

"Alliance Politics in a Unipolar World"

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Abstract : *Unipolarity is a novel condition in world politics and has had profound effects on the nature of contemporary international alliances. The end of the cold war did not return the world to multipolarity. Instead, a preponderance of power in the hands of a single state - in this case, The United States - has been unprecedented in the modern era. Not surprisingly, this extraordinary imbalance has triggered a global debate. This special issue is a systematic research into the logic and dynamics of alliance formation in Unipolarity. In a world with a single global super-power,*

a) *How will other states choose allies and what strategies will they follow in order to maximize international support and minimize opposition?*

b) *What strategies should we expect the unipole to pursue and with what effects?*

These various queries offer a fairly complete menu of the most common motivations - "Hard-balancing", "Soft-balancing", "Leash-slipping", "Neutrality", "Bandwagoning" and "Regional balancing" - for alliance formation in a Unipolar world. These responses are ideal types, of course, and reality will usually be considerably more complex.

Keywords: *Alliance, Bandwagoning, Hard-balancing, Leash-slipping, Unipolarity, Soft-balancing, Neutrality, Regional balancing*

I. INTRODUCTION

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

Paul. W. Schroeder emphasized - alliances are both "weapons of power" and "tools of great power management"

On the other hand, a Unipolar system is one in which a single state controls a disproportionate share of the politically relevant resources of the system. Unipolarity implies that the single super--power faces no ideological rival of equal status or influence, even if ideological alternatives do exist, they do not pose a threat to the unipolar power's role as a model for others. William Wohlforth argues that the "Unipolar Threshold" is reached when one state is so strong that there is no possibility of a counter-hegemonic coalition. Despite certain ambiguities in this conception, Wohlforth is almost certainly correct in describing the current structure of world politics as Unipolar. The United States has the world's largest economy (roughly 60 percent larger than the number two power), and it possesses by far the most powerful military forces. If one includes supplemental spending, U.S military expenditures now exceed those of the rest of the world combined. Despite its current difficulties in Iraq and the recent downturn in the U.S economy, the United States holds a comfortable margin of superiority over the other major powers. All these capacities give "The United States", the command of commons (the ability to operate with liberty in the air, oceans and space) and the ability to defeat any other country (or current coalition) in a direct test of battlefield strength. In short, America's formidable capabilities (or primacy) shape the perceptions, calculations and possibilities available to all other states, as well as to other consequential International actors.

Thus, on a whole, weaker powers have essentially three choices. They can -

- (1) ally with each other to try to mitigate the unipole's influence,
- (2) align with the unipole in order to support its actions or exploit its power for their own purposes, or
- (3) remain neutral.

Therefore, in a unipolar world, most alliances will in some sense be a reaction to the dominant state— either to constrain it or to exploit it. Independent alliances may form to address purely local concerns on occasion, but they will be less common and probably less important.

1891-1894, which countered the Austro-German pact.

In Kenneth Waltz's classic formulation, states can balance either by internal effort or by cooperating with others. In either case, the aim is to strengthen one's ability to defend one's interests in the uncertain world of anarchy. Both internal and external balancing can be directed against very specific threats (for example, as in a defensive alliance that commits the members to war if either is attacked by a particular enemy), but it can also consist of more general treaties of mutual support regardless of the precise identity of the threat.

Examples of states seeking to balance the unipole (The United States) via internal effort.

- Efforts by Iran and North Korea to gain nuclear weapons are inspired in part by the desire to deter a U.S. attack or avert U.S. pressure.
- Several recent accounts suggest that part of the motivation behind A. Q. Khan's successful effort to spread nuclear technology was a desire to constrain American power and that Khan's objective was shared by prominent Pakistani officials.
- Similarly, part of the motivation behind China's military buildup is almost certainly the desire to counter U.S. military dominance in the Far East, even if it does not yet involve an explicit attempt to alter the global balance of power.

Turning to external efforts, one can in fact find a few examples of hard balancing against the American unipole, although even these examples fall short of the classic balance of power ideal.

- Continuing security partnership between Russia and China, the multilateral Shanghai Cooperation organization (which brought Russia, China, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan together in 2001 for the purpose of "strengthening mutual trust and good-neighborly friendship among the member states . . . [and] devoting themselves jointly to preserving and safeguarding regional peace, security and stability"),
- Or earlier security cooperation between rogue states such as Saddam Hussein's Iraq and Slobodan Milosevic's Serbia.

Each of these efforts seems to have been intended either to strengthen the parties vis-à-vis the United States or to limit U.S. influence in particular regions (for example, Central Asia). Such actions should be seen as a form of balancing (that is, states are seeking to enhance their security through combined or coordinated action) even if they lack the capabilities necessary to create a true counterpoise to the current unipole.

2.2 Soft Balancing

The soft-balancing argument rose to prominence only in the past several years and has not been fully fleshed out theoretically. T.V. Paul proposes a concise definition of this basic concept: "Soft balancing involves tacit balancing short of formal alliances. It occurs when states generally develop ententes or limited security understandings with one another to balance a potentially threatening state or a rising power. Soft balancing is often based on a limited arms buildup, adhoc cooperative exercises, or collaboration in regional or international institutions; these policy elements may be converted to open, hard-balancing strategies if and when security competition becomes intense and the powerful state becomes threatening".

The soft-balancing argument combines Waltz's structural balance of power theory and Walt's balance of threat theory. In keeping with the intellectual history of balance of power theory; both formulations are systemic when applied to the United States. For each, balancing is action taken to check a potential hegemon. It reflects systemic incentives to rebalance power, rather than the specifics of a given issue. It is action, moreover that would not have been taken in the absence of the prospect of a dangerous concentration of power in the system.

Examples of soft-balancing:

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

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

2. Both the Six-Party talks on North Korea's nuclear program and the EU3 negotiations with Iran served a dual

purpose: on the one hand, they sought to bring greater pressure to bear on the suspected proliferators; on the other hand, they also make it more difficult (at least in the short term) for the United States to take unilateral action. In each case, the effectiveness of this constraining effort is magnified by coordination among the non-U.S. members: if the EU3 had not taken a united position and stuck to it, the United States might have adopted policies that are even more confrontational than those it has adapted to date. Indeed, the inability of the United States to obtain sufficient backing from the EU3, China, and Russia eventually forced the Bush administration to take a more forthcoming position vis-à-vis direct negotiation with Tehran, a position it had previously rejected strenuously.

2.3 Leash-Slipping

Under Unipolarity states may also form an alliance not to balance or constrain the unipole but to reduce their dependence on the unipole by pooling their own capabilities. The objective is not to balance the unipole in the near term but to gain a measure of autonomy and hedge against future uncertainties. Christopher Layne has termed this response “leash-slipping,” which he describes as “a form of insurance against a hegemon that might someday exercise its power in a predatory and menacing fashion. As Robert Art puts it, a state adopting a leash-slipping strategy “does not fear an increased threat to its physical security from another rising state; rather it is concerned about the adverse effects of that state’s rise on its general position, both political and economic, in the international arena. This concern also may, but need not, include a worry that the rising state could cause security problems in the future, although not necessarily war.” If successful, leash-slipping would result in the creation of new poles of power in the international system, thereby restoring multipolarity and bringing U.S. hegemony to an end.

Examples to demonstrate that states have attempted to counter-balance U.S. hegemonic powers:

- The European union’s security and defense policy(1999):

Along with Jones, Posen, and Art, Layne sees the European Union's recent efforts to develop a common foreign and security policy- and especially the European Security and Defense Policy (ESDP) adopted in 1999- as an initiative designed to enable European states to protect their security interests without having to depend on U.S. military assets (and thus on U.S. approval) as a clear case of leash-slipping. In part this desire reflects growing disagreements with some elements of U.S. foreign policy, but it also reflects the awareness that the United States may not always be willing to act on Europe's behalf. To increase its own leverage and autonomy, therefore, the EU has been enhancing its own defense production capability and increasing its capacity to impose effective multi-lateral economic sanctions.

- French counterbalancing under Charles de Gaulle (early 1960's):

President Charles de Gaulle’s challenge to U.S. hegemony in the early 1960s is another example of leash-slipping. Although France did not fear a U.S. invasion, de Gaulle believed that, because of its overwhelming power, the United States was driven “automatically” to extend its influence and “to exercise a preponderant weight, that is to say, hegemony over others.”This was especially true in transatlantic relations. Moreover, following the 1962 Cuban missile crisis, de Gaulle concluded that the world had become Unipolar—dominated by a hegemonic United States—and therefore that Europe had lost its military and diplomatic independence. De Gaulle’s strategy aimed to constrain U.S. power and regain Europe’s autonomy by creating a new pole of power in the international system that was independent of U.S. control. Specifically, he sought to develop an independent French nuclear force, cement the Franco-German alliance as the basis of an independent Western Europe, and construct a common West European defense policy.

2.4 Neutrality

Neutrality, the legal status arising from the abstention of a state from all participation in a war between other states, the maintenance of an attitude of impartiality toward the belligerents, and the recognition by the belligerents of this abstention and impartiality. Under international law this legal status gives rise to certain rights and duties between the neutral and the belligerents. The laws concerning the rights and duties of neutrality are contained, for the most part, in the Declaration of Paris of 1856, Hague Convention V, 1907 (neutrality in land war), and Hague Convention XIII, 1907 (neutrality in maritime war).

The most important of the rights that result from a state of neutrality is the right of territorial integrity. Belligerents may not use a neutral’s territory as a base of operations or engage in hostilities there in. This right applies not only to neutral territory and water but extends to air space above that territory as well. A neutral also has the right to maintain diplomatic communications with other neutral states and with the belligerents; the right to demand compliance with its domestic regulations designed to secure its neutrality; and the right to require belligerents not to interfere with the commercial intercourse of its citizens, unless such interference is warranted by international law.

Exemplifying neutrality:

During the first half of the nineteenth century (1815-48):

- Switzerland had special function as a neutral state under joint European guarantee, which are both strategic -to keep the passes between Germany and Italy out of any great power 's control- and broadly political-to make France, Austria and Germany jointly responsible for a crucial area
- Denmark and Sweden undertook their roles as neutrals guarding the entrance to the Baltic, thus surviving everyone's commercial interests and preventing the constant struggles over the regions from 1558 to 1815 from flaring up.

However, the events of World Wars I and II foreshadowed a breakdown of some of the basic concepts of neutrality. With the German invasion of Belgium, the Italian invasion of Greece, the British occupation of Iceland, and the passage by the United States of the Lend-Lease Act (1941), the traditional rules of neutrality appeared no longer viable. By the middle of the 20th century new developments in the law of neutrality were evident. (1) The total character of modern war, with its use of economic as well as mechanized means of warfare, has sharply reduced the traditional area of freedom of the neutral. (2) Under the provisions of the Charter of the United Nations, neutrality, as a permissive legal status, disappears for those members that the Security Council "calls upon" or requires in specific instances to take military or other measures of coercion against an aggressor (Articles 41, 48). (3) The socialization of national economies may result in a lessening of neutral trade; many business enterprises that could formerly trade with belligerents as private traders could no longer legally do so as state enterprises.

2.5 Bandwagoning with the Unipole

The term "bandwagoning" as a description of international alliance behavior first appeared in Kenneth Waltz's Theory of International Politics. In his structural model of balance-of-power theory, Waltz uses "bandwagoning" to serve as the opposite of balancing: bandwagoning refers to joining the stronger coalition, balancing means allying with the weaker side. Stephen Walt re-defines these terms to suit balance-of-threat theory: "When confronted by a significant external threat, states may either balance or band-wagon. Balancing is defined as allying with others against the prevailing threat; bandwagoning refers to alignment with the source of danger."It involves an unequal exchange; the vulnerable state makes asymmetrical concessions to the dominant power and accepts a subordinate role.

Why States Bandwagon?

Bandwagoning dynamics move the system in the direction of change. Like a ball rolling down an incline, initial success generates further success, not greater resistance. In the language of systems theory, bandwagoning is a form of positive feedback. If it is characterized by conflict, bandwagoning behavior may enhance the prospects for a more durable peace. In this regard, the bandwagon's *raison d'être* also matters. "Jackal" bandwagoning, with a rising expansionist state or a coalition that seeks to overthrow the status quo, decreases system stability. Conversely, "piling on" bandwagoning with the stronger status-quo coalition enhances system stability. Thus, bandwagoning rarely involves costs and is typically done in the expectation of gain.

Exemplifying this strategy,

- Hitler encouraged Italy, the Soviet Union, Japan, Hungary, and Bulgaria to feed on the pickings of the Nazi lion's kill, in order to block the formation of a dangerous rival coalition. In this way, the Reich became master of Europe by 1941. But just as Napoleon had gratuitously destroyed the source of his own success by attacking his allies, Hitler brought Germany to ruin by declaring war against his Soviet ally and the United States, "two World powers who asked only to be left alone. In doing so, the Fuhrer forced into creation the only coalition powerful enough to prevent a German victory in Europe. Historically, most major wars have ended with piling-on behavior.
- During the First World War, Japan bandwagoned with the Entente powers because it coveted German possessions in Asia, while China bandwagoned to gain Anglo-French protection from Japan and Imperial Russia.
- Libya's decision to abandon its anti-Western position and give up its unconventional weapons programs illustrates this basic logic well. Although fear of American power played a role in Libyan decision making, the primary motivation for the decision was Libya's deteriorating economic condition and the concomitant need to escape the highly effective set of multilateral sanctions imposed after the bombing of Pan Am flight 103 in 1988. As Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi's son, Saif ul-Islam Gaddafi, explained: "the first reason (for the decision to give up WMD) is political, economic, cultural, and military gains that were promised by the Western party. . . . the temptation was really great." Libya realigned primarily to end sanctions and

obtain economic benefits and only in part because it feared the direct application of U.S. military power. Equally important, convincing Gaddafi to abandon WMD, terrorism, and other “rogue state” policies required the United States to formally abandon the goal of regime change and to agree that Gaddafi would remain in power. U.S. capabilities clearly played a role in Gaddafi’s decision—in this sense, he was choosing not to resist the dominant global power—and thus qualifies as bandwagoning.

2.6 Regional Balancing

Under Unipolarity, an alternative motivation for close ties with the dominant power is the desire for protection, normally against some sort of regional threat. Thus, what might at first glance appear to be bandwagoning (that is, more and more states aligning with the unipole) may actually be a specific form of balancing, where the threat to be countered is a neighboring power or some other local problem. Throughout the cold war local powers sought help from one of the superpowers (and occasionally both) in order to deal with nearby challengers. North and South Korea, North and South Vietnam, Israel, Angola, Cuba, Pakistan, Ethiopia, Somalia, and a host of others sought U.S. or Soviet support to meet a threat from a nearby power (or in some cases, to quell an internal challenge). These concerns made the United States an especially attractive ally for the medium powers of Europe and Asia: it was strong enough to provide an effective deterrent against the Soviet Union, but it was also far enough away not to pose an equally serious danger. Here the distribution of capabilities and the geographic location of the major powers combined to make alignment with the United States especially attractive for states on the periphery of the Soviet empire. As a result, the United States was able to bring together the industrial powers of Western Europe and Japan (and to some degree China) in an anti-Soviet coalition, while the USSR was forced to rely on weak and unpopular regimes such as Angola, Ethiopia, South Yemen, and North Korea.

In Asia, the end of the cold war did not eliminate the desire for U.S. protection. In addition to Taiwan (which has long sought U.S. protection against pressure from the PRC), Asian countries like Japan, Singapore, Vietnam, Malaysia, Indonesia, the Philippines, and India continue to welcome a close strategic partnership with the United States.

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

Last but not least, the heightened fear of international terrorism in the wake of September 11 provides smaller states with yet another incentive for close collaboration with the world’s most powerful country.

III. Managing Unipolar Alliances

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

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

Even, states that choose to align with the United States do not do so passively. Aware that the United States is no longer bound by the need for solidarity against a peer competitor (as it was during the cold war), America’s weaker partners will try to cement relations with Washington in several interrelated ways. Some leaders will try to bond with U.S. elites, in effect trying to establish close personal ties with influential Americans and thus gaining greater influence over U.S. actions.

Another option is to try to ingratiate one’s self with Washington by adopting (or at least appearing to adopt) America’s own strategic agenda.

A third option is to deliberately manipulate American domestic politics, either through formal lobbying

efforts or by exploiting sympathetic groups (such as ethnic diasporas) within the United States itself. In 2002, for example, an Indian government commission noted that "Indo-Americans have effectively mobilized on issues ranging from the nuclear test in 1998 to Kargil, and have played a crucial role in generating a favorable climate of opinion in the (U.S.) Congress.

Thus, although Unipolarity confers real advantages on the United States in its relations with other states, other states do have ways of challenging these structural benefits and if U.S. leaders are not careful, U.S. power may end up doing more for its allies than it does for itself.

IV. Conclusion

Unipolarity is a new phenomenon in world politics, and it is not surprising that scholars and policymakers are just beginning to grasp its essential characteristics. With respect to alliance relations, however, the main features of Unipolarity are gradually becoming clear.

First, the alliance structures inherited from the cold war are now in flux and are unlikely to persist in their present form. Instead of relying on fixed, multilateral, and highly institutionalized structures that depend on permanent overseas deployments, the United States, as the Unipolar power, is likely to rely more heavily on ad hoc coalitions, flexible deployments, and bilateral arrangements that maximize its own leverage and freedom of action. Efforts to constrain U.S. power will occur but will not take the form of formal countervailing coalitions unless the United States adopts an extremely aggressive approach to several different parts of the world. When states do balance U.S. power, they will do so through internal effort or through various forms of soft balancing or leash-slipping.

Medium and small powers will compete for influence in Washington, either to prevent U.S. power from being used against them or to encourage its deployment on their behalf.

Although Unipolarity inevitably heightens concerns about the preferences and actions of the unipole, the distribution of capabilities does not dictate how other states will respond. It matters who the unipole is, where it is located, and how it chooses to use its power. If the unipole is geographically distant, reasonably restrained in its ambitions and conduct, and, most importantly, does not try to conquer others, it is likely to face no more than occasional episodes of soft balancing and may still attract many allies who appreciate the order that the unipole provides and want to use its power to address their own concerns.

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

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

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