U.S. from using its capabilities in ways that diminish the security and prosperity of other states.[28] Unless the United States falls completely from the ranks of great powers and is replaced by a single, new power with a similar lead over its rivals (which, due the size of the U.S. economy, the strength of nuclear deterrence, and the number of second tier states, is extremely unlikely), rising states will not have the global reach the U.S. enjoys today.

States need not attack American strengths to balance American power. Indeed, as Christensen himself argues, rising states such as China could limit U.S. reach simply by consolidating their regional positions. Christensen does not believe that this would be sufficient to balance U.S. power. Instead, he suggests that this would require a military, economic, and political profile similar to that of the U.S. Yet when China and other states are capable of "develop[ing] politically useful capabilities to punish American forces if they were to intervene in a conflict of great interest to [them]," the U.S. would no longer be the dominant state in the system. It would be a regional power, contained by other states just as the U.S. and Soviet Union were contained in their respective regions during the Cold War.

Global reach is possible only in a unipolar system. In bipolar and multipolar systems, regionalism is the norm. When rising states can dissuade the U.S. from intervening in their regions, unipolarity will have waned.

The Meaning of Capability. Misunderstanding about "capabilities" is another source of confusion about what it will take for states to balance U.S. power. According to Waltz, what matters is overall capabilities, that is, "size of population and territory, resource endowment, economic capability, military strength, political stability, and

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[25] Wohlforth, "The Stability of a Unipolar World," p. 30.

[26] Thomas J. Christensen, "Posing Problems without Catching Up: China's Rise and Challenges for U.S. Security Policy," *International Security*, Vol. 25, No. 4 (Spring 2001), p. 8. Similarly, Avery Goldstein argues that "There is little prospect that China's economic and military capabilities will increase so rapidly that it can become a peer competitor of the United States in the next few decades. Indeed, … China would be hard-pressed to close the gap with 'the world's sole remaining superpower' even if the U.S. stood still." Avery Goldstein, "Structural Realism and China's Foreign Policy," in Andrew K. Hanami, ed., *Perspectives on Structural Realism* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), pp. 144-145.

[27] Wohlforth, "The Stability of a Unipolar World," p. 39. Christensen, "Posing Problems without Catching Up," p. 8.

[28] In other words, "full-spectrum dominance" and "command of the commons," like globalization, are consequences of unipolarity, not something we should expect to see in a bipolar or multipolar system. "Full-spectrum dominance" is the goal of the U.S. military as articulated in "Joint Vision 2020," May 30, 2000, available at http://www.dtic.mil/jointvision/. On the dangers of assuming that relative power facilitates control, see Waltz, *Theory of International Politics*, pp. 191-192. On the relationship between unipolarity and globalization, see Kenneth N. Waltz, "Globalization and American Power," *The National Interest* (Spring 2000).

competence."[29] Waltz does not explain why overall capabilities matter. But when the domestic and international challenges states face are considered, it is clear why great powers need military, economic, *and* political capabilities.

Domestically, great powers (like other states) must cultivate sovereignty to survive relative to internal rivals and gather the political will to act externally. Doing so requires military (police) capabilities to deter and disarm revolutionary movements, economic capabilities to provide for the well-being of citizens, and political capabilities to develop, deploy, and maintain the requisite military and economic capabilities and govern effectively.

Internationally, great powers (even more than weak states, which may be able to free ride on the efforts of others) must balance the power of other strong states in the system to dissuade them from attacking their homelands and vital interests. Thus they need military capabilities to deter, defend against, or preempt conquest without resorting to union, economic capabilities to provide resources to the military, compete economically with other states, and provide incentives for allies to stick with them, and political capabilities to develop, deploy, and maintain the requisite military and economic capabilities and engage in skillful diplomacy.

As explained above, this does not mean that all great powers will always attempt or succeed in the actions that these domestic and international capabilities facilitate. But to be a great power, a state must either have unrivalled capabilities or capabilities that are roughly equivalent to those of the leading state or states.

In assessing the number and identity of great powers, it is imperative to remember the functional nature of capabilities. Because states exist in an anarchic milieu in which they cannot be sure that other actors will help them survive, it is their relative capabilities that matter. But, contrary to the prevalent use of this term, this does not simply mean that states must be concerned with their own gains and losses relative to other states (although that certainly matters).[30] It also means that states must be sure that their capabilities enable them to carry out the domestic and international tasks of statehood.[31] One way to do so is to match other states' capabilities item by item. Another is to determine the most efficient way to carry out state functions.

If states have the strategic military capability to dissuade other states from attacking their territory and vital interests, they need not match other states' operational or tactical military capabilities on a one for one basis. Due to domestic politics, a desire to swagger, or simple misunderstanding of what is required, states may nevertheless attempt to do so. But this is not necessary for either their survival or their ability to become or remain great powers.[32]

Similarly, if states have the economic capabilities to maintain their dissuasionary forces and satisfy (or repress) their domestic populations and allies, both now and for the foreseeable future, matching other states' industrial capabilities may not be necessary to achieve great power status.

The Effects of Nuclear Weapons. Since the beginning of the nuclear era in 1945, there has been a tendency for scholars and statesmen to engage in conventionalization – that is, to assume that nuclear weapons are simply more powerful weapons, not a different kind of weapon altogether.[33] But nuclear weapons are absolute weapons. Because they can destroy not just other weapons but entire geographical areas, such as cities, they need not fight

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[29] Waltz, *Theory of International Politics*, p. 131.

[30] Grieco

[31] This is why Waltz uses the concept of capability instead of power. Waltz, *Theory of International Politics*, pp. XX. For a similar argument about capabilities, see Ann Tickner…

[32] For a different argument about the dangers of inflating the military capabilities needed to balance U.S. power, see Christensen, who argues that "overall American national assets are often not a useful basis of comparison to judge whether Beijing will perceive itself as able to use force effectively against American interests in East Asia." Christensen, "Posing Problems without Catching Up," p. 11.

[33] Bernard Brodie, "The Development of Nuclear Strategy," *International Security*, Vol. 2, No. 4 (Spring 1978), pp. 65-83. Aaron L. Friedberg, "A History of the US Strategic 'Doctrine,'" *Journal of Strategic Studies* 3 (December 1980), pp. 37-71.

their likes. Moreover, states need not win wars to punish others for attacking their homelands and vital interests.[34] This has important military, political, and economic implications for the rise and fall of great powers.

Militarily, the nuclear revolution has four primary effects. First, it means that deterrence is easy. States with second-strike nuclear forces are significantly less vulnerable to attack and conquest than historical great powers have been. Thus, whereas historical great powers spent a great deal of time and effort trying to reduce their vulnerability to one another (and take advantage of others' vulnerability), great powers in the nuclear age can take a more relaxed view of their rivals.

Second, because nuclear deterrence is so effective and efficient, it dominates even the most sophisticated offensive and defensive operations. If states misunderstand the situation or have resources to burn, they may develop large conventional forces. But their ability to deter others does not depend on their ability to dominate every rung of the "escalation ladder" or every notch on the "spectrum." It depends on their possession of nuclear forces (and, as discussed below, their ability to substantiate their interests). To forget this and hope that war will be safe because one's plan is to keep it limited is to forget that other states may fail to play along, going straight to nuclear threats when a crisis emerges.[35] Moreover, to believe that second tier states will not be U.S. peers until they compete militarily and economically on a one-for-one basis with the U.S. is to take U.S. political hype as truth. Just as Ronald Reagan allegedly strove to run the Soviet Union into the ground by enticing it to engage in "full-scale competition with the United States" so it would be "forced to choose between maintaining its global empire and solving its domestic problems," contemporary U.S. presidents will try to convince rising states to play the game the United States is most likely to win.[36] But there is no guarantee that other states will do so. Indeed, given the strength of nuclear deterrence, it is likely that rising states will take an indirect (and more efficient) approach to great power competition.[37]

Third, due to the impossibility of defending against nuclear weapons, deterrence dominance will persist well into the future (if not indefinitely), freeing states from the conventional imperatives to innovate and pursue quantitative and qualitative superiority.[38] Thus states can redeploy their resources -- both internally, to stem threats from their domestic rivals, and externally, to become more economically competitive or induce others to ally with them.

Fourth, for the first time in history, weapons dominate strategy. Whether states with second-strike forces adopt offensive, defensive, or deterrent strategies has little effect on their ability to deter other states from attacking their homelands and vital interests. Thus, although tomorrow's great powers may plan to fight and win nuclear wars, when they come into conflict they will act like the Cold War's superpowers, quickly abandoning their plans and looking for the exit.[39]

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[34] Bernard Brodie, "War in the Atomic Age" and "Implications for Military Policy," in Bernard Brodie, ed., *The Absolute Weapon: Atomic Power and World Order* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, and Co., 1946), pp. 28-29 and 71. Thomas C. Schelling, *Arms and Influence* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1966), ch 1.

[35] John Lewis Gaddis, "Implementing Flexible Response: Vietnam as a Test Case," in Kenneth N. Waltz and Robert J. Art, eds., *The Use of Force*, 6th edition (New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 2004). Originally published in *Strategies of Containment: A Critical Appraisal of Postwar American National Security Policy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982).

[36] Edwin Meese III, *With Reagan: The Inside Story* (Washington, D.C.: Regnery Gateway, 1992), p. 169.

[37] On the indirect approach in conventional era, see Basil Liddell Hart, "The Strategy of Indirect Approach," in Gerard Chaliand, ed., *The Art of War in World History: From Antiquity to the Nuclear Age* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), pp. 927-931.

[38]Adams, "Attack and Conquer."

[39] On weapons dominating strategy, see Kenneth N. Waltz, "Nuclear Myths and Political Realities," *American Political Science Review*, Vol. 84, No. 3 (September 1990), pp. XXX. As Betts points out, "Except over Cuba, the cold war crises never really brought the superpowers close to war." Betts, *Nuclear Blackmail and Nuclear Balance*, p. 132. On the Cuban Missile Crisis, see Albert and Roberta Wohlstetter, *Controlling the Risks in Cuba*, Adelphi Paper 7 (April 1965); and Bruce J. Allyn, James G. Blight, and David A. Welch, "Essence of Revision: Moscow, Havana, and the Cuban Missile Crisis," *International Security*, Vol. 14, No. 3 (Winter, 1989-1990), pp. 136-172.

In the nuclear era, what was hard in the conventional era (deterrence) is easy. The hard thing is gathering the political will to adjust to the fact that large conventional forces are not needed for state survival and prosperity and may even reduce state capabilities to achieve these goals. Whether this is the case depends on the relationship between military and economic technologies and stimuli. If military spending trickles down to the domestic economy in the form of competitive industrial technologies and other spin-offs, such as employment, it might not hurt to maintain more conventional forces than are militarily necessary. But if, as many scholars argue, military and economic technologies are decoupled and military spending has fewer multiplier effects than other forms of fiscal policy (such as funding for education, industrial R&D, or tax cuts), maintaining large conventional forces will make states vulnerable to economic competition from states that choose not to do so.[40] Such competition could make it difficult for great powers that pursue conventional superiority to avoid decline or even death by internal means (revolution, disintegration, or collapse). It could also make it difficult for them to substantiate and extend their deterrent threats.

Nuclear weapons are necessary, but not sufficient, for nuclear deterrence. What activates, or substantiates, a state's deterrent threats is its ability to demonstrate that certain territories "belong" to it – that they are intrinsically or instrumentally so vital to it that the state might respond to attacks upon that territory with devastating reprisals. Due to civil war, some states (*e.g.*, India and Pakistan) are able to substantiate their deterrent threats over only part of the territory they claim. Others (*e.g.,* North Korea), due to a tenuous hold on domestic sovereignty or international isolation, are able to substantiate their deterrent threats over only the territory they claim. Still others (*e.g.,* the US and USSR during the Cold War) are able to extend their deterrent threats far beyond their formal borders to encompass a number of other states.

Extended deterrence can be substantiated in many ways – through the deployment of expatriates such as diplomats, advisors, or troops, for example, or through the cultivation of extensive political, economic, or cultural ties. Determining how this is most efficiently and effectively done in the nuclear, information age will be the key to identifying how second-tier states become great powers, as well as which ones are furthest along that path.[41]

Despite the variety of options, there is a tendency in the US to focus on troop deployments, especially large ones. This is why policy makers see "command of the commons" as so vital. It is also why they discount the possibility that the US will have "peer competitors" in the near future. Yet, occasionally, officials acknowledge the logic of deterrence. For example, although during the Cold War, massive US deployments in the Korean DMZ were thought necessary to deter North Korea from attacking the South, today (when those troops are being redeployed to Iraq and within South Korea), Pentagon officials acknowledge that trip-wire forces of 5,000 are just as effective as deployments of 500,000.[42]

Because nuclear weapons reduce the number of troops needed for the simple survival of a state and its allies – and because the contemporary relationship between military and economic technologies means military excesses impede economic competitiveness -- new great powers are unlikely to step into the US's military limelight. Instead, they are likely to act on the Cold War lesson that the less economically-competitive a state is, the harder time it has sustaining the domestic legitimacy it needs to substantiate its threats to retaliate for attacks on its

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[40] Jay Stowsky, "From Spin Off to Spin On: Redefining the Military's Role in American Technology Development," in Michael Borrus, *et al., The Highest Stakes: The Economic Foundations of the New Security System* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993). Karen Ruth Adams, "State Survival and State Death: International and Technological Contexts" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of California, Berkeley, 2000), pp. 33-39.

[41] For a similar argument cast in terms of states' "balance of interests" in specific states or regions, see Betts, *Nuclear Blackmail and Nuclear Balance*, p. 14. As Betts points out (p.134), "few of the crises in which nuclear threats occurred involved direct threats to major [U.S.] interests -- the sovereignty of Western European countries, Japan, or even the Israeli homeland. ... Most of the crises were over small territories whose significance to U.S. leaders was determined symbolically, by how their loss would whet communist appetites, demoralize allies, or contribute to gradual erosion of containment if they were tolerated piecemeal." I believe that Betts' finding that the balance of interests explains U.S. behavior in nuclear crises but not the Soviet Union's reflects the fact that he limited his inquiry to the crises that did occur, which as he notes were in peripheral areas.
[42]*Time*

homeland, not to mention engage in the international aid and trade that make it clear that certain allies and activities are vital to its survival and prosperity.

During the Cold War, the U.S. and Soviet Union adjusted to these new realities only episodically: during the Massive Retaliation phase of the Eisenhower administration and towards the end of the Khruschev and Gorbachev eras in the Soviet Union. Second tier states did adjust, however. As Avery Goldstein has shown, early in the nuclear era, Britain, France, and China "reallocated scarce resources from conventional to nuclear arms."[43] Moreover, they have taken the Soviet Union's fall from great power ranks as confirmation that, in the nuclear era, military superiority is meaningless and counterproductive. As Deng Xiaoping put it, "one of the reasons ... the Soviet economy suffers from paralysis is that the Russians spend too much money on the military."[44]

Today, it is easy for nuclear states to deter great power attacks. What is hard is maintaining domestic stability in the absence of a pressing external threat and in the presence of communication and transportation technologies that enable citizens to compare their living standards to others around the world.[45] Thus it is no longer the case either that "war makes states" or that the ability to prevail in war makes great powers.[46] Instead of winning wars, new great powers must win the peace. That is, they must secure the area over which they wish their deterrent forces to extend by cultivating domestic sovereignty and strong international ties.

The USSR fell from great power because it failed to cultivate the appropriate mix of capabilities to do so. Instead of relying on nuclear deterrence and political-economic substantiation of its interests, it tried to match specific U.S. operational and tactical capabilities. Moreover, instead of working to diffuse its conflict with Afghanistan, it intervened militarily to replace the Afghan government. Then, extended beyond what its economic and political capabilities allowed it to consolidate and sustain, it invited U.S. intervention in the conflict and planted the seeds of domestic disintegration. Today, Russia's deterrent extends only (and barely) to Chechnya, and its domestic stability is tenuous due to the debt it accumulated and institutional structures it established to keep up with the United States.

Thus John J. Mearsheimer is wrong when he claims that "to qualify as a great power, a state must have sufficient military assets to put up a serious fight in an all-out conventional war against the most powerful state in the world."[47] In the nuclear era, states that try to develop such capabilities will *delay* their emergence as great powers. Second tier states that learn the lesson of the Cold War will compete far less directly with the U.S. Instead of attacking U.S. strengths or even probing for its weaknesses, they will cultivate their domestic and regional economies, slowly expanding the orbit of their influence and thus the range of their already robust second-strike nuclear forces.[48]

How Will We Know When New Great Powers Have Arrived? When one or several state have the capabilities to dissuade the U.S. from intervening in their affairs and trampling on their international interests, unipolarity will have waned. Such states will have, at least:

-- A second-strike force of nuclear weapons capable of delivering weapons to targets in the United States.

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[43] Avery Goldstein, *Deterrence and Security in the 21st Century: China, Britain, France, and the Enduring Legacy of the Nuclear Revolution* (Stanford, C.A.: Stanford University Press, 2000), pp. 119-138, 150-154, 181-184.

[44] Nancy Bernkopf Tucker, "China as a Factor in the Collapse of the Soviet Empire," *Political Science Quarterly* 110:4 (Winter 1995-96), p. 505.

[45] Andrew C. Janos, *East Central Europe in the Modern World: The Politics of the Borderlands from Pre- to Postcommunism* (Stanford, C.A.: Stanford University Press, 2000), pp. 16-18, 409.

[46] On the historical tendency for states to make war and war to make states, see Charles Tilly, XXX.

[47] John J. Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2001), p. 5.

[48] This, of course, is the "second half of the walnut" to which Truman referred in explaining that containment had both military and political-economic dimensions. As quoted by LaFeber, *America, Russia, and the Cold War*, pp. XXX. In this connection, it is important to point out that the U.S. itself relied on nuclear deterrence to level the conventional playing field, which in Europe was tilted decisively towards the Soviet Union.

-- Conventional forces sufficient to maintain domestic order and serve as a trip wire in conflict situations,

-- Domestic political and economic stability,

-- International interests, demonstrated by political, economic, or military connections with a number of other countries

-- Surplus resources that could be dispensed to gather allies and assure their loyalty,

and

-- Limited economic dependence on the U.S. and U.S.-dominated institutions, so as to reduce domestic and alliance instability in the face of U.S. economic sanctions.

That nuclear weapons, conventional forces, and international interests are necessary but insufficient for great power is demonstrated by Russia's ability to maintain the status quo in the Middle East prior to its economic decline and domestic disintegration in the 1980s, and its inability to do so in the lead up to and aftermath of Iraq's 1991 invasion of Kuwait. It is also demonstrated by the inability of China, France, and Russia to dissuade the U.S. from invading Iraq in 2003. Had these states had more stable domestic-political situations, closer ties with Iraq and its neighbors, and more ability to withstand U.S. economic retribution, the U.S. would either not have considered toppling the Iraqi government or would have been actively deterred from implementing its plans to do so by their demonstrations of capability, interest, and resolve (*e.g.,* dispatch of diplomats and business leaders, granting of economic aid, deployment of or exercises by trip-wire forces, or conduct of nuclear tests). Until these or other states develop such capabilities, they may protest all they like (*i.e.,* act like great powers), to no avail. Conversely, when they do have such capabilities, if US policy makers understand the new terrain of world politics, they may not need to exhibit any of the traditional (offense-dominant) behaviors of great powers to dissuade the US from imposing its will on the world.

What it will take for states to rise as great powers, then, is not more conventional military capabilities but greater domestic political legitimacy, more extensive and deeper international ties, and a reduction or reconfiguration of economic interdependence.

Conclusion

Today, U.S. policymakers assert and U.S. scholars agree that the U.S.'s lead in conventional military capabilities assures that it will remain the dominant international actor well into the second half of the century. By contrast, I have argued that, by overdeveloping and overusing these capabilities, the U.S. has made itself vulnerable to the possibility of precipitous decline to the level of contemporary second tier states, either through military setbacks or (more likely) a balance of payments crisis.

But even if the U.S. puts its economic house in order and avoids absolute decline, it is unlikely that unipolarity will last as long as policy makers and analysts suggest, for their predictions are based on fundamental misunderstandings about the nature of unipolarity, the meaning of capability, and the effects of nuclear weapons. New great powers will not have to replace the U.S. as the dominant state in the system. They must simply have the capability to dominate their regions, which will deny the U.S. the ability to act globally. Moreover, the capabilities needed to achieve this are far less extensive that is generally supposed. The relevant capabilities are those that enable states to cultivate domestic sovereignty and dissuade other states from attacking their homelands and vital interests. Because nuclear weapons make it easy to dissuade attacks when political-economic postures and policies clearly demarcate states' interests, it will not be necessary for second-tier states to match the U.S. across the operational and tactical spectrum of its military dominance. Indeed, trying to do so will delay their emergence because it will diminish their ability to cultivate the domestic sovereignty and international allies necessary to substantiate and extend deterrence and become economically independent from the U.S.

Thus, to determine which states will rise and when and how they will do so, it is necessary to redirect attention from the military capabilities of the U.S.' closest international rivals (which -- like China, France, and Russia -- either have second strike nuclear forces or – like Germany and Japan – could quickly develop them) to their domestic and international political-economic profiles. Specifically, it is necessary to evaluate the domestic

political stability and international interdependence of these states, as well as their capabilities to cultivate international ties and shelter their economies from U.S. sanctions. In future work, I will take up this empirical question and, based on my findings, consider which of today's second-tier states is most likely to step into the limelight, casting the shadow of a new great power upon the world stage.