Liberalism and empire: logics of order in the American unipolar age

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Introduction

The United States dominates the world as no state has. It emerged from the Cold War the world's only superpower, and no geopolitical or ideological contenders are in sight. Europe is drawn inward and Japan is stagnant. A half-century after their occupation, the United States still provides security and garrisons troops in Japan and Germany — the world's second and third largest economies. US military bases and carrier battle groups ring the world. Russia is in a quasi-formal security partnership with the United States, and China has accommodated itself to US dominance, at least for the moment. For the first time in the modern era, the world's most powerful state can operate on the global stage without the counterbalancing constraints of other great powers. We have entered the American unipolar age.¹

The United States is not just a superpower pursuing its interests; it is a producer of world order. Over the decades, and with more support than resistance from other states, it has fashioned a distinctively open and rule-based international order. Its dynamic bundle of oversized capacities, interests, and ideals together constitute an 'American project' with an unprecedented global reach. For better or worse, states today must operate in, come to terms with, or work around this protean order.²

America's overwhelming edge in sheer military power has been dramatically revealed to the world. The Bush administration's war on terrorism, invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq, expanded military budget, and controversial 2002 National Security Strategy have thrust American power into the light of day — and, in doing so, deeply unsettled much of the world. Worry about the implications of American unipolarity is the not-so-hidden subtext of recent US-European tensions and has figured prominently in recent presidential elections in Germany, Brazil, and South Korea. The most fundamental questions about the nature of global politics — who commands and who benefits — are now the subject of conversation among long-time allies and adversaries alike. To acquire the capacity to dominate is not to gain the right to rule.

The world is trying to make sense of this new unipolar reality. Diplomats are trying to figure out how an American unipolar order will operate. Will the US break out of its postwar commitment to multilateral and alliance-based partnerships and

¹ This essay draws on G. John Ikenberry, 'The Illusions of Empire', Foreign Affairs (March/April 2004).
attempt to unilaterally dominate the world? Should American power be appeased, engaged, or resisted? Meanwhile, scholars are asking basic questions about American unipolarity as a political formation. What is the character of American domination? If the postwar American system is based on a mix of force and consent, is it shifting increasingly toward force? What are the restraints on American power – if any? Is counterbalancing, resistance and breakdown inevitable? Looming in the background is the fundamental question: is American unipolarity consistent with multilateral, rule-based order?

Today, the US does face a choice between two logics of order. One logic is unipolar order organised around ‘liberal’ characteristics. This is order built around multilateralism, alliance partnership, strategic restraint, and institutional and rule-based relationships – prominent features of the post-1945 Western system. The other logic is unipolar order organised around ‘imperial’ characteristics. This is order built around American unilateralism, coercive domination, divide and rule strategies, and reduced commitment to shared rules of the game. In this imperial vision of order, US power is the provider, protector, arbiter, and final word in international order.

The view that America is making a grand historic turn toward imperial rule is reflected in a growing body of scholarship that evokes images of empire. ‘No one can deny the extent of the American informal empire’, argues Neill Ferguson who likens today’s imperium to its British precursor. ‘Even recent American foreign policy recalls the gunboat diplomacy of the British Empire in its Victorian heyday, when a little trouble on the periphery could be dealt with by a short, sharp “surgical strike”’.3 Chalmers Johnson advances the more disturbing claim that America’s Cold War-era military power and far-flung system of bases have been consolidated over the last decade into a new form of global imperial rule. Driven by a triumphalist ideology, exaggerated threats, and a self-serving military-industrial complex, the United States is ‘a military juggernaut intent on world domination’.4 Military commanders in regional headquarters around the world are latter-day proconsuls, warrior-diplomats who are the visible manifestation of American imperial reach. The American empire is innovative, Johnson asserts, because it is not built on the acquisition of territory; it is an empire of bases.

The assertion that America is bent on empire is not new. A looming global empire is the image evoked by British writer and Labour politician Harold Laski in 1947 when he said that ‘America bestrides the world like a colossus; neither Rome at the height of its power nor Great Britain in the period of economic supremacy enjoyed an influence so direct, so profound, or so pervasive. . . . Today literally hundreds of millions of Europeans and Asiatics know that both the quality and the rhythm of their lives depend upon decisions made in Washington’.5 And, indeed, Dean Acheson and other American architects of postwar order were great admirers of the British Empire. During the Vietnam war era, left-wing thinkers and revisionist


Today the notion of an American empire has more varied and contested connotations – a term of approval and optimism for some and disparagement and danger for others. Neo-conservatives celebrate the imperial exercise of American power. In a modern version of Kipling’s ‘white man’s burden’, America’s ‘liberal imperialism’ promotes democracy and undercuts the tyranny that supports terrorism, military aggression, and weapons proliferation. In contrast, critics who see an emerging American empire worry about its corrosive impact on the country’s democracy, its unacceptable financial burdens, and the threat it poses to the multilateral institutions and alliances that have supported America’s national interests since World War II.

In this essay, I make three arguments. First, unipolarity does generate imperial temptations but notions of empire do not adequately capture key features of the political order that have grown up around American power. The United States has a long history of pursuing crude imperial policies, particularly in Latin America and the Middle East. But America’s relations with Europe, Japan, Russia and China are not best described as imperial – and this is true even when the term empire is modified with neo-, liberal, or democratic. It is a political order built on ‘liberal hegemonic’ bargains, diffuse reciprocity, public goods provision, and an unprecedented array of intergovernmental institutions and working relationships. The advanced democracies operate within a ‘security community’ where the use or threat of force is unthinkable. This is not empire – it is an American-led open-democratic political order that has no name or historical antecedent.

Second, to be sure, both liberal and imperial logics are at play in the current American unipolar moment. Both logics are deeply rooted in American political culture and they both have been manifest in American diplomacy over the last century. The liberal logic has been manifest most fully in the Atlantic community, and its institutional expressions include NATO and multilateral economic regimes. The imperial logic is manifest in the neo-conservative grand strategy of unilateral American rule. This is a vision of order organised around the bold exercise of American power, gradual disengagement from the constraints of multilateralism and a pre-emptive push to overturn or disarm hostile dictatorships. The invasion of Iraq was the defining goal of this ambitious grand strategy. Over the longer term, the imperial logic of order would likely take the shape of a global ‘hub and spoke’ system. This is order built around bilateralism, ‘special relationships’, client states, and patronage-oriented foreign policy. America’s postwar ‘hub and spoke’ security ties with East Asia offer a glimmering of this approach. As we shall see, both liberal and imperial logics continue to offer a mixture of benefits and costs for the American governance of unipolarity.

Third, despite Washington’s imperial temptation, the US is not doomed to abandon rule-based order. This is true if only because the alternatives are ultimately unsustainable. The costs of an imperial system of American rule – even the ‘hub and
spoke’ version that currently holds sway in East Asia – is too costly, fraught with contradictions, and premised on an inflated accounting of American power. Likewise, there are an array of incentives and impulses that will persuade the US to try to organise unipolarity around multilateral rules and institutions. The United States may want to renegotiate rules and institutions in some global areas, but it ultimately will want to wield its power legitimately in a world of rules and institutions.

In the first sections of this article, I explore alternative ways to conceptualise American unipolarity, captured by notions of hierarchy, empire, hegemony, and security community. After this, I sketch the defining characteristics of the American system – public goods provision, rule-based relations, and bargaining and ‘voice’ opportunities. In the next sections, I look at the imperial and ‘hub and spoke’ impulses generated by unipolarity. Finally, I identify the incentives and pressures for multilateral, rule-based order that still hold sway even in a unipolar world.

Anarchy and hierarchy

No one disputes that American power is extraordinary. It is the character and logic of American domination that is at issue. Is the American unipolar order a latter-day empire or is it something new? At stake are the most basic distinctions that scholars make in depicting international order. The first distinction is between anarchy and hierarchy; the second is between empire, hegemony, and security community. Whatever its specific character, international political order refers to the ‘governing’ arrangements among a group of states, including its fundamental rules, principles, and institutions. Order can be based on coercion, consent, or an equilibrium of power. As we shall see, today’s unipolar order is both hierarchical and infused with liberal hegemonic characteristics.

In identifying the organising principle of international politics, neorealists make the elemental distinction between anarchy and hierarchy. Anarchy is order without central authority. Sovereign states compete in a self-help system. In Kenneth Waltz’s classic statement of this view, the ‘parts’ of the system are made up of states that are alike (‘like units’) in their fundamental character, undifferentiated by function. In a condition of anarchy, states do not stand in any fixed, formal, or hierarchical relation with one another. The last word in political authority is state sovereignty, which constitutes the formal rejection of hierarchy.

In a world of anarchy, incentives exist for states to balance. States can never be fully certain of the intentions of other states and so cannot rely on commitments and guarantees to ensure their security. When powerful states emerge, weaker states will seek protection in countervailing coalitions. The alternative is to risk domination. ‘Secondary states, if they are free to choose, flock to the weaker side; for it is

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the stronger side that threatens them. On the weaker side they are both more appreciated and safer, provided, of course, that the coalition they join achieves enough defensive or deterrent strength to dissuade adversaries from attacking.9 As the distribution of power shifts, coalitions will shift as well. International order, therefore, is the result of balancing by states seeking to ensure their survival in an anarchical system.10

Waltz contrasts balancing with ‘bandwagoning’, which he argues is a typical strategy of competitors within a domestic political system. Losers in domestic political contests tend to throw their support to winners.11 The contrast is critical for Waltz, and it goes to the heart of the neorealist claim that domestic and international politics are fundamentally distinct. The stakes of winning and losing are lower in domestic politics, and the possibilities exist to experience gains even while cooperating with powerful new leaders. Under conditions of anarchy, if states ‘bandwagon’ with the most powerful state, the result will be a ‘world hegemony’ – a situation that would leave these states at the mercy of the strong. Because the stakes are lower in domestic politics, more complex and differentiated political orders can emerge.

Hierarchical orders, in contrast to anarchy, are ordered relations between units where political authority is centralised and the units in the system are functionally differentiated.12 In a hierarchical international order, states are integrated vertically with highly defined superordinate and subordinate positions. But hierarchies can be established and maintained in different ways – and hierarchical orders can come in many guises. Hierarchical relations can be a feature of states that still are ultimately operating within anarchy. That is, hierarchy can be based simply on differentiation of authority based on power disparities. The ‘great powers’ have a privileged position in the international order based on their power capabilities.13 More articulated hierarchical relations can also emerge from negotiated ‘contracts’ between states, where secondary powers cede formal control of aspects of their sovereignty to lead states. David Lake argues that external restrictions on states constitute hierarchical authority relations. ‘The degree of hierarchy . . . is defined by the locus of rights of residual control or, less formally, by the decision-making authority possessed by each polity’.14 In this view, hierarchy in international relations is generated through negotiated agreements between states that result in transfers of sovereign authority.

Hierarchical relations can also be manifest in more formal and elaborated institutional relations in which anarchy all but disappears. Formal colonial empires and coercive spheres of influence – such as the Soviet Union established in Eastern

9 Waltz, Theory of International Politics, p. 127.
11 Waltz, Theory of International Politics, p. 126.
Europe after World War II – were hierarchical orders where domination was institutionalised. The hierarchical relationships were neither informal nor negotiated. Alternatively, hierarchical order may be manifest in a system of negotiated rules and institutions where both the subordinate and superordinate states agree to differentiation of functions, rights, and obligations. Power disparities still matter but they exist within a mutually agreed-upon institutional, rule-based order. American relations with Western Europe after World War II tend to fit this pattern.15

Clearly, international order today – and in the past as well – exhibits a rich array of these hierarchical characteristics.16 The question is: is today’s unipolar order hierarchical? Unipolarity is a term that refers to the distribution of power – and it can be contrasted with bipolar and multipolar distributions of power. As William Wohlforth argues, the sheer disparities of power in favour of the United States alter the fundamental logic of anarchy.17 Weaker states are not able to resort to the realist strategy of power balancing to protect themselves from American predominance. The insecurities of anarchy do not disappear for weak states, these states are simply too weak – individually and collectively – to do anything about it. Without the fear of counterbalancing alliances rising up to resist the United States, Washington has an unprecedented opportunity to impose its will on the global system. The ultimate check on its power has disappeared.18 But the absence of balancing against the US may also be a result of features of international order that make the United States less threatening to other states than were previous powerful states. Nuclear weapons, democracy, capitalism and modernisation – all these features of today’s unipolar order may make unipolarity more benign than realists might contend.19 But what is not in dispute is that unipolar order is hierarchical.

The security and economic features of unipolarity also reflect hierarchical relations. A half-century after their occupation, the United States still provides security protection for Germany (and Western Europe) and Japan. Germany and Japan have eschewed nuclear weapons and pursue ‘civilian’ great-power strategies precisely because they remain secondary partners within an American-led alliance security system. Economic relations are also generating specialisation and division of labour patterns that are more consistent with patterns of hierarchy than anarchy.20

If the United States is so powerful today that the logic of anarchy recedes, neorealist theory will have problems explaining American behaviour. US policy under conditions of anarchy is seen to be driven by neorealist mechanisms of selection and competition. But if anarchy-driven pressures and incentives disappear, it is not clear what factors shape unipolar foreign policy. It does mean that other factors – domestic, ideological, transnational, and the more specific costs and benefits of policy – will likely be stronger determinants of policy. It also means that, although

15 These last two types of hierarchical orders roughly confirm to the distinction I make below between empire and hegemony.
19 Ikenberry (ed.), America Unrivaled, ch. 1.
unipolarity is more consistent with hierarchy than anarchy, the actual character of hierarchy can vary greatly between formal and informal, negotiated or imposed, coercive or liberal relationships.

Empire, hegemony and security community

American unipolar order may be hierarchical, but what type of hierarchy? Here it is useful to distinguish between three forms of hierarchical order – empire, hegemony, and security community. Each offers a distinct logic of order, even though all three logics may be manifest in various ways in today's global system. The key difference between empire and hegemony is that in an empire, the lead state operates unilaterally and outside the order, whereas in a hegemonic order, the lead establishes multilateral rules and institutions that it itself operates within. They are different types of domination. In a security community, coercion is washed out of the system, power becomes ‘domesticated’, and hierarchy itself is muted.

Empire has many different meanings and manifestations. But in essence, empire refers to the formal or informal control by a leading state of the foreign and domestic policies of weaker political units. As Michael Doyle suggests, ‘empire . . . is a relationship, formal or informal, in which one state controls the effective political sovereignty of another political society’. In modern scholarship, according to Dominic Lieven, this has led to the comparative study of two types of empire. One is the modern European maritime empire where empire is defined in terms of the relationship between the metropolitan centre and colonial periphery. Cultural and political domination, along with economic exploitation, are seen as inherent aspects of empire. The other focus is on the great military and absolutist land empires, often tied to universal religion, which run from Alexander the Great to ancient Rome and China and on through the Hapsburg and Ottoman empires to Russia and the Soviet Union.

Empire – manifest in any of these instances – offers the most extreme form of hierarchical order in international relations. It is order in which weaker units are not fully sovereign and control is ultimately based on coercive domination. Weaker peoples and societies on the periphery are dependent on and coercively tied to the imperial centre. In actual practice, imperial orders have varied widely in their degree of hierarchical domination and control.

Hegemony is also a contested term but in modern international relations theory it refers to the rule and regime-based order created by a leading state. Hegemonic orders are also hierarchical, although within the order, weaker and secondary states

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24 See Doyle, *Empires*.
are formally sovereign and the extent and mechanisms of domination can be looser and less formal. But ultimately, hegemonic order is established and maintained by the preponderance of power of the leading state, and when that power declines or passes to another state, the order will break apart or at least change to reflect the interests of the newly powerful state.\(^{25}\) Britain in the nineteenth century and the US after World War II are the great historical cases of liberal hegemony.

Robert Gilpin has captured the logic of hegemonic order. A dominant state emerges from war with the capabilities to organise a new international order – and takes advantage of its favourable position to establish rules and institutions that serve its long-term interests. Rules and rights are established and enforced by the postwar capacities of the hegemonic state. Compliance and participation within the order is ultimately ensured by a range of power capabilities available to the hegemon – military power, financial capital, market access, technology and so forth. Direct coercion is always an option in the enforcement of order, but less direct ‘carrots and sticks’ are also mechanisms to maintain hegemonic control. Gilpin also argues that ideology and status appeals are also integral to the perpetuation of hegemonic order.\(^{26}\)

Hegemonic order can be more or less based on the direct and coercive domination of the lead state. When hegemony is relatively benevolent and non-coercive, relations between states are organised around more reciprocal, consensual, and institutionalised relations. In its ‘liberal’ guise, the hegemonic state has incentives to establish multilateral regimes. The hegemon acts on its long-term interests rather than struggle over short-term distributional gains. This allows it to identify its own interest with the openness and stability of the larger political system. In Robert Keohane's formulation, the theory holds that ‘hegemonic structures of power, dominated by a single country, are most conducive to the development of strong international regimes whose rules are relatively precise and well obeyed’.\(^{27}\) Such states have the capacity to maintain regimes that they favour through the use of coercion or positive sanctions. The hegemonic state gains the ability to shape and dominate the international order, while providing the flow of benefits to smaller states that is sufficient to persuade them to acquiesce.

Security community is a final conception of non-anarchical international political order. In a security community, war or the use of violence to settle disputes is seen as unthinkable among member states within the community. Anarchy as the deep organising principle of state relations disappears and a new ‘social structure’ of state relations emerges – an amalgam of open, integrated democratic states. In such an order, balance of power politics – and indeed hierarchy as well – is rendered


\(^{26}\) Robert Gilpin, *War and Change in World Politics.*

irrelevant. In the original formation, advanced by Karl Deutsch, a security community is defined as a group of like-minded peoples who were economically and politically integrated, linked together by common institutions and practices, and united by a shared ‘sense of community’.28

Three features of the North Atlantic region make it a security community: collective identities and shared values; transnational economic and societal interdependence; and governance structures that channel and resolve political conflict. In a recent restatement of this perspective, Thomas Risse argues that the social structure of the Western security community shapes the basic character and identities of the actors who operate within it.29 This Western security community does not vanquish conflict but it does radically reduce security dilemma dynamics and makes great-power war impossible. Democracy, economic interdependence, and institutionalized governance relations are characteristics of Western political order that work together to produce shared values and collective identities.30 Peoples in Western states have attained a sufficient level of shared loyalty to each other and trust that the structure of interstate relations has changed. Risse argues that as a result of this shared sense of community and collective identity, countries within the Atlantic region do not regard as threatening state actions that would be seen as highly threatening if they came from states outside the community. Disputes over trade, defence, and other issues do not disappear – indeed because these democracies are becoming more interdependent such conflicts may actually increase – but they are contained within shared political institutions and stable expectations that their resolution can be achieved short of resort to armed violence.

Unipolarity, liberalism, and empire

Despite the postwar legacy of liberal hegemony and Western security community, unipolarity – particularly when combined with the new strategic thinking triggered by September 11 – does make more plausible the logic of American empire. This is so not only because of the sheer predominance of American power. But also – paradoxically – because unipolar power is connected to liberal ideals which makes the American world order ‘project’ both more expansive and complex. In shaping world order, power and liberalism are a much more potent mixture than simply the exercise of crude material power alone. But the question remains: is the resulting American-led order an empire?

Realist scholars depict international relations as the interaction of sovereign states who manoeuvre in a world of anarchy. In the classic Westphalian image, states

30 These three characteristics of liberal order are explored in Russett and Oneal, Triangulating Peace.
maintain a monopoly on the use of force domestically, while order at the international level is maintained through a diffusion and equilibrium of power among states. But, as we have seen, today's unipolar world is more hierarchical than anarchical - and the Westphalian image is flipped on its head. The United States possesses a quasi-monopoly on the international use of force while the domestic institutions and behaviours of states are increasingly open to global - that is, American - scrutiny. Post-9/11 Bush administration thinking about 'contingent sovereignty' and pre-emption open states up even further to outside intrusions. The rise of American unipolar predominance and the simultaneous unbundling of state sovereignty is a new world historical development.

Echoing this view, the Italian scholar, Vittorio Emanuele Parsi, argues that the international system has undergone a transformation in the last decade - only to be intensified since September 11 - as profound as any since the Peace of Westphalia. Parsi identifies two epochal shifts. One is a shift from pace d'equilibrio ('peace of equilibrium') to a pace egemonica ('hegemonic peace'). For five hundred years, the security of states was maintained by ensuring an absence of an overarching power in the international system. With the rise of American unipolarity, stability and peace are guaranteed by the wielding of power by a single superstate. The disparities of power are so great that counterbalancing by the other great powers is impossible. The other shift is from a system governed by the 'balance of power' to the 'balance of terror'. The United States and the other great powers are not worried about war between them. They are now worried about global terrorism - that is, they are worried about threats that emerge from failed and hostile states in the periphery. These threats cannot be deterred; they must be pre-emptively attacked. Together these two shifts give the United States the capacity and necessity - but only a few would say the authority - to police international order and unilaterally project force into the affairs of vulnerable yet threatening sovereign states.

This new logic, of course, is grandly embraced by the Bush administration in its 2002 National Security Strategy. In this vision, the United States will increasingly stand aloof from the rest of the world and use its unipolar power - most importantly, its military power - to arbitrate right and wrong and enforce the peace. In a Hobbesian world of anarchy, the United States must step forward as the order-creating Leviathan. The United States will refuse to play by the same rules as other states; this is the price that the world must pay for the unipolar provision of security. This view is reflected in the Bush doctrine of pre-emption under which the United States claims a new right to use force 'to act against emerging threats before they are fully formed'. The Bush administration also warns other great powers not to challenge America's military pre-eminence. The US insists that it will not accept the rise of a 'peer competitor'. Indeed, in the Bush view, no one should want to try - everyone benefits in a world where a single superpower maintains the peace.

31 For general depictions of the Westphalian state system, see Bull, The Anarchical Society; and Waltz, Theory of International Politics. For an important reinterpretation of the Westphalian settlement, see Stephen D. Krasner, Sovereignty: Organized Hypocrisy (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999). Krasner argues that the norms of Westphalian sovereignty actually emerged long after 1648 and departs from it lace the entire history of the state system.


Interestingly, in this vision of American unipolar rule, the Bush administration is wrapping itself in liberal clothing. American power is seen as being put at the service of universal ideas – openness, democracy, limited government, human dignity, and the rule of law. In this sense, President Bush’s championing of democracy in Iraq and around the world is only the most recent version of a century-old American tradition in which its leaders see a natural confluence between liberal idealism and the exercise of geopolitical power. Wilson, FDR, Truman, Kennedy, Reagan, and Clinton – all these American presidents portrayed the United States as a ‘liberal beacon’ for the world. Now the Bush administration raises the stakes and offers the US to the world as a liberal Leviathan.

The United States is not the first global power to see its geopolitical exertions in this light. Niall Ferguson argues that the American ‘strategy of openness’ is remarkably similar to the aspirations of the British Empire in the second half of the nineteenth century until the Great Depression. After all, it was a young Winston Churchill who argued that the aim of British imperialism was ultimately to ‘give peace to warring tribes, to administer justice where all was violence, to strike the chains off the slave, to draw the richness from the soil, to place the earliest seeds of commerce and learning, to increase in whole peoples their capacities for pleasure and diminish their chances of pain . . .’ In Ferguson’s view, these are but variations on a common Anglophile theme of liberal empire.

More generally, almost all of the great empires in the Western world – from Alexander the Great to Rome and Great Britain – were seen by their leaders as exercises in the provision of peace and stability. Alexander the Great’s ambition was not just to conquer but to assimilate outsiders and to unite East and West. As Anthony Pagden argues: ‘Alexander’s vision of empire, or at least the vision later historians have provided for him, had many of the properties that later empires would claim for themselves, from ancient Rome to the United States: the capacity to provide a living space for diverse peoples, to create peace and order in a world that would otherwise be at war with itself, and to defend a tenuous, hard-won and fragile civilisation against all that might threaten it’.

But – to restate the question – is today’s American dominated political formation an empire? If empire has any meaning, it refers to the political control by a dominant state of the domestic and foreign policy of weaker countries. The European colonial empires of the late nineteenth century embodied the most direct and formal versions. The Soviet postwar sphere of influence in Eastern Europe entailed an equally coercive but more indirect form of control. Political rule in the British Empire varied enormously from direct colonial rule to what Robinson and Gallagher have called ‘informal empire’ in parts of China, the Ottoman Empire, and Egypt. If empire is defined more loosely as a hierarchical system of political relationships in which the most powerful state exercises decisive influence, the postwar American system indeed qualifies.

But if the American system is an empire, it is like no other. To be sure, the United States has a long tradition of pursuing crude imperial policies – most notably in Latin America and the Middle East. But, at least for the more advanced democratic countries in the postwar era, the American-led order is a more negotiated system where the United States has sought participation by other states on terms that are mutually agreeable. This is true in three respects. First, the United States has provided public goods in exchange for the cooperation of other states, in particular through the extension of security and the support for an open trade regime. Second, the American system is infused with rules and institutions through which power is typically exercised. Power politics are not eliminated from the system but arbitrary and indiscriminate power is reigned in. Finally, weaker and subordinate states in the American order are given some ‘voice opportunities’, that is, they are given informal access to the policymaking process of the United States and the wider array of intergovernmental institutions that constitute the system.

It is these features of the post-1945 American-led liberal international order that have led historians such as Charles Maier to talk about a ‘consensual empire’ and Geir Lundestad to talk about an ‘empire of invitation’. Raymond Aron saw the American system as an ‘imperial republic’. Britain had a formal empire with few imperial institutions. The United States has no formal empire but more developed institutions – such as alliances, security treaties and multilateral regimes. The American order is hierarchical and ultimately sustained by economic and military power. But it is order infused with liberal characteristics and put at the service of supporting an expanding system of democracy and capitalism.

The American system

In contrast with imperial political formations, the American system took shape in the decades after World War II as an open, negotiated, and institutionalised order among the major democracies. The United States is situated at the centre of this complex liberal order – but it is an order built around the American provision of security and economic public goods, mutually agreeable rules and institutions, and interactive political processes that give states a voice in the running of the system. Strategic bargains, binding security ties, open markets, and diffuse reciprocity also infuse the order and give it liberal characteristics. This distinctive liberal political architecture is built on top of a Western security community which removes war and threats of force from American relations with the other democracies. America’s massive power advantages do give the order a hierarchical cast, but its liberal hegemonic and security community features make American empire a structural impossibility.

40 These features of the American system in Ikenberry, After Victory, ch. 6.
This order was built in the decades after World War II through the pursuit of two grand strategies. One grand strategy is realist in orientation. Forged during the Cold War, it is organised around containment, deterrence, and the maintenance of the global balance of power. This strategy has been celebrated in America’s history of the last half-century. Facing a threatening and expansive Soviet Union after 1945, the United States stepped forward to fill the vacuum left by a waning British empire and a collapsing European order to provide a counterweight to Soviet power. The touchstone of this strategy was containment which sought to deny the Soviet Union the ability to expand its sphere of influence outside its region. Order was maintained during these decades by the management of the bipolar balance between the American and Soviet camps. Stability was achieved through nuclear deterrence.41

For the first time in the modern era, nuclear weapons and the doctrine of mutual assured destruction made war between the great powers utterly irrational. Containment and global power balancing ended with the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991. Nuclear deterrence is no longer the defining logic of the existing order but it remains a recessed feature that continues to impart stability in relations among China, Russia, and the West.

America’s balance-of-power grand strategy has yielded a bounty of institutions and partnerships in the decades since 1947. The most important have been the NATO and US-Japan alliances. This global system of American-led security partnerships have survived the end of the Cold War, providing a bulwark for stability through the commitments and reassurances they manifest. The United States maintains a forward presence in Europe and East Asia and its alliance partners gain security protection as well as a measure of regularity in their relationship with the world’s leading military power. But Cold War balancing has yielded more than a utilitarian alliance structure. The American-led alliance system has inspired a wider array of economic and political agreements that have helped generate unprecedented levels of integration and cooperation among the countries of Western Europe, North America and Northeast Asia.

The other grand strategy, forged during World War II as the United States planned the reconstruction of the world economy, is liberal in orientation.42 It seeks to build order around institutionalised political relations among integrated market democracies. America’s agenda for reopening the world economy and integrating the major regions of the world together was not simply an inspiration of businessmen and economists. There have always been geopolitical goals as well. Whereas America’s realist grand strategy was aimed at countering Soviet power, its liberal grand strategy was aimed at avoiding a return to the 1930s: an era of regional blocs, trade conflict, and strategic rivalry. Open trade, democracy, and multilateral institutional relations went together. Undergirding this strategy is the view that a rule-based international


order – especially one where the United States uses its political weight to derive congenial rules – is an order that most fully protects American interests, conserves its power, and extends its influence into the future.

This grand strategy has been pursued through an array of postwar initiatives that look disarmingly like ‘low politics’. The Bretton Woods agreements, the GATT and WTO, APEC, NAFTA, OECD, democracy promotion in Eastern Europe, Latin America, and East Asia – together they are a complex layer cake of integrative initiatives the bind the democratic industrial world together. During the 1990s, the United States continued to pursue this liberal grand strategy. Both the first Bush and Clinton administrations attempted to articulate a vision of world order that was not dependent on an external threat or an explicit policy of balance of power. Bush the elder talked about the importance of the Euro-Atlantic community and articulated ideas about a more fully integrated Asia Pacific region. In both the Atlantic and Pacific regions the Bush strategy was to offer a positive vision of alliance and partnership that was built around common values, tradition, mutual self-interest, and the preservation of stability. The Clinton administration attempted to describe the post-Cold War order in terms of the expansion of democracy and open markets. What emerged was a liberal vision of order. Democracy provided the foundation for global and regional community. Trade and capital flows were seen as forces for political reform and integration.

These two grand strategies are rooted in divergent – and in some ways antagonistic intellectual traditions, but over the last fifty years they have worked remarkably well together. The realist grand strategy created a political rationale for establishing major security commitments around the world. The liberal strategy created a positive agenda for American leadership. The United States could exercise its power and achieve its national interests but do so in a way that helped deepen the fabric of international community. American power did not destabilise world order – it helped create it. The creation of rule-based agreements and political-security partnerships were both good for the United States and for a huge part of the rest of the world. The result by the end of the 1990s was a global political formation of unprecedented size and success – a trans-oceanic coalition of democratic states tied together through markets, institutions and security partnerships.

Importantly, this American system is tied together in a cooperative security order. This was a very important departure from past security arrangements within the Atlantic area. The idea was that Europe and the United States would be part of a single security system. Such a system would ensure that the democratic great powers would not go back to the dangerous game of strategic rivalry and balance of power politics. It helped, of course, to have an emerging Cold War with the Soviet Union to generate this cooperative security arrangement. But the goal of cooperative security was implicit in the other elements of Western order. Without the Cold War, it is not clear that a formal alliance would have emerged as it did. Probably it would not have taken on such an intense and formal character. But a security relationship between Europe and the United States that lessened the incentives for these states to engage in balance of power politics was needed and probably would have been engineered. A cooperative security order – embodied in a formal alliance institution – ensured that the power of the United States would be rendered more predictable. Power would be caged in institutions thereby making American power more reliable and connected to Europe and to East Asia.
This American system is built on two historic bargains that the United States has made with the rest of the world. One is the realist bargain – and grows out of its Cold War grand strategy. The United States provides its European and Asian partners with security protection and access to American markets, technology, and supplies within an open world economy. In return, these countries agree to be reliable partners who provide diplomatic, economic and logistical support for the United States as it leads the wider Western postwar order.

The other is a liberal bargain that addresses the uncertainties of American power. East Asian and European states agree to accept American leadership and operate within an agreed-upon political-economic system. In return, the United States opens itself up and binds itself to its partners. In effect, the United States builds an institutionalised coalition of partners and reinforces the stability of these long-term mutually beneficial relations by making itself ‘user friendly’ – that is, by playing by the rules and creating ongoing political processes with these other states that facilitate consultation and joint decision-making. The United States makes its power safe for the world and in return the world agrees to live within the American system. These bargains date from the 1940s but continue to undergird the post-Cold War order. The result has been the most stable and prosperous international order in world history. But new ideas within the Bush administration – crystallised by September 11 and American power dominance – are unsettling today’s order and the political bargains behind it.

Unipolarity and its discontents

Unipolarity presents the United States with both new opportunities and dangers. Increased power advantages gives the US more freedom of action. It is easier for Washington to say no to other countries or to go it alone. Growing power – military, economic and technological – also gives the US more opportunities to control outcomes around the world. But unipolarity also creates problems of governance. Without bipolar or multipolar competition, it is not clear what disciplines or renders predictable US power. Other countries worry more than in the past about domination, exploitation, and abandonment. They may not be able to organise a counter-balancing alliance but they can resist and undermine US policies. Moreover, when countries confronting the US are democracies, their leaders may have electoral incentives not to bend to American pressure.43

There are several aspects to these new American unipolar dilemmas. First, a unipolar distribution of power creates ‘legitimacy problems’ for the lead state in a way that great powers operating in other power configurations – such as bipolar and multipolar orders – do not experience. And indeed, American unipolar power today is experiencing a legitimacy problem. In a bipolar or multipolar world, the legitimacy of state power is easier to achieve. During the bipolar Cold War struggle,

43 For efforts to sketch the emerging politics of unipolarity, see Ikenberry (ed.), American Unrivaled; and Ethan B. Kapstein and Michael Mastanduno (eds.), Unipolar Politics: Realism and State Strategies after the Cold War (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999).
American power was seen as legitimate by other states within its orbit because that power was embedded in mutual security pacts and put at the service of the common defence against Soviet communism. America was *primum inter pares* within a Free World partnership.

But unipolar or hierarchical orders do not legitimate power as readily. It is easier for other states and peoples to ask basic questions about the rectitude and legitimacy of American power: why should the United States rule the system? What gives it the right to decide right and wrong, good and evil, or make and enforce rules? After the Cold War, the Clinton administration legitimated American power by championing globalisation and open markets – engagement and enlargement were the watchwords. United States power was aligned with the progressive forces of capitalism and democracy. The Asian financial crisis and the anti-globalisation movement have tarnished this legitimating cover for American power. The Bush administration has elevated the war on terrorism as the cutting edge of American foreign and master principle of international order. But fear of terrorism is not a sufficient legitimating cover for American power.44

Second, unipolarity also appears to have created problems in how the world sees the American provision of public goods. In the past, the United States provided global ‘services’ – such as security protection and support for open markets – which made other states willing to work with rather than resist American pre-eminence. The public goods provision tended to make it worthwhile for these states to endure the day-to-day irritations of American foreign policy. But the trade-off seems to be shifting. Today, the United States appears to be providing fewer global public goods while at the same time the irritations associated with American dominance appear to be growing.

It might be useful to think of this dynamic in this way: the United States is unique in that it is simultaneously both the provider of ‘global governance’ – through what has tended in the past to be the exercise of ‘liberal’ hegemony – and it is a great power that pursues its own national interest. America’s liberal hegemonic role is manifest when it champions the WTO, engages in international rule or regime creation, or reafirms its commitment to cooperative security in Asia and Europe. Its great-power role is manifest, for example, when it seeks to protect its domestic steel or textile industry – or when President Bush proclaims, as he did in the 2004 State of the Union message, that ‘the United States doesn’t need a permission slip’ to use force to protect its citizens. When it acts as a liberal hegemon, it is seeking to lead or manage the global system of rules and institutions; when it is acting as a nationalist great power, it is seeking to advance domestic interests and its relative power position.45 Today, these two roles – liberal hegemon and nationalist great power – are increasingly in conflict.

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Neo-imperial grand strategy

It is at this juncture that a new neo-imperialist grand strategy has been embraced by the Bush administration in the aftermath of September 11. Driven by the fear of terrorism, a willingness to take big risks, and emboldened by the rise of American unipolar power, neo-conservative thinkers argue for an era of American global rule organised around the bold unilateral exercise of American military power and aimed at confronting rogue regimes around the world. It is a vision in which sovereignty becomes more absolute for America even as it becomes more conditional for countries that challenge Washington's standards of internal and external behaviour. But it is also a grand strategy that is politically unsustainable.

The new imperial grand strategy makes four claims. First, the United States should increasingly stand aloof from the rest of the world and use its unipolar power – most importantly, its military power – to arbitrate right and wrong and enforce the peace. The United States will refuse to play by the same rules as other states but this is the price that the world must pay for the unipolar provision of security. America’s older, postwar approach to order – organised around alliances, multilateral cooperation, and strategic bargains with other key states – falls away.

This new geopolitical aloofness is reflected in Secretary Rumsfeld’s aphorism that ‘the mission determines the alliance’ rather than the other way around.46 The United States will determine what is a threat and how to respond; relevant and willing partners will be invited to join in. But gone is the notion that the alliance determines the mission. Neo-imperial thinkers are not against security partnerships per se – but ‘coalitions of the willing’ will be formed only if other countries sign on to America’s unilaterally-defined goals. This approach is also reflected in the October 2002 National Security Strategy’s new doctrine of pre-emption under which the United States claims a new right to use force ‘to act against emerging threats before they are fully formed’. Gone are the old justifications of war based on self-defence and imminent threat enshrined in Article 51 of the United Nations charter. ‘When it comes to our security’, President Bush affirmed, ‘we really don’t need anybody’s permission’.47

Second, the new imperialists argue that military power – and the willingness to use it robustly in pursuit of the national interest – must be put back into the centre of American foreign policy. Early neo-conservative thinking in the 1970s made this a central tenet of its critique of American foreign policy in the post-Vietnam era; that policy, in the minds of neo-conservatives, had become too liberal, too soft, and too unwilling to confront Soviet expansionism. Power must be put back in the service of American principles and the national interest.

Third, the new imperialists urge the US to pull back from treaties and international agreements that jeopardise American sovereignty and constrain the exercise of power. The neo-conservative pundit, Charles Krauthammer, calls it the ‘new unilateralism’ – ‘After eight years during which foreign policy success was largely

measured by the number of treaties the president could sign and the number of summits he could attend, we now have an administration willing to assert American freedom of action and the primacy of American national interests. Rather than contain power within a vast web of constraining international agreements, the new unilateralism seeks to strengthen American power and unashamedly deploy it on behalf of self-defined global ends.\footnote{48}

Some advocates of this view simply appeal to the new realities of terrorism: in an new era where small groups of determined individuals can unleash massive violence against the civilised world without warning, the old system of rules and multilateral cooperation must give way to action – whatever it takes, in short, to ‘get them before they get us’. Other new fundamentalists offer more political-philosophical attacks on multilateralism and rule-based order. In one of the most far-fetched versions, Under Secretary of State John Bolton, prior to joining the administration, argued that a great struggle was unfolding between what he calls ‘Americanists and Globalists’.\footnote{49} Globalists are depicted as elite activist groups who seek to strengthen ‘global governance’ through a widening net of agreements on environment, human rights, labour, health, and political-military affairs and whose not-so-hidden agenda is to enmesh the United States in international laws and institutions that rob the country of its sovereignty. Americanists, according to Bolton, have finally awakened and are now seizing back the country’s control over its own destiny.

Finally, the new imperial thinkers also incorporate Wilsonian ideas into their vision in urging the spread of democracy. This is not just idealism, according to neo-conservatives; it is good national security policy. If democracy and the rule of law are established in troubled countries around the world, they cease being threats. This argument was given a conservative imprimatur in Ronald Reagan’s celebrated 1982 speech to the British Parliament in which he called for the promotion of democracy as a fundamental global security imperative. In the hands of new fundamentalists, this aspiration has become, in Pierre Hassner apt phrase, ‘Wilsonian in boots’.\footnote{50} The promotion of democracy is not left to the indirect, long-term forces of economic development and political engagement – but, when necessary, it is purveyed through military force. Some neo-imperialists, such as Tom Donnelly and Max Boot, go even further and argue for formal quasi-imperial control over strategically valuable failed states, backed up by new American bases and an imperial civil service.\footnote{51}

This new grand strategy, however, encounters problems for a variety of reasons. To begin with, the troubles that the Bush administration is having in stabilising postwar Iraq – together with the failure to find weapons of mass destruction in Iraq – have cast doubt on the viability of this strategy elsewhere in the world. The Bush administration will defend its actions, but the Iraq war looks increasingly like a costly misadventure pursued with poor intelligence and an under-appreciation of

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\footnote{50} Pierre Hassner, ‘The United States: The Empire of Force or the Force of Empire?’ \textit{Chaillot Papers}, no. 54 (September 2002), p. 43.

diplomatic and political costs. The financial cost to the American people has also reduced the appeal of this grand strategy. Politicians will grudgingly provide the massive funds needed to rebuild Iraq, but they also realise that American unilateralism means that the United States will get stuck with the bills. The American people are not willing to pay for the neo-conservative vision.

Most importantly, this grand strategy is built on a radically inflated view of American power. American military power is overwhelming – and it does, in fact, give the United States extraordinary global influence. But in an age where terrorism is the overriding security threat, offering or withholding American security cooperation does not mean as much as it did during the Cold War. Back then – when the threats were clear and aimed at Europe and Asia as much as North America – the US was truly indispensable to its allies. Current threats are less geographically fixed and the United States feels more at risk than its major Asian or European allies. Yet the United States needs those allies for assistance in intelligence, law enforcement, and a thousand small cooperative gestures every week in the war on terrorism. All roads lead back to America’s traditional grand strategies and its more liberal hegemonic orientation.

**Hub-and-spoke versus multilateral order**

Even if neo-conservative grand strategy is unsustainable, there are still two general ways in which the United States might choose to ‘govern’ unpolarity. One strategy is the multilateral, rule-based strategy of the postwar era, manifest most fully in America’s relations with Western Europe. The other strategy is what might be called ‘hub and spoke’ bilateralism. This is a strategy that has been pursued in important respects in America’s postwar relations with East Asia. Overall, unipolarity does appear to generate some incentives – but also costs – for the United States to run a global ‘hub and spoke’ order.

The countries arrayed around a unipolar America have an interest in a rule-based multilateral order. In such a system, power is exercised through agreed-upon institutions. But the question is: how will the United States calculate its interests? Will it want to renew, renegotiate, and manage a rule-based hegemonic order – which entails institutional restraints, ‘voice opportunities’, and reduced policy autonomy – or will it want to break out of these multilateral shackles and pursue direct control of the system? As the ‘hub and spoke’ security organisation of East Asia suggests, there are incentives for the United States to operate a global order where it deals bilaterally with key states in all the various regions.

To understand the two competing logics of unipolar state power, it is useful to remember the contrasting American experiences in Europe and East Asia. The

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52 These failings of neo-conservative thinking are discussed in G. John Ikenberry, ‘The End of the Neo-Conservative Moment’, *Survival* (March 2004).

53 For a discussion of empire as a ‘rimless hub and spoke’ system, see Alex Motyl, *Revolutions, Nations, Empires: Conceptual Limits and Theoretical Possibilities* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999).
United States agreed to a multilateral order with Europe because it determined that the restraints on its power through NATO and other multilateral institutions was worth what it got in return. Britain, France and other major states were willing to accept multilateral agreements to the extent that they also constrained and regularised US economic and security actions. American agreement to operate within a multilateral economic order and make an alliance-based security commitment to Europe was worth the price: it ensured that Germany and the rest of Western Europe would be integrated into a wider, American-centred international order. At the same time, the actual restraints on American policy were minimal. But it did agree to operate within loose multilateral arrangements – and this ensured that Western Europe would be anchored in an Atlantic and global political order that advanced America’s long-term national interest.

In East Asia, security relations quickly became bilateral. Why? One difference was that conditions did not favour multilateralism. Europe had a set of roughly equal-sized states that could be brought together in a multilateral pact whereas nothing like this existed in East Asia. But another factor mattered: the United States was dominant in East Asia yet wanted less out of the region, so the United States found it less necessary to give up policy autonomy in exchange for institutionalised cooperation there. In Europe, the United States had an elaborate agenda of uniting Europe, creating an institutional bulwark against communism, and supporting centrist democratic governments. These ambitious goals could not be realised simply by exercising brute power. To get what it wanted, the United States had to bargain with the Europeans, and this meant agreeing to institutionally restrain and commit its power. In East Asia, the building of order around bilateral pacts was more desirable because multilateralism would have entailed more restraints on American policy autonomy. Extreme hegemony in East Asia led to free riding by the weak postwar states in the region – while the United States could exercise control without multilateral restraints on its freedom of action.

In some ways, unipolarity today presents this same logic for the United States on a global scale. Rather than operate within multilateral frameworks, the United States forges a hub and spoke array of ‘special relationships’ around the world. Countries that cooperate with the United States and accept its leadership receive special bilateral security and economic favours. More so than multilateral agreements, ‘hub and spoke’ bilateral agreements allow the United States to more fully translate its power advantages into immediate and tangible concessions from other states – and do so without giving up policy autonomy. For example, Singapore supported the Bush administration’s war on terrorism and so it gets a bilateral free trade agreement. At the same time, the United States can deal directly with important states so as to circumvent global multilateral commitments. For example, the Bush administration is seeking to get around the constraints of the International Criminal Court by negotiating bilateral deals with dozens of countries. The United States has massive power advantages. It finds it easier to accept non-agreement, so its bargaining leverage is great. It does not need as much from countries. So the East Asian ‘model’ becomes attractive. But whether this is a logic that will be manifest selectively or become the basic organising logic of unipolar order requires looking at the incentives the United States might still have for exercising its power through multilateral and rule-based arrangements.
Liberal multilateralism endures

There are three major types of incentives for the United States to continue to operate within a multilateral order. These sources of multilateralism stem from the functional demands of interdependence, the long-term power calculations of power management, and American political tradition and identity. First, American support for multilateralism is likely to be sustained – even in the face of resistance and ideological challenges to multilateralism within the Bush administration – in part because of a simple logic: as global economic interdependence grows, the need for multilateral coordination of policies also grows. The more economically interconnected that states become the more dependent they are for the realisation of their objectives on the actions of other states. Rising economic interdependence is one of the great hallmarks of the contemporary international system. If this remains true in the years ahead, it is easy to predict that the demands for multilateral agreements – even and perhaps especially by the United States – will increase and not decrease.

Second, American support for multilateralism will also stem from a grand strategic interest in preserving power and creating a stable and legitimate international order. The support for multilateralism is a way to signal restraint and commitment to other states thereby encouraging the acquiescence and cooperation of weaker states. This has been a strategy that the United States has pursued to a greater or less degree across the twentieth century – and it explains the remarkably durable and legitimate character of the existing international order. From this perspective, multilateralism – and the search for rule-based agreements – should increase rather than decrease with the rise of American unipolarity. This insight suggests that the current administration should respond to general power management incentives and limit its tilt toward unilateralism.

A final source of American multilateralism emerges from the polity itself. The United States has a distinctive self-understanding about the nature of its own political order – and this has implications for how it thinks about international political order. The Enlightenment origins of the American founding has given the United States an identity that sees its principles of politics of universal significance and scope. The republican democratic tradition that enshrines the rule of law reflects an enduring American view that polities – domestic or international – are best organised around rules and principles of order. America’s tradition of civil nationalism also reinforces this notion – that the rule of law is the source of legitimacy and political inclusion. This tradition provides a background support for a multilateral-oriented foreign policy.

Conclusion

Is the United States an empire? The world is certainly more hierarchical today than at any era since the days of ancient Rome. The United States is at the centre of a

54 These sources of the multilateral in American foreign policy are discussed in Ikenberry, ‘Is American Multilateralism in Decline?’ Perspectives on Politics, 1: 3 (September 2003).
dynamic and expanding political formation rooted in Atlantic and Western institutions and traditions. The American system has features that it shares with past great empires. But ultimately the term ‘empire’ is misleading and misses the distinctive aspects of the global political order. Today’s US-centred political formation requires new ways of thinking about liberalism, power, and international order rather than the rehabilitation of the evocative – but ultimately ill-fitting – notion of empire.

The United States is an unrivalled military power and this does lead Washington to pursue old-style imperial policies. The other major powers have no real control over American imperial impulses. Moreover, the neo-conservatives in Washington do offer an imperial vision of international order. In their hands, it would be an era of American global rule organised around the bold unilateral exercise of American military power, gradual disentanglement from the constraints of multilateralism, and an aggressive push to bring freedom and democracy to countries where evil lurks. But this neo-conservative vision is built on illusions about American power. They risk stripping the United States of its legitimacy as the pre-eminent global power and the authority that flows from that status. They fail to appreciate the role of cooperative institutions and multilateral rules in the exercise and preservation of American power. Their ideas are essentially a crude ‘owners manual’ for the unilateral waging of a war against dangerous regimes and terrorists. But beyond that, they are silent on the full range of global challenges and opportunities that America faces. The costs of military actions – in lives, treasure, and lost legitimacy – is greater than neo-conservatives realise. The American people are not seized with the desire to run colonies or a global empire. So even in a unipolar era, there are limits on American imperial pretensions.

Finally, the empire debate misses what is perhaps a more important international development, namely the long peace among the great powers – or what some scholars argue is the end of great-power war. We are living in the longest period without war among any of the major powers. Capitalism, democracy, Cold War bipolarity, and nuclear weapons are all part of the explanation. But so too is the unique way in which the United States has gone about the business of building international order. American success after both the Second World War and the Cold War is closely linked to the creation and extension of international institutions, which both limited and legitimated American power. In exercising unipolar power, the United States is today struggling between liberal and imperial logics of rule. Both impulses can be found deep within the American body politic. But the costs and dangers of running the world as an American empire are great and the country’s liberal faith in the rule of law is undiminished. When all is said and done, Americans are less interested in ruling the world than they are in a world of rules.