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REFLECTION, EVALUATION, INTEGRATION

Systemic Leadership, Evolutionary Processes, and International Relations Theory: The Unipolarity Question[1]

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Scholars disagree about the nature of the current international distribution of power and its implications for world politics. Is the current system unipolar, and, if so, is unipolarity likely to persist for very long? Fifteen generalizations about the structure of the international system are culled from the literature and addressed critically from a leadership long cycle point of view. Although the current system is militarily unipolar, it is not buttressed by a new wave of radical technological innovation that is critical to the operation of systemic leadership. Until or unless US military predominance is based on economic predominance, the effects of unipolarity are likely to be relatively weak and probably also short-lived.

The Chinese curse—"may you live in interesting times"—applies fully to international relations theory, but in reverse. For people intrigued by such theory, interesting times are not a curse because noninteresting times encourage little in the way of theoretical novelty and progress. International change and turmoil—perhaps subject to some ceiling threshold—dramatize analytical puzzles that invite speculation and theory construction.

A case in point is systemic analysis. Periods of recognized macro-structural change tend to be good for systemic analyses.[2] In particular, periods in which the leading power is in decline and other states seem to be catching up are especially good times for systemic analysis. Distributions of power seem to be in flux. The potential for great mischief, revised status quos, and intensive violence seem to be in the offing. Uncertain futures make people uneasy and especially attentive to structural arguments. The late 1970s through the early 1990s was such a period. But then some things happened. The Soviet Union fell apart. The Japanese economic challenge fizzled. The United States not only persisted as the world's sole superpower survivor, it was hard pressed to find any semblance of peer competitors. The world system seemingly had become unipolar literally overnight. For many

[1]This essay is the Presidential Address presented at the International Studies Association annual meeting, March 2–5, 2005, in Honolulu, Hawaii at the beginning of the author's tenure as President of the Association.

[2]Some level of macro-structural change probably is ongoing constantly. At times, though, it becomes more readily apparent than at other times.

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analysts, this was the first instance of unipolarity in a planetary-wide international system that had so far swung only from multipolarity to bipolarity.

This structural change has generated continuing debate about what it means and how we should interpret it. The arguments, unfortunately, have not led to a widespread revival of systemic theorizing.[3] But the renewed interest in such questions is most heartening in a world dominated by too many politicians who view international affairs through starkly monadic lenses and too many international relations analysts who are captivated (and captured) by exclusively dyadic frameworks. In the course of the debate, some very interesting new ideas have emerged as well as some that are less than fully persuasive.

Within this context, I propose to join the debate by tackling the "unipolar question" from a leadership long cycle perspective.[4] At issue is where we are systemically and, as a consequence, what we might anticipate. First, I will sketch the leadership long cycle perspective to establish the ideational foundation on which this essay builds,[5] and, then, examine 15 assertions found in the unipolarity literature that I think are dubious or debatable. The point is not simply to throw critical rocks at a host of disconnected generalizations, although some of that is inevitable, but to highlight theoretical problems, positively and negatively, to see if we cannot improve on our ability to tell "system time"—that is, where we are in the evolution of the world's political-military structure and what it portends for world politics.

Unipolarity and the Leadership Long Cycle Perspective

Unipolarity is a relatively alien concept in most international relations theory.[6] It is not something that is supposed to happen, courtesy of balance-of-power reactions, according to most realists. Power concentration of this sort is rarely germane to liberals who prefer to focus on domestic attributes and processes anyway. Constructivists, for the most part, seem also unlikely to devote much time to categories of systemic power distributions. Historical-structural approaches, in contrast, are fairly comfortable with the notion of power concentration by a single leading actor because these approaches often assume intermittent unipolarity as a fundamental factor in their explanations.

One historical-structural approach, leadership long cycle theory, examines the systemic evolution of power, leadership, and structural order. A variety of circumstances in the first half of the second millennium CE gave Western Europe an opportunity to establish itself as the central region in the world system. Not all European states seized this opportunity and many of the most successful were marginal players by regional standards. Specializing in long-distance commerce, some states chose to focus on activities outside of their home region. Venice, Portugal, the Netherlands, and Britain proved to be the most successful of these maritime-commercial powers. Other states continued to pursue more traditional strategies of expanding their home bases within the local region. Still others tried to

[3]Although a unipolar outcome, should one emerge, must be the product of structural change, it seems to encourage many onlookers to think that structural change has slowed to a halt or at least become suspended for a period of time.

[4]The related literature on the United States as an empire is too large to deal with here in a suitably critical fashion (see, for instance, Hardt and Negri 2000; Bacevich 2002; Ferguson 2004; Mann 2004; Odom and Dujarric 2004). This topic deserves separate attention.

[5]The main works in this research program include George Modelski (1987, 1996, 2000), Modelski and Thompson (1988, 1989, 1996), Modelski and Sylvia Modelski (1988), Karen Rasler and Thompson (1989, 1994, 2000, 2005), Rafael Reuveny and Thompson (2004), and Thompson (1988, 2000). The tables and figures reported in this essay are taken from this research.

[6]Presumably, the perceived oddity of unipolarity cannot be blamed on its scarcity in the historical annals. See, for instance, the ongoing work of David Wilkinson (1996, 1999, 2001, 2004a, 2004b), which suggests that unipolarity has not been all that uncommon in the past.

TABLE 1. Global Wars

Global War	Timing	Issues
Italian/Indian Ocean Wars	1490s–1510s	Franco-Spanish contest over Italian states; Portuguese breaking of Venetian/Mameluke eastern trade monopoly
Dutch Independence War	1580s–1600s	Opposition to Phillip II's expansion; Dutch breaking of Spanish/Portuguese eastern trade monopoly
Louis XIV Wars	1680s–1710s	Opposition to Louis XIV expansion; French attempt to break Dutch trading monopoly in Europe and elsewhere
French Revolutionary/ Napoleonic Wars	1790s–1810s	Opposition to French expansion; French attempt to resist British industrial lead and systemic leadership
World Wars I and II	1910s–1940s	Opposition to German expansion; German attempt to succeed Britain as system leader

pursue both types of strategies, usually waffling back and forth between the two types of endeavors. Spain and France were the most prominent wafflers.

The distinctions between these two fundamental strategies lent themselves to a two-game differentiation between regional and global politics. The former game was mainly about territorial expansion carried out by large and increasingly well-armed armies in relatively adjacent space. The other revolved around the management of interregional trade, its associated problems, and the consequent need for maritime capabilities. From time to time, attempts to unify the European region spilled over into global politics because regional hegemony constituted direct and indirect threats to the status quo of the global political economy. Global wars, listed in Table 1, were fought in part to suppress the regional threats and in part to determine who would make policy at the global level. In this latter respect, global wars have served as periodic political selection instruments, not unlike elections in state political systems—only more deadly and primitive.[7]

Yet, there is more to global warfare than the simple intermittent fusing of global and regional affairs. Long-term economic growth, according to the leadership long cycle perspective, is based on radical shifts in commercial and technological innovations that tend to be concentrated initially in one state at a time. A spurt of growth in one state revolutionizes best economic practices and also destabilizes the international system's pecking order. The ensuing global war, assuming a decisive outcome, restabilizes the global system by producing a clear winner—the state with the system's lead economy or principal source of innovation and, later, credit and finance. The benefits of war-induced growth and a world economy tilted in its direction then leads to a second, postwar spurt of innovation and growth. In this fashion, each lead economy experiences at least one "twin peak" set of growth built around a long global war period.

On the basis of the schedule of leading sector indicators in Table 2 (the activities or industries in which the radical innovations have taken place), Figure 1 plots the rough timing of the successive economic life cycles of the leading global powers (Portugal, the Netherlands, Britain, and the United States). The first two system leaders experienced one set of twin peaks. Britain enjoyed a double set or four successive peaks. The United States has led the world economy through one set of twin peaks and may be set to preside over a second set.[8]

[7]Keep in mind, however, that domestic elections also tend to increase the level of domestic political violence.

[8]Still, the upturn at the end of the US series may be misleading. The index is focused on the production activities of the older, more developed states. It does not reflect the gains in motor vehicle and semiconductor production made in the past few years by South Korea and China.

TABLE 2. Leading Sector Timing and Indicators, Fifteenth to Twenty-First Centuries

Lead Economy	Leading Sector Indicators	Start-Up Phase	High Growth Phase
Portugal	Guinea gold	1430–1460	1460–1494
	Indian pepper	1494–1516	1516–1540
The Netherlands	Baltic and Atlantic trade	1540–1560	1560–1580
	Eastern trade	1580–1609	1609–1640
Britain I	Amerasian trade (especially sugar)	1640–1660	1660–1688
	Amerasian trade	1688–1713	1713–1740
Britain II	Cotton, iron	1740–1763	1763–1792
	Railroads, steam	1792–1815	1815–1850
United States I	Steel, chemicals, electronics	1850–1873	1873–1914
	Motor vehicles, aviation, electronics	1914–1945	1945–1973
United States II?	Information industries	1973–2000	2000–2030
	?	2030–2050	2050–2080

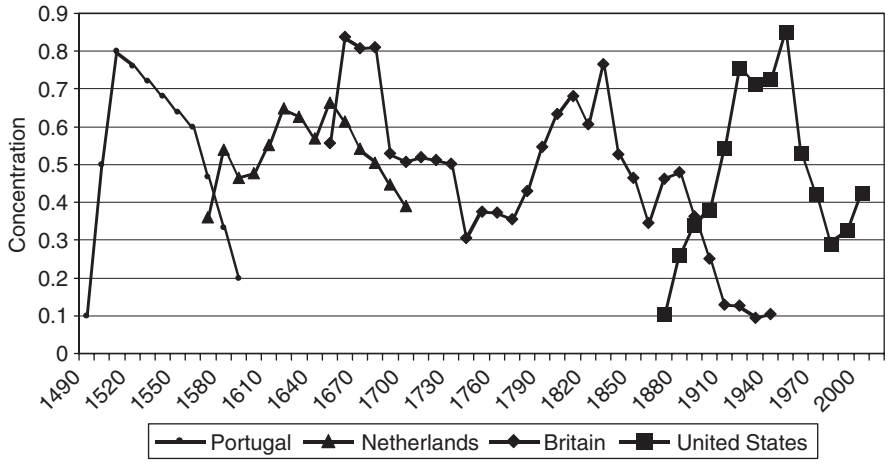

FIG. 1. System Leader Leading-Sector Concentration

Another way of keeping track of systemic leadership is to look at the distribution of naval capabilities—the power medium that, historically, has been most appropriate for expanding and defending long distance trade, which was primarily maritime trade after 1500. Contrary to popular impressions, the leadership long cycle argument is not about cycles of sea power concentration. Rather, sea power has been the global reach capability of choice for much of the past 500 years. Other types of capabilities are not dismissed as irrelevant. But they either tend to be of less significance for global reach or already hinted at by the distribution of sea power capabilities.[9] As a consequence, fluctuations in naval power concentration are geared to the timing of global war and lead economy predominance. Global wars and the wealth gained from pioneering radical economic innovations facilitate systemic reconcentration in global reach capabilities, just as they select political–economic and military leadership in the global political system. The principal winner of

[9]There is certainly no argument here against Barry Posen's (2003:8) idea of the command of the global commons, defined as control or mastery of sea and space areas that belong to no state and that provide access to much of the planet. He regards this mastery as the key enabler of US global power.

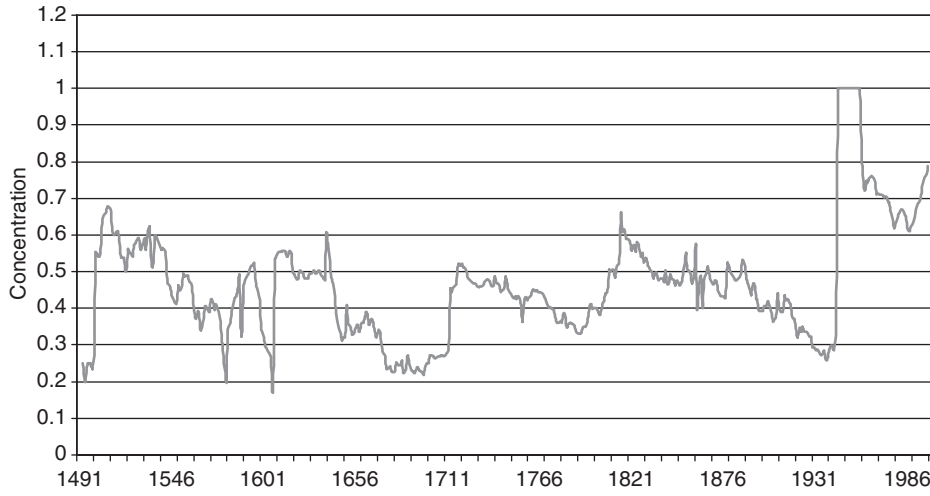

FIG. 2. Global Reach Concentration, 1494–2000

the global war and the system's lead economy is also the global system's leading sea power. Thus, the primary foundations for systemic leadership are the periodic concentrations in economic innovation and growth and in global reach capabilities.

Figure 2 provides an updated look at the ups and downs of global reach—or naval capability concentration—by charting the proportion controlled by the four successive system leaders between 1494 and 2000. The causal relationships among leading sector growth, leading sector share concentration, and naval capability concentration have been established by Rasler and Thompson (1994) and Reuveny and Thompson (2004).[10]

From this perspective, unipolarity in global politics—a high concentration of power favoring one state—is a recurring, if nonpermanent, phenomenon. Political–economic and military concentrations ultimately give way to systemic deconcentration—something easily discernible in Figures 1 and 2. There are fluctuations in year-to-year deconcentration. It is not simply an inexorable, negative slide from some early peak into great-power oblivion. The relative decline of systemic leadership can be quite gradual and protracted. There are also various ways in which a trend toward deconcentration can be interrupted. One is the twin-peaks phenomenon in which another round of technological innovation revitalizes the basis of a system leader's capabilities. Other, although ultimately less significant, paths involve the defeat of major players or changes in the nature of global reach capabilities that cause short-term gains in the relative share of leading sector production and global reach capabilities.

From a leadership long cycle perspective, unipolarity is not so abnormal or extraordinary. Although not the norm, it is at least a familiar phenomenon at the global level.[11] Moreover, it is not a static concept. Over time, the capabilities of unipolar powers have evolved and expanded as has the structural nature of world politics. Portuguese global unipolarity in the sixteenth century was by no means identical to US global unipolarity in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. In the

[10]Even though all three variables are related reciprocally, temporal precedence must go to leading sector growth, which positively stimulates leading sector share concentration. Both processes influence global reach (naval) capability concentration positively.

[11]In contrast, unipolarity has been much rarer in European regional politics, which is one reason why many realists have tended to purge it from their earlier theorizing. Another reason, of course, is that balance-of-power mechanisms are supposed to prevent its occurrence.

TABLE 3. Fifteen Assertions about Contemporary Unipolarity

(1) The anarchy assumption is a good place to begin an analysis of the distribution of power and world order.
(2) Polarity is the right "question."
(3) All major powers are identical in terms of their primary strategic orientation to world politics.
(4) Absolute gains have supplanted relative gains for all or most major powers, thereby rendering the search for primacy as outmoded.
(5) Technological change occurs randomly in space and time.
(6) A modern European state-system evolved into a global system.
(7) The relative restraint of the incumbent system leader can be attributed to American exceptionalism.
(8) The US preeminent position shortly after 1945 was unusual and cannot be compared to its present position.
(9) The current US unipolarity is unprecedented and indicates that the talk of decline in the 1980s was in error.
(10) The chief threat to prolonged unipolarity is not doing enough.
(11) The quick route to multipolarity is blocked by the absence of formidable challengers on the near horizon.
(12) The chief threats to prolonged unipolarity are the costs of leadership and the consequent loss of domestic support for system leadership activities.
(13) Balancing against a strong system leader is highly probable eventually.
(14) Unbalanced power encourages the emergence of new powers.
(15) Challengers must catch up to the system leader to cause significant levels of trouble.

sixteenth century, a global political system was very much an emergent phenomenon and Portugal was very weak in terms of its overall capability portfolio. Yet, it was sufficiently capable of playing the role of the first lead global power away from the European home region for a generation or two.[12] Successive centuries of change and further evolution have seen the capabilities of the lead global power grow enormously, just as the world system has become far more complex than it was in the sixteenth century.

So, from this perspective, what are we to make of the contemporary concern about unipolarity in a post-Cold War world? However one views the various interpretations that have been put forward, perhaps the most welcome aspect of the debates about unipolarity is that they have enriched our theoretical inventory with new arguments. What follows then is a critique, based on a leadership long cycle perspective, of multiple points of view on the nature of contemporary unipolarity. The critique is structured around 15 assertions that have been culled from the unipolarity literature, which are listed in Table 3. Even though a variety of disagreements with prevailing interpretations will be registered in what follows, an auxiliary goal is to highlight some new ideas that have emerged and that are well worth paying more empirical attention to as well as possibly co-opting.

Fifteen Assertions about Contemporary Unipolarity

(1) The well-known anarchy assumption is a good place to begin an analysis of the distribution of power and world order (or anything else).

Anarchy is not simply what you make of it. It is a major obstacle to theorizing about governance in the international system. With thanks in part to Thomas

[12]Admittedly, the initial exercise of global political-economic leadership by Portugal focused largely on acting as a monopolistic extortionist power in the Indian Ocean. They were succeeded by the Dutch who were almost constantly at war with their various opponents. The systemic leadership role emerged slowly and weakly. Even though the capabilities of the current system leader are much greater than its predecessors, one would be hard pressed to characterize contemporary manifestations of systemic leadership as reflecting a highly developed and sophisticated institution. The global political system remains fairly primitive.

Hobbes' premature birth—possibly because his mother had become alarmed about an imminent invasion by the 1588 Spanish Armada—compounded by abandonment by his father shortly thereafter, we have inherited a major assumption in international relations that tends to be shared by realists and liberals alike (see, for example, McClelland 1996:192). The international relations concept of anarchy, of course, does not mean what our students frequently assume—that is, that anarchy is a synonym for chaos. Rather, anarchy, predicated on very mistaken ideas about security and insecurity in the state of nature, means the absence of central government. But the employment of the term "anarchy" implies rather strongly that the absence of central government is equated with a high potential for chaotic insecurity in which everyone needs to take care of themselves as best they can (namely, self-help). Call it the Mad Max approach to international politics.

If we put aside the understandable Hobbesian preference for a central government in the mid-seventeenth century, at a time when his own country was embroiled in a series of civil wars, the anarchy assumption can be reduced to a distinction between national and international politics. The former is often characterized by a central government and the latter rarely is. Expressed in this fashion, the anarchy assumption becomes another way of saying that domestic and international politics do not always proceed in precisely the same types of institutional environments—even though we can think of a number of exceptions in which states have no functioning central governments. But keep in mind that even in the case of failed states, there is usually some minimal level of central governance being attempted, just as there are likely to be rival groups attempting to capture and regulate limited spatial domains within the state.

Without wishing to mince words, then, there is also a distinction to be made between *a* central government and central government or governance. Yes, by definition, there is no single central government that rules or reigns in contemporary international politics, but there are all sorts of phenomena and practices that generate variable amounts of governance. From a realist perspective, even the venerable balance-of-power practice is a primitive process for regulating conflict tendencies and power inequalities. From a liberal perspective, a number of international institutions increasingly attempt to supply governance in restricted domains. From an evolutionary perspective, systemic leadership, primarily focused on managing policy conflicts pertaining to intercontinental commerce, began to emerge some 500 years ago. Anarchy, however defined, is, thus, not a constant. It is a variable, as is the amount of governance supplied from various sources in international politics. We would do well to reconsider our dependence on this concept and perhaps purge ourselves altogether of what Barry Buzan and Richard Little (2000) amusingly, but accurately, call "anarchophobia."

(2) Polarity is the right "question."

The appropriate answer to this question is the Janus-faced "yes" and "no." Discussions of polarity run the risk of falling into the conceptual and theoretical traps of older arguments about polarity, which are twofold. One is the reductionist tendency to think that polarity per se can explain a great deal. The reason why this argument is unlikely to be the case leads directly to the second problem with polarity—namely, polarity distinctions demand qualification. All multipolar situations are not the same. Charles Kegley and Gregory Raymond (1994), for instance, compare six multipolar periods over the last 500 years and find that behavior is not uniform. The same problem applies equally to bipolar and unipolar settings. For that matter, we do not really have any consensus about the categorical thresholds separating unipolarity from bipolarity and multipolarity, making it difficult to systematically pursue different behavior within the nominal polarity categories. George Modelski (1974) offered a set of definitional criteria that might have helped create an empirical consensus, but, unfortunately, his proposed thresholds have not

been widely adopted. As a consequence, polarity arguments often quickly bring in modifiers such as tight/loose or symmetrical/asymmetrical. In doing so, we have abruptly escalated what was initially three categories of polarity into 12 possible combinations without getting into hybrid possibilities, such as a system that is, say, unipolar in terms of military resources but multipolar in terms of the distribution of economic resources. Usually, though, polarity arguments have proceeded along the lines of generic distinctions between multipolarity and bipolarity, with little reference to unipolarity or the many possible qualifiers of various structural settings.

To the extent that contemporary discussions of unipolarity fall back into the sterility of the older polarity arguments (assuming that all unipolar settings are equal), we are unlikely to get very far. Fortunately, however, a number of the new unipolar arguments are theoretically rich and have raised interesting cognate questions that deserve further consideration. Consider the questions that have been raised regarding the use of soft versus hard power (Nye 1990), the strategies that are pursued (Mastanduno 1997; Joffe 2002; Doran 2003; Buzan 2004), how leadership strategies are received by potential followers and the opposition (Rodman 2000; Mastanduno 2002; Owen 2002), and whether the devices used in the institutionalization of world order restrain leadership behavior (Ikenberry 2002; Joffe 2002; Risse 2002). Thomas Volgy and Alison Bailin (2003) have emphasized how the specific context in which structural change occurs—for instance, the aftermath of a major war versus the more peaceful demise of the US-Soviet Cold War—can make a difference in the type of world order that can be anticipated. The former situation is more likely to lead to radical changes whereas the latter tends toward incremental change. These studies suggest important qualifications to the understanding of unipolarity. Thus, structural change at the systemic level is at least good for one thing. It encourages analysts to think creatively about what is going on. Earlier instances of this phenomenon include the late nineteenth-century geopolitics of A. T. Mahan (1890) and Halford MacKinder (1904, 1919), arguably the beginning of modern international relations discourse, and the late twentieth-century arguments about "hegemonic decline."[13]

(3) All major powers are identical in terms of their primary strategic orientation to world politics.

International relations theory tends to assume that all states participate in world politics on similar bases. All states seek security; all states seek to expand their power; or all states are in the process of becoming more concerned with low politics than with more traditional, high political questions. Such assumptions may be convenient for constructing some kinds of theory, but they do great damage to Robert Gilpin's (1981) essential duality in international relations.[14] As we observed above, some states have a marked propensity for worrying primarily about territorial expansion, often in their home region. Others specialize in commercial and industrial expansion, concerned more about access to, and control of, distant markets than about territorial expansion closer to home. These are not "genetically based" instincts or orientations. In some cases, states wobble back and forth between the two fundamental orientations. In other cases, states adopt the commercial orientation after satiating their local territorial ambitions—or after being

[13]The mainstream assumption (see, for instance, Carr 1946:1 or Vasquez 1998:33) that professional international relations emerged only after World War I would seem to be at least a generation too late. Why perspectives that develop in periods of structural turmoil do not always "stick" is an interesting question in the sociology of knowledge. One hypothesis is that as things get better, the ideas that developed in periods of greater change and turmoil become less attractive because analysts stress "normal" processes as opposed to "abnormal" processes. As a consequence, we tend to get caught off guard by recurring episodes of structural change.

[14]See Richard Rosecrance (1999:213–225) on this question of dualism (or its relative absence) in international relations theory.

thwarted in satiating them. Consider the fact that English decision makers had to be convinced, through several centuries of coercive contestation over their claims to France, that they did, indeed, inhabit an island. However states come by their strategic orientations, two very different approaches to participating in world politics suggest rather strongly that we should seek to avoid assuming that one size fits all when it comes to motivations.

(4) Absolute gains have supplanted relative gains for all or most major powers. Therefore, primacy is an outmoded concept.

(5) Technological change is random in space and time.

There is ample room for disagreement about whether absolute gains in general have become the primary concern for certain sets of actors in world politics. We can also argue about whether such generalizations apply to all or some issues. One very important issue, however, tends to be overlooked in these debates. The history of the past several hundred years (if not longer) suggests that states with pronounced technological edges over their competitors tend to be the norm and not the exception. It is possible to take this observation one step further and argue that, in many years, one state tends to possess an economy that is more technologically advanced than any other in the system.

The reason for this tendency is not hard to discern. The most technologically advanced state in the system gained that status by generating more technological innovations than the other states. Technological innovation is, therefore, concentrated spatially. The economy that pioneers many innovations enjoys superiority in economic production for a finite time. It also accrues all sorts of rents and profits from its pioneering lead, which, among other things, pays off in terms of higher standards of living for the population of the system's lead economy.

One area in which relative gains matter very much, therefore, is who has the system's lead economy and relative monopoly on technological innovation. To be sure, this status is not permanent. Pioneering innovations eventually are adopted and often improved on elsewhere. As technological innovation diffuses, some (but certainly not all) economies can catch up to the leader. Still, the preferred position is to have the lead economy, and this is one domain of relative gains that should persist even in a "postmodern" world. It may not matter as much as it once did who has the largest army or the most tanks. Who possesses the most innovative economy still matters very much.[15]

(6) A modern European state-system evolved into a global system.

(7) The relative restraint of the current system leader is attributable to US exceptionalism.

One widespread interpretation of the modern history of international relations is that the European region invented states and interstate politics in 1494 or 1648 and proceeded to extend the scope of what was initially a regional system to gradually encompass the rest of the world.[16] According to this interpretation, Europeans stayed in charge until the late nineteenth-century advent of non-European great powers and the exhaustion of the West European powers by two world wars in the first half of the twentieth century. Along the way the modern European state-system morphed into a planetary-wide, global system presided over—for a time—by

[15]Compare this assertion to the debate about the advantages of primacy in world politics (Huntington 1993; Jervis 1993).

[16]Precisely why international relations scholars insist on 1648 as the birth of a modern European international political system has always been puzzling. The end of the Thirty Years War may have made some conventions about sovereignty more prominent, but it does not capture any major increase in the extent to which the region operated as an international or regional system. Even 1494 is probably late. It captures the beginning of the global war phenomenon, but European regional dynamics had already been strongly manifested in the Hundred Years War.

two superpowers: the United States and the Soviet Union. By the end of the twentieth century, the Soviet Union had disintegrated, leaving only one superpower survivor.

This story starts from a highly Eurocentric perspective. Europe may take credit for the first nation-states, but the existence of states and regional interstate systems outside the western edge of Eurasia long predated the modern era.[17] Nor was European superiority over other regions manifested all that quickly. The penetration of the Caribbean and South America proved to be easier than it probably should have been. The African interior took centuries to penetrate. India and China were also able to resist European inroads until after local empires had either fallen apart or were in decline (see Thompson 1999).

A more even-handed approach would see a number of different regional systems operating in the second millennium CE. By the middle of the millennium, few operated with complete autonomy from the others. Gradually, the European region did become the central, wealthiest, and most powerful region for a time, but the point remains that a larger system existed before the ascent of Europe from a fairly peripheral position in the fifteenth century to one of greater centrality afterward.

A combination of factors contributed to the elevation of the European region. Some of these factors were exogenous to Europe in the sense that they depended on developments over which the Europeans had no control. Two examples are the successes of the Mongol conquests and the later exploitation of American silver that proved indispensable in breaking into Asian markets. Other factors were endogenous to Europe. Perhaps most important was the hyper-competitiveness of the European states, which led, in turn, to the development of increasingly lethal firepower with more than a little help from the late eighteenth-century industrial revolution.

Another critical factor was related closely to this hyper-competitiveness. Given the failure of any hegemonic aspirant to conquer the European region, weak, marginal states on the fringe of western Eurasia (Genoa, Venice, Portugal, the United Provinces of the Netherlands, and Britain) were permitted to survive and thrive as commercial–maritime powers. This type of actor had existed before (Minoans, Phoenicians, and Carthaginians). But they tended to run afoul of adjacent land empires that either swallowed or destroyed them. Between the eleventh and early twentieth centuries, a string of trading states worked hard to gain and maintain control over east–west trade initially within Eurasia but ultimately on a worldwide basis. Much of the time, they were able to evade conquest by nearby land empires.

But it was not just the absence of a coercively unified Europe that permitted the survival of these relative anomalies. Increasingly, they became crucial to the construction and financing of coalitions that thwarted aspiring regional hegemons. Philip II and Louis XIV might have managed to change the regional trajectory of a nonunified Europe, and world history in the bargain, were it not for the coalition wars of the 1580s-1600s and 1680s-1710s. The interdependence of the commercial–maritime states and multiple sovereignties within Europe was thus highly reciprocal.

Nonetheless, something else was going on besides the intermittent efforts to maintain a nonunified European region. The commercial–maritime powers were too weak and largely disinterested in competing with the regional powers for territorial expansion within their home region. Instead, their energies were focused principally on extending their influence and maritime networks at some distance from their home region. Territorial expansion tended to come later (somewhere

[17]Not ironically or coincidentally, the first European nation-state, Portugal, later became the first global system leader.

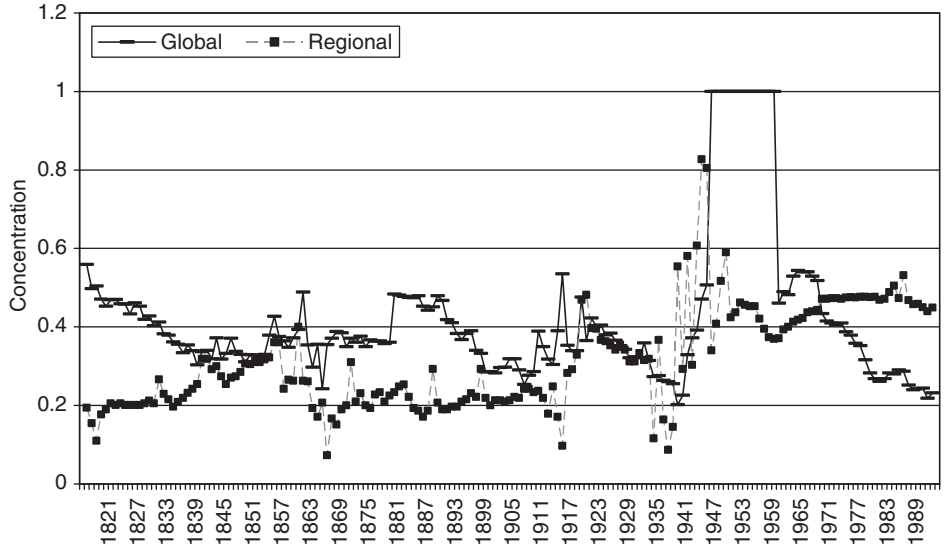

FIG. 3. Global and Regional Concentration

other than Europe) and only after the powers initially attempted to avoid the expenses involved in maintaining extensive onshore holdings.

The two very different strategic orientations—territorial expansion in the home region (certainly not distinctive to Europe) and market expansion abroad—created the sort of two-level game mentioned previously. Commercial–maritime powers concerned themselves first with managing global contests over interregional trade. Only when affairs in the home region threatened their survival did they turn to the task of managing contests at home over regional hegemony. At these times, the local and increasingly Central European region became fused with the global system of managing long distance trade. At other times, the affairs of the central region and the global system functioned somewhat separately.

Figure 3 provides one sketch of this process by charting post-1815 concentration and deconcentration in naval capabilities within the global system against concentration and deconcentration in army capabilities within the West European region. (Longer series can be found in Rasler and Thompson 1994.) Much of the time the two levels of concentration are dissynchronized. High levels of concentration in the global system took place when the European region was relatively deconcentrated and vice versa. These patterns are hardly coincidental, nor do they rule out intermittent phases of entraining in which the global system becomes more highly concentrated militarily in order to deal with the implications of military reconcentration in the European region.

Still, it is the two orientations that help explain leadership restraint. Regional territorial expansion is less likely to be characterized by restraint. Initial successes seem to encourage further expansion so that there have been concerted efforts to take over the whole European region. Global commercial expansion is more subtle (and distant) and, at least initially, attempts proceed by avoiding territorial conquest. The world is also a much bigger place than the European region. What might be contemplated in terms of dominance at the regional level is simply unthinkable at the global level. There is no need to fall back on US exceptionalism (see Ikenberry 2002) to account for the reluctance of post-1945 US policies to control fully the rest of the world. Constrained systemic leadership predated US exceptionalism. In fact, restrained systemic leadership conforms to the global historical pattern and, therefore, is unexceptional.

(8) The preeminent US position shortly after 1945 was unusual and cannot be compared to its present position.

This generalization is best deconstructed into two separate statements. The first one—that the 1945 position was unusual—is the more dubious of the two. From a leadership long cycle perspective, the US position in 1945 was comparable to the British positions after 1713 and 1815, the Dutch position after 1608, and the Portuguese position after 1516. What these episodes had in common was that one state emerged from a period of global warfare as the preeminent global power. It controlled the lead economy in the system. Its control of global reach capabilities exceeded a threshold set at the sum of the capabilities held by all other global powers (50%). Its most acute enemies had just been defeated decisively in a generation of intensive war.

Do any of these assertions mean that the lead global power was "hegemonic"? No, not if "hegemony" implies absolute dominance over other actors.[18] All of these global leaders have been limited in their ability to project their influence inland. None sought control of European affairs, and only the incumbent leading global power was in a position to strongly influence what took place within the west European region. Even that position proved to be temporary.

Do these assertions mean that each of the global leaders was equally powerful immediately after their global war triumph? Again, the answer is of course not. The magnitude of the lead enjoyed by the United States in 1945 did not spring forth at full force in the way the Portuguese lead of the early sixteenth century did. Nor could it have done so. The magnitude of the lead, and the types of capabilities upon which global systemic leadership rests, have evolved over time. Portugal possessed a very small population and a limited resource base. It was capable of stumbling its way around Africa and beyond, as well as seizing control of Indian Ocean trade for a period of time. The Dutch were twice as numerous and more formidable in war than the Portuguese but just as vulnerable to a hostile takeover on the western Eurasian continent. Ultimately, the Dutch were forced to hijack the English throne to augment their capabilities against the French. The British population base was about three times that of the Dutch. Moreover, their maritime–commercial network was augmented by a less vulnerable geopolitical location, two colonial empires, and an industrial revolution. The United States could claim even more people, a substantial resource endowment, the least vulnerable location possible, and a succession of more advanced industrial revolutions.

We might expect this trend to be discernible in our data, and it is. Figure 4 plots the mean level of naval power concentration between global wars. The Portuguese interval is quite high, no doubt reflecting an unusually asymmetrical beginning. In the sixteenth century, few states possessed anything resembling a state navy. Other than Mediterranean galleys, Spain, for instance, only began to build its blue-water fleets in the last quarter of the century.[19] France was even slower and might be said to have constructed a standing navy only in the second half of the seventeenth century. If we do not dwell on the high beginning point, the mean levels rise pretty much as expected: about 41% in the seventeenth century, 44% in the eighteenth century, almost 48% in the nineteenth century, and 77% in the twentieth century. Of course, the last number reflects more than simply a rising mean level of power concentration given the paucity of actors that were competitive at sea after 1945. The fifth mean was likely to have been higher than the fourth mean, but it did not have to be 29 points higher.[20]

[18]Not everyone, of course, equates "hegemony" with absolute dominance.

[19]Even then, the core of the Spanish oceanic naval capability at the end of the sixteenth century continued to be the appropriated Portuguese navy.

[20]This probability is linked to the gradual attrition in the number of major powers.

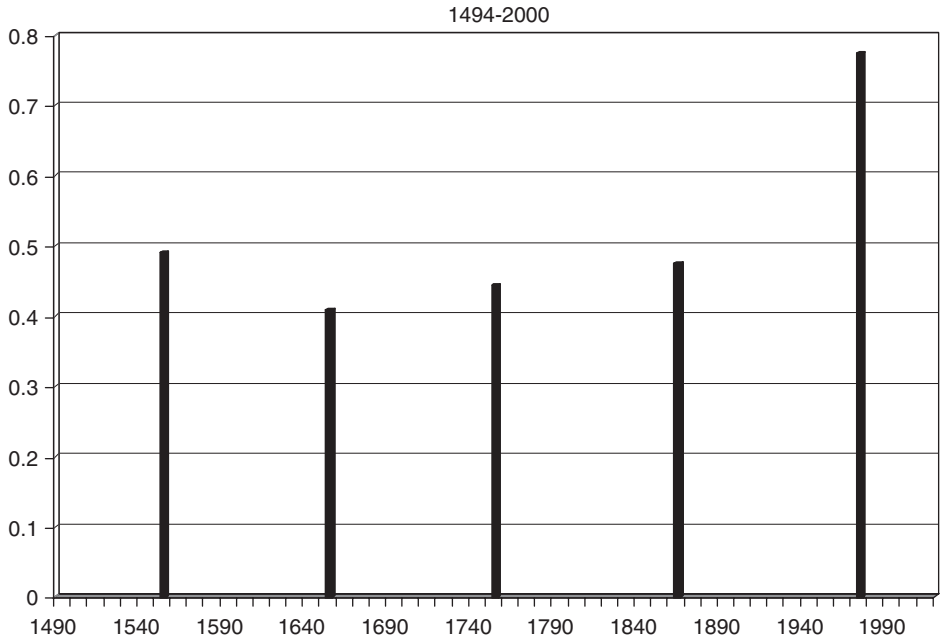

FIG. 4. Mean Global Reach Concentration, 1494–2000

System leaders gradually grew stronger. Each successive leader could aspire to do more, if they chose to do so. But then their opponents also grew stronger, which meant that the ability of system leaders to penetrate the interior of the Eurasian land mass improved but was usually restrained by the natures of their resource foundations for exerting global systemic leadership. As whales, not elephants, they were ill equipped to move much beyond the striking range of their fleets. Again, only in the contemporary era has that striking range been substantially stretched inland by bombers and missiles. Yet even in the contemporary era, there remains considerable reluctance to operate physically too far inland.

Where does that leave the second assertion—that the current US position is incomparable to its earlier 1945 position? If incomparable means that the 1945 and 2005 positions are different, one would certainly have to agree. They are not the same. The earlier one was immediately post-global war, and the current position is a half-century away from the last global war. Although the global war enemies were defeated decisively by 1945, a Cold War with a wartime ally was about to commence. In 2005, the principal enemies are nonstate groups espousing variants on militant Islam and a handful of weak minor powers that have, or are threatening to acquire, nuclear weapons.

If incomparable means that the 1945 and 2005 positions cannot be compared, that is obviously not the case, as is demonstrated in the preceding paragraph. They are also not identical positions as Figure 5 demonstrates. US sea power had regained much of the relative positional losses incurred during the Cold War after 1960, but it is unlikely to improve much more than it already has. The leading sector picture is even clearer in some respects given that the relative decline in production was more precipitous after the 1950s peak. The economic relative position began to turn upward after the 1980s trough, but there is still some way to go to return to the 1950s relative position.

Unlike the global reach index, there is some possibility, however, that the US leading sector position could return to a 1950s-like peak. Just as Britain led the way through two sets of twin-peaked technological innovation spurts, we may be in the

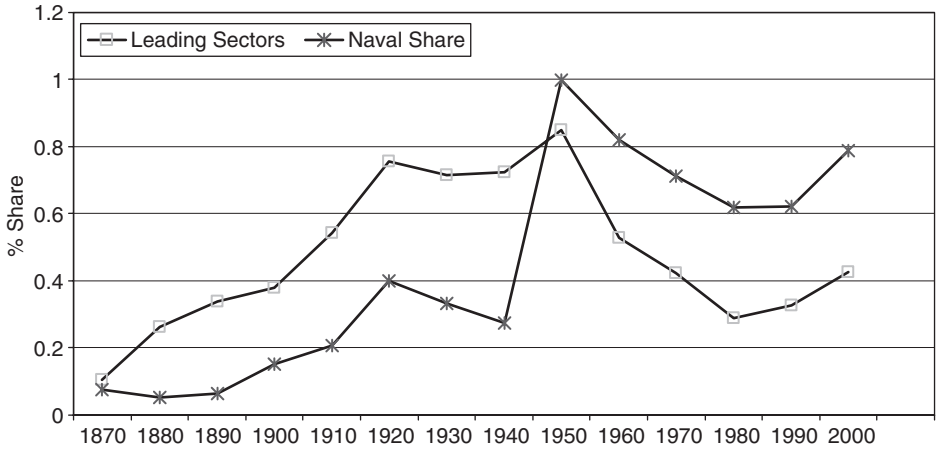

FIG. 5. US Leading Sectors and Naval Shares

beginning of a second set for the United States that is geared to information technology. It is fair to say that the US economy has led the way in such technology in its start-up phase. It remains in a respectable leading position at the beginning of the high-growth phase. The question is whether it can maintain the lead in the next few decades. That is a future outcome that is most difficult to predict.

(9) The current US unipolarity is unprecedented and indicates that the talk of decline in the 1980s was in error.

Again, this assertion is best broken into two statements. Of the two statements, the second one is the easiest one to handle. The discussion of decline in the 1980s was entirely appropriate. The US position had, indeed, declined relative to its earlier position. Relative decline cannot be equated with absolute decline, however. Absolute decline was not in question. Multiple indicators of relative decline were difficult to challenge. Actually, though, the real debate was not—and should not have been—about relative decline per se. The real question should have been about how much relative decline had taken place by the 1980s. With the advantage of hindsight and knowing how the Cold War played out, it is possible to say that the level of relative decline that had been experienced by the 1980s was easy to exaggerate.[21]

In point of fact, there are "new things under the sun." The current US position is unprecedented in some ways. Two important ones come immediately to mind. One is that the current system leader has no major power rivals. That condition may be temporary, but it is certainly unprecedented. It is also closely related to the unipolar outcome. The emergence of a genuine rival may end US military unipolarity, although there are other ways that the unipolar status may end.

A second novelty is that the United States currently possesses the world system's lead army—not necessarily in size but in terms of lethality, technological competence, and ability to project force at long distance. Not all of these characteristics are entirely novel, but the total package is unusual. Normally, the leading whale is not also the leading elephant.

[21] In this respect, Bruce Russett (1985) and others (e.g., Strange 1987; Nau 1990) were correct to question claims of *fin-de siecle* decline. The problem, however, is one of differentiating between no decline, some decline, and a great deal of decline. Many arguments tend to focus on no decline versus great decline rather than on the more ambiguous in-between zone.

In other respects, though, the current US position is not so unprecedented. Some 60 years after the last global war, its relative standing has diminished**,** not become stronger. The US military reach can now penetrate the interior of Eurasia better than it could in 1945, but then so could Britain 60 years after 1815. The US share of global reach has also not declined as much as its relative economic position. That was true of the United States' predecessor as well.[22] Most important, the basic nature of the system has not seemed to have changed all that much. We are still dependent on a high concentration of technological innovation and global reach for the creation of world order. The odds of maintaining both attributes tend to diminish as one moves away from the last episode of structural clarification via global war. The United States may be able to claim a unipolar status, but it is in part due to default. That is not the same thing as being able to claim a unipolar status as the result of winning a global war. As a consequence, the United States has its hands full—not so much with near-term major power challenges, but with plenty of smaller challenges to the eroding world order that it established after the conclusion of World War II.

(10) The chief threat to prolonged unipolarity is not doing enough.

(11) The quick route to multipolarity is blocked by the absence of formidable challengers on the near horizon.

Presumably, the system leader's basic options are attempting much or little. Unlike Goldilocks, we do not know what level of activity is just right. Nonetheless, the main threat to a preeminent position from a leadership long cycle perspective is erosion in the economic foundation that supports systemic leadership. Put another way, there is more than one quick route to multipolarity. The loss of a commercial–technological edge due to diffusion will decrease the gap between the system leader just as fast as will the rise of a formidable challenger. Doing too much or too little need not influence the extent to which material power is concentrated in the system. Doing too much or too little, however, can affect how much world order is accomplished through the efforts of the system leader. So can performing the role of the system leader poorly and with no concern for the legitimacy of one's efforts.

(12) The chief threats to prolonged unipolarity are the costs of leadership and the consequent loss of domestic support for system leadership activities.

Although, empirically, it can be demonstrated that there are economic costs related to systemic leadership, it is also easy to exaggerate the role leadership costs play in facilitating the relative decline of the system leader. The principal cause of relative decline is the loss of advantage in technological innovation. Even though nothing is inevitable, the diffusion of technological innovation is highly probable. The only real antidote is being the first to catch the next long wave of economic growth and not hanging on too tightly to investments and ways of doing things from the last wave.

The potential loss of domestic support for systemic leadership activities is an area that is little explored. We know something about mass preferences for defense spending and internationalism in the United States. The problem is that defense spending and international activities are rarely framed as systemic leadership functions. They are sold to public opinion as responses to threats to US interests. Germans, Japanese, Soviets, Chinese, unfriendly alleged possessors of weapons of

[22]This is not to suggest that the British and US life cycles are similar in all respects. Britain, for instance, was able to rely on its Napoleonic War shipping stock through the first half of the nineteenth century; thanks to few maritime rivals and little accepted technological change. The United States confronted what appeared to be a strong challenge very early on and, partially as a consequence, developed new naval technology rather than relying exclusively on its World War II fleet. But the general similarities outweigh the idiosyncracies—otherwise, comparison would be rather difficult. For an opposite viewpoint, see Patrick O'Brien (2002).

mass destruction, and terrorists have so far been obliging in providing a series of apparent threats over the past 65 years. What might public opinion's reaction be to a major threat portrayed as something more abstract and generic—such as climate change, overpopulation, poverty, or disease—that call for equal or even greater sacrifices if we are to cope with their dangers? That remains to be seen.

Nonetheless, Charles Kupchan's (2002) contention that structural arguments tend to assume system leaders will choose to make use of their power advantage deserves more study. But it need not be the case. If the system leader chooses to withdraw from international activism, a structural concentration of power will be less relevant. Other actors will become relatively more powerful by default.

Kupchan (2002) argues that current US unipolarity is likely to disappear as the US commitment to internationalism wanes. Another way of looking at this possibility is that the distribution of power described as unipolar might persist but that structural concentration would make less difference. The emphasis on whether strategic choices are pursued, as opposed to assuming they will be by a system leader, is most appropriate, but it raises a number of auxiliary questions also raised by Kupchan's discussion. Has US internationalism peaked? Is internationalism sustained by economic growth and reliance on casualty reducing tactics such as air power? How are new generations persuaded to accept commitments made in an earlier time? Or, should we integrate a generational decay factor into the problem of systemic leadership decline? The point here is not that none of these questions has ever been examined in the US context. They have (see, for instance, Russett 1990 or Wittkopf 1990)—but not as questions directly tied to analyses of systemic leadership.[23] Given the serial threats encountered by the United States over the last 65 years or so, separating elite and mass support for a response to threats as opposed to a commitment to internationalism is not an easy task. Moreover, the empirical work that has been done on this particular theoretical approach to systemic leadership, call it the domestic political support for engaging in systemic leadership, for the most part has been conducted solely in the US domain. More comparisons with earlier leadership life cycles are needed even though, or because, domestic politics presumably has evolved into a more significant component of systemic leadership over the past five centuries.

(13) Balancing against a strong system leader is highly probable eventually.

Historically, balancing against a system leader is not all that common. Note that Jack Levy and Thompson (2003) have found that the leading sea power is far less likely than the leading land power to provoke balancing coalitions. The main reason takes us back to the basic major power duality. System leaders have had maritime-commercial-industrial orientations. Whatever they may have done before becoming system leaders, their primary expansionary interests have concerned access to markets not territory and, most especially, not territory in a home region populated by other major powers. As a consequence, their economic success may well be resented, but system leaders are not seen as representing overt threats to the sovereignty of other major powers.

Stephen Walt (2002) argues cogently that threats pertinent to balancing calculi are a function of power, proximity, offensive capabilities, and aggressive intentions. However, these four factors need not be equally weighted. Of the four, aggressive intentions represent the most significant element. Yet, land powers that control a strong proportion of a region's resources tend to be viewed, rightly or wrongly, as possessing the intention of dominating the region coercively. Thus, leading regional powers, unlike global system leaders, do tend to be the target of balancing

[23]Earlier considerations of elite and mass attitudes vis-à-vis rise and fall dynamics can be found in Jeffrey Frieden (1988) and Torbjorn Knutsen (1999). However, these studies do not examine public opinion data.

coalitions. Historically, and especially in the European cockpit of balancing, power and aggressive intentions have tended to become fused in the minds of decision makers contemplating the likelihood of maintaining their autonomy given the relative power of the Habsburg-Spanish, French, and Germans.

Balancing against the system leader, therefore, is not ruled out completely, but it is a low probability occurrence because system leaders do not seek hegemony and territorial control—at least not where it matters most to balancing considerations. But system leaders, as leaders, do need followers. More likely than balancing, then, is the probability that other states become disinclined to accept policy directions advocated by system leaders in relative decline or who are acting in ways thought to be lacking in legitimacy.

(14) Unbalanced power encourages the emergence of new powers.

Christopher Layne (1993) contends that unbalanced power creates situations that are conducive to the emergence of new major powers. Why this might be the case appears to be predicated on a combination of uneven growth rates and the anarchy-driven propensity to imitate rivals. This argument seems problematic in at least two respects. First, it is not clear why uneven growth should be viewed as a function of unbalanced power. No one would deny that uneven growth has characterized the major power subsystem. Yet, surely, uneven growth and power concentration can be separate processes. Power deconcentration may encourage growth elsewhere, as does the system leader's technological innovation, but it is not clear that concentration per se will stimulate growth.

A second problem is that Layne's evidence is based on two earlier cases that he finds similar in nature to the present situation: France in 1660 and Britain in 1860. From a leadership long cycle perspective (but not necessarily from Layne's perspective), the first case is inappropriate because it mixes regional apples with global oranges. (Layne appears to subscribe to the assumption that a European system evolved into a global system.) In the second half of the seventeenth century, France was the leading regional power in Europe, but it was not the global system leader. That is precisely why it sought to destroy the Netherlands and its European trade monopoly. But even if one accepted the case as analogous, it is also difficult to see how Britain and Austria should be seen as emerging in imitation of France's predominance. Both states had been considered major powers in Europe long before 1660. They had also been occasional foes of France for many years before 1660. That they coalesced against French ambitions in the 1688–1713 conflict was neither surprising nor emergent behavior.

The second case—Britain in 1860—is more interesting. It focuses on a system leader and, therefore, is more relevant than the earlier French case. A glance at Figure 6 is most suggestive. In 1860, Britain had declined considerably in relative economic position (in leading sector terms) from a peak attained around 1830. Its status then improved for a few years before beginning a steady plunge toward the bottom of the chart. Thanks to the defeat of Russia in the Crimean War and subsequent experimentation in battleship construction, Britain's naval position remained high and even re-exceeded the 50% threshold in the last two decades of the nineteenth century. That high position could no longer be sustained in the twentieth century.

Whether a strong case can be made for British unipolarity in 1860 or not, the comparison may be even more appropriate than what Layne thought. To the extent that it illustrates the transitoriness of leading powers on downward trajectories—and the problems of interpreting them without the benefit of hindsight—Britain in 1860 may prove to be analogous to the United States in the early twenty-first century. Just how analogous depends on whether the United States has resumed an upward trajectory as it moves into a second twin-peak set of

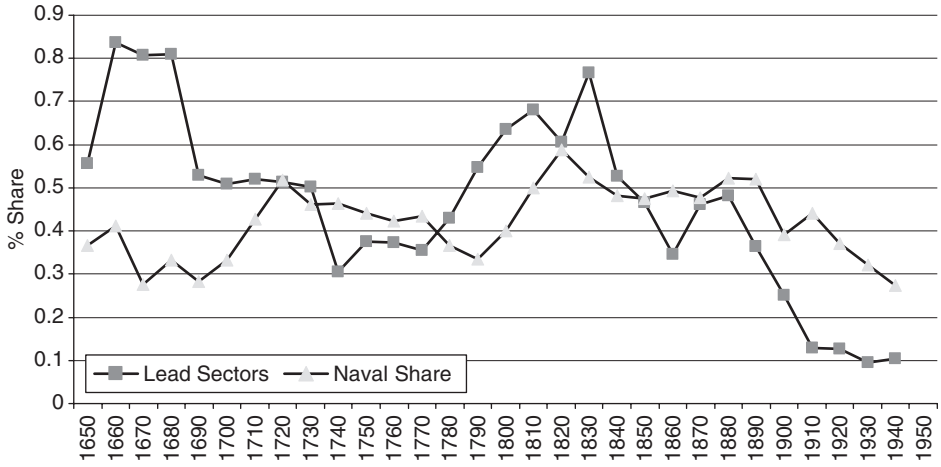

FIG. 6. British Leading Sector and Naval Shares

technological innovations. If the United States is on this latter trajectory, the analogy will break down because Britain by 1860 had already enjoyed two sets of twin spurts of economic growth leadership and was not destined to lead in a third set.[24]

Even so, it is difficult to accept the emergence of Germany, Japan, and the United States as responding, strictly speaking, to British predominance in the nineteenth century. That their ascendance resisted the implications of British predominance is clear. Both Germany and the United States erected high tariff barriers in the nineteenth century to hold off British productive superiority and to escape their role as suppliers of raw materials to the British industrial machine. They also imitated Britain's initial leading sectors (textiles, iron, steam, and rail). But that is the way modern economic growth and diffusion work. The center innovates and others either copy or fall behind. However, Germany, Japan, and the United States did not imitate Britain in all other respects. Both Germany and Japan stayed attached to, and mired in, dominating their home regions. The United States did so as well initially, but moved on to more global preoccupations after conquering a respectable proportion of North America without too much opposition. Both Japan and the United States chose to coalesce with Britain against the German threat in World War I. There seems to be much less "sameness" operating here than Layne sees.

On the contrary, exactly the opposite pattern to the imbalancing one that Layne advances has characterized the last 500 years. Regional powers are encouraged to emerge and grow stronger in the context of systemic leadership decline. As illustrated in Figure 3, global powers are also encouraged to rebuild the foundation of their capability in response to regional hegemonic threats.

(15) Challengers must catch up to the system leader to cause significant levels of trouble.

The historical pattern of ascent and decline is more complex than this assertion allows. Some challengers win without a fight. The US–British transition is a case in point. Although the Dutch and English fought several less intense wars in the 1650s–1670s, the actual transition in global leadership from the Netherlands to Britain in the early eighteenth century was resented but not resisted by the exhausted Dutch. There was never any once-and-for-all showdown between the

[24]This is not meant to invoke destiny as an explanation for Britain's decline. It lost its technological lead to more innovative states that also had larger national populations and, at least in one case, a larger resource endowment.

Dutch and the Portuguese either—in large part because Spain absorbed Portugal before such a confrontation could take place.

Other challengers have taken on the system leader before they have fully caught up in economic or military terms. The point has been made that incomplete catch-ups are inherently conflict-prone. If one state has or is about to surpass the system leader in all the categories that count, there is much less reason to fight. It is probably too late for the incumbent to hope to reverse its relative decline on the battlefield. The challenger, to the contrary, has less to prove than if there is uncertainty as to who is actually ahead and in what way.[25]

William Wohlforth (1999:20) has advanced the theory that uneven capability portfolios generate structural ambiguity that, in turn, is more dangerous than more unambiguous situations. Preponderance across the board should discourage all but the greatest risk takers. When the most powerful states are powerful in some respects but considered vulnerable in others, challenges become more conceivable. Challengers are empowered by superiority in some areas. At the same time, leaders still have reason to feel they can defend the status quo that they have largely created in an earlier era.

Even though this argument has yet to be fully tested, it has plausibility. It may also be useful in two contexts. The argument may help explain periods of reduced conflict sometimes associated with new system leaders. Newly incumbent system leaders may be most likely to be "preponderant across the board" at the outset of their political–military life cycle. To the extent that system leaders are likely to decline unevenly in different sectors (challengers are also likely to improve their relative positions unevenly), Wohlforth's interpretation may help explain what seem to be, with the advantage of hindsight, premature challenges.

Conclusion

So, where are we in the evolution of systemic structure? The current system has some unipolar features. Most evident is the persistent monopoly in global reach capabilities. One state continues to have a superior ability to project military power throughout the globe. But that is something less than a novelty of the post-Cold War era. It has been in place since at least 1945 in the US iteration, even if the technology has certainly improved.

The same state continues to lead in pioneering technological innovation—something it has been doing since the late nineteenth century. What is less clear is whether the United States is on the technological ascent or descent. Is it introducing new sunrise industries or riding sunset industries into relative decline? The answer is probably some of both. The United States leads in information technology, but it remains heavily wedded to the old Fordist/assembly line/motor vehicle/petroleum paradigm that prevailed throughout most of the twentieth century.

The United States may be first among a small set of economic peers, but it is hardly unipolar economically. Its capability portfolio, in Wohlforth's terms, is not uniformly predominant. We will need to see how things shake out in the first quarter of the twenty-first century to assess whether the capability portfolio is becoming more uniform and more predominant or not. In the interim, one would have to acknowledge the slow relative decline of the US economic position over the past 60 years.

Thus, the early decades of the twenty-first century, other things being equal, should be more like the last quarter or so of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Assuming foremost that technological innovation continues to be concentrated spatially and temporally, one state will move to the front of the pack. This passage could resemble the late eighteenth century in which Britain re-emerged as

[25]These are issues that are of great interest within the power transition research program (see, for instance, many of the chapters in Kugler and Lemke 1996).

the clear economic leader. Or, it could resemble the late nineteenth century in which the incumbent lead economy was supplanted gradually by challengers.

In either case, stressing the unipolar facets of the current period too much could prove to be a major error of interpretation. Whether it proves to be long lasting (a technologically ascendant United States) or temporary (a United States in relative technological decline), the current structure remains a weak and weakened form of military unipolarity created by Soviet default. Thus, I would agree with Randall Schweller (1999:37) and others that the current system is "both more unipolar and less concentrated" than before. But if forced to choose between a stand-alone military unipolarity or a more uniform concentration of political–military and economic resources as predictors of structural impact, leadership long cycle theory would opt for the latter over the former. Genuine or strong military unipolarity, at the very least, needs to be buttressed by strong technological and economic unipolarity. Some legitimacy for system leadership activities would not hurt either.

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