

East Asia in a unipolar international order and Europe's role in the region*

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Abstract

This article attempts to explore the post-Cold War international system in which regional orders intermingle their influence. It pays special attention to regional conflicts in East Asia in the new era and what roles global powers could play to maintain regional stability. I will first examine the characteristics of the new global order after the end of the bipolarity. I will then focus on American foreign policy in the new international system in the context of its dealing with major global events that have strategic implications for its relations with other major global powers. As to discussions of regional orders, this article focuses on East Asia, where conflicts between states have not evaporated despite the relaxation of the global Cold War confrontation. What makes this area special is the involvements of many great powers and less-powerful nations that could somehow easily manipulate the seniors into the conflicts to their favour. While the regional order in East Asia is being shaped by the post-Cold War international order, the region's peace and conflicts will in turn significantly influence global order. Finally, I will argue that dealing with problems in East Asia should acquire involvements of powers that would give necessary momentum to the existing participants to solve conflicts by the means of multilateralism. The European Union (EU) is often forgotten for its role in contributing to world order, and the EU should be taken seriously by the powers in East Asia as a possible player in maintaining the regional peace. I conclude that both global and regional security depend on continuing US unipolarity, strengthened by the co-operation of the EU in the form of multilateralism. By the same token, US unilateralism without a EU counterbalancing it, only invites potential challengers, such as China, to threaten the US's preponderant position, thereby destabilising world peace.

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Introduction

The collapse of the Soviet Union more than a decade ago symbolised the end of the bipolar international system, where Washington and Moscow competed for influence and interests, both globally and regionally. Each of the superpowers dominated its own alliance, by 'invitation' or by coercion.¹ Junior members complied with the hierarchical power structure in exchange for protection provided by the great power concerned or, as in some cases, immunity from the leading power's intervention in domestic affairs. This global bipolarity, characterised as the confrontation between the US-led and Soviet-dominated blocs, lasted for relatively long period of time, mainly because the great powers' struggles did not evolve into military conflict, and regional clashes were confined locally.

Now with the end of the Cold War, questions have arisen concerning the new world order, and how it is to be understood in light of the bipolarity. Firstly, which new international system emerged following the bipolarity? The fundamental issue underlying this question is whether the United States is the sole superpower, stronger than any possible combination of other nations? Or is the US merely first among equals in the sense that other competitors, for instance, the European Union (EU), China, or the Islamic world, are able to contend with the US economically, politically, militarily, or culturally? Secondly, will the post-Cold War international system be more peaceful than the previous one? During the Cold War, the world endured a long period of peace as that there were no major wars between the great powers. The end of the confrontation between the two blocs, nevertheless paved the way for optimistic views of a new world order. But whether the collapse of the bipolarity will lead to a more peaceful world remains to be seen. Peace depends on the stability of the international system. Just how much the major global players are content with the current global system, and how reluctant they are to see it destabilised, will determine the longevity of the world system. A third immediate concern arising from the emerging new world system, is what impact would the global system have on regional orders? International politics in the Cold War showed that the great powers were able to confine the nations within their spheres of influence from triggering military clashes between the two blocs. At the regional level, however, crises and conflicts remained constant. The end of the constraint exercised by the great powers, at least by the Soviet Union, over their juniors, provided new elements to shape regional orders. This in turn influences the international system as a whole.

This article attempts to weave around these questions, an exploration of the post-Cold War international system in which regional orders intermingle their influence. It pays special attention to regional conflicts in East Asia in the new era and what roles global powers could play. I will first examine the characteristics of the new global order after the end of bipolarity. The existing system where the US is the leading power, followed by some major powers, leaves much room for debate over whether our new world is a unipolarity or a

¹ For international history dealing with the Cold War taking shape, see Geir Lundestad, 'Empire by Invitation? The United States and Western Europe, 1945-1952,' *Journal of Peace Research*, 23(3); (May 1986) 263-277.

multipolarity. I will then focus on American foreign policy in the new international system in the context of its dealing with major global events that have strategic implications for its relations with other major powers. The demise of its Cold War adversary has enabled Washington to conduct its foreign relations without bothering to take into considerations others' responses. What many brand as unilateralism will inevitably influence American relations with other nations who stress the necessity of handling international affairs in a multilateral framework. As to discussions of regional orders, this article focuses on East Asia, where conflicts between states have not evaporated despite the relaxation of the Cold War confrontation. What makes this area special is the involvement of many great powers and less-powerful nations that could somehow easily manipulate the seniors into the conflicts to their favour. While the regional order in East Asia is being shaped by the post-Cold War international order, the region's peace and conflicts will in turn significantly influence the global order. Finally, I will argue that dealing with problems in East Asia should acquire the involvement of powers that should give the necessary momentum to the existing participants to solve their conflicts by the means of multilateralism. The European Union (EU) is often forgotten for its role in contributing to world order, and the EU should be taken seriously by the powers in East Asia as a possible player in maintaining the regional peace.

Unipolarity vs. multipolarity: A new international order

An international order reflects, according to Robert Gilpin, the distribution of power of states within the global system.² The question is in what aspects power should be examined. Scholarly conventional wisdom focuses on military power exclusively, with other dimensions of power rarely counting. This is the point which critics of unipolarity contend with most. Joseph S. Nye argues that current world politics should be examined three-dimensionally. In terms of the classical military sense, the US will remain the sole superpower, at least for the near future. But judging from the distribution of economics and trade, the EU, Japan, and others are competitors or partners which Washington cannot ignore. In the last of these three dimensions, non-state actors compete for power *vis-à-vis* the state.³ Samuel P. Huntington holds that the current international order does not fit any of the three conventional power structure models. He defines a unipolar world system as having one superpower, no significant major powers, and some minor powers; a bipolar system as having two superpowers, each dominating a coalition of allies; and a multipolar system having several major powers of comparable strength able to compete with each other. The post-Cold War period has witnessed 'a strange hybrid' of these in what Huntington terms a uni-multipolar international system, with one superpower and several major powers. Within this unique system, the only superpower may veto action on key international issues taken by a combination of major powers, but it also needs the co-operation of others to solve disputes effectively.⁴ In their accounts, both

² Robert Gilpin (1981), *War and Change in World Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press).

³ Joseph S. Nye, Jr. (2003) 'U.S. Power and Strategy after Iraq,' *Foreign Affairs*, 82(4): 65.

⁴ Samuel P. Huntington (1999) 'The Lonely Superpower,' *Foreign Affairs*, 78(2): 35-36.

Nye and Huntington have reservations about whether the current international order is a genuine unipolarity.

To the contrary, other commentators maintain that the post-Cold War time is an era of global unipolarity dominated by the Americans. William C. Wohlforth applies quantitative and qualitative methods to prove US unipolarity, by comparing the current US power with Pax Britannica in the 19th Century, and earlier stages of the Cold War. He concludes that no previous great power has ever enjoyed such a large margin of superiority over the next most powerful states in all the underlying components of power: economic, military, technological and geopolitical, than the US does now in the current global order.⁵ In fact, what distinguishes the current US dominance with previous hegemonies, is the US's preponderance in all the major dimensions, simultaneously.⁶ As Michael Mastanduno claims, the US is 'in a category by itself now.'⁷ Charles Krauthammer also sees the US position as one of leading great power status, with other 'second rank powers' following.⁸ Overall, claims by these scholars and many others point to the similar conclusion that America has more influence over foreign affairs on a global level than any predecessor in history could have imagined.

To examine the current world order, there are three basic superpower elements we need to focus on. Firstly, capabilities alone are a necessary, but far from sufficient, factor for a nation to become a superpower. Second, a nation also needs willingness to surpass others in order to be the hegemon.⁹ And finally, a great power should be perceived as such by others. In terms of capabilities, at the end of the bipolar system, the US excelled in a range of 'hard power' attributes, including military power and preparedness, economic and technological capacity, size of population and territory, resource endowment, and political stability, as well as 'soft power' attributes such as ideology, values and culture. If we look at military strength alone, American defence – expenses exceed the combined defence budgets of the next 15–20 biggest spenders, leaving it with the unique capability to project power globally. The US particularly excels others in military technologies, as well as possessing command of the global commons – sea, air and space. This permits Washington to credibly threaten others with the

⁵ William C. Wohlforth (1999) 'The Stability of a Unipolar World,' *International Security*, 24(1): 5–41.

⁶ Stephen G. Brooks and William C. Wohlforth (2002) 'American Primacy in Perspective,' *Foreign Affairs*, 81(4): 23.

⁷ Michael Mastanduno (1997) 'Preserving the Unipolar Moment: Realist Theories and U.S. Grand Strategy after the Cold War,' *International Security*, 21(4): 54; also, Joseph S. Nye, Jr. (1990) *Bound to Lead: The Changing Nature of American Power* (New York: Basic Books).

⁸ Charles Krauthammer categorised Japan, Germany, Britain, France and to a lesser extent, Russia as 'second rank' powers. See Krauthammer (1990/91) 'The Unipolar Movement,' *Foreign Affairs*, 70(1): 24.

⁹ Some works try to single out the difference between hegemony and unipolarity. For example, David Wilkinson argues that hegemony is a unipolar configuration of politico-military capability with a structure of influence, while unipolarity is a configuration where the dominant power's capability may not be matched by a predominant influence. For example, David Wilkinson, 'Unipolarity without Hegemony,' *International Studies Review*, 1(2): 141–172. Meanwhile, others emphasise that hegemony simply means an ability to lead from a relative position of strength and therefore the distinction between unipolarity and hegemony is ambiguous. See Michael Cox (2002) 'September 11th and U.S. Hegemony—Or Will the 21st Century Be American Too?' *International Studies Perspectives*, 3(1): 64–65.

denial of their use. This control, as well as the unrivalled communications and information technologies that equip the US to trace and target its observed objects from afar with incredible precision, enables Washington to implement its hegemonic foreign policy.¹⁰ Other powers are able to compete in one way or the other, but none of them have the capability to influence global affairs like Washington does across multiple theatres. As regard to willingness, the United States claims unequivocally that it will dissuade any potential challenger from equalling, or even surpassing American power. For this purpose, Washington will continue to strengthen its military and defend its supremacy.¹¹ The combination of the unequalled military might and the willingness to use such strength to fulfil its objectives leave others with unambiguous perceptions that the US is the sole superpower on earth.

Taking together, it is a unipolar world now simply because the dominant state's capabilities are too great to be counter-balanced.¹² As Stephen G. Brooks and William C. Wohlforth argue, if the current American predominance does not constitute unipolarity, then nothing ever will.¹³ The post-Cold War era has become what Christopher Layne claims as a transformation of the international system from bipolarity to unipolarity.¹⁴ Since the Soviet Union's collapse, the United States has been and will be the only country which possesses the capacity to shape the international system in a way not seen before. Until any counterpoise threatening to the US monopoly arises, the international system will remain unipolar.¹⁵

Durability of the unipolarity

Despite recognition of the current unipolarity, we still see a great deal of speculation about whether US superiority will meet any resistance and competition from other players. Some predicted soon after the collapse of the bipolarity in the early 1990s, that Germany and Japan would emerge as being capable of challenging the US's position as sole dominant nation. But this prediction turned out to be incorrect.¹⁶ Rather, in recent years, the possibility of China rising to replace Germany's and Japan's position has become a controversial issue for academics and decision-makers alike, as they dispute about prospective challengers to US dominance. Charles A. Kupchan goes as far as claiming that the days of Pax Americana are numbered.¹⁷

¹⁰ Barry R. Posen (2003) 'Command of the Commons: The Military Foundation of U.S. Hegemony,' *International Security*, 28(1): 8–9.

¹¹ See Nye, *Bound to Lead*.

¹² Harrison Wagner (1993) 'What Was Bipolarity,' *International Organization*, 47(1): 77–106.

¹³ Brooks and Wohlforth, 'American Primacy in Perspective,' p. 21.

¹⁴ Christopher Layne (1993) 'The Unipolar Illusion: Why New Great Powers Will Rise?' *International Security*, 17(4): 5. Also, Krauthammer, 'The Unipolar Moment,' pp. 23–33.

¹⁵ Wohlforth, 'The Stability of a Unipolar World,' p. 36.

¹⁶ On arguments over Germany's and Japan's post-Cold War position, see Mastanduno, 'Preserving the Unipolar Moment,' pp. 63–64; Mastanduno (2000) 'Models, Markets and Power: Political Economy and the Asia-Pacific, 1989–1999,' *Review of International Studies*, 26(4): 493–508; Kenneth N. Waltz (1993) 'The Emerging Structure of International Politics,' *International Security*, 18(2): 44–79; also, John J. Mearsheimer (1990) 'Back to the Future: Instability in Europe after the Cold War,' *International Security*, 15(1): 5–56.

¹⁷ Charles A. Kupchan (1998) 'After Pax Americana: Benign Power, Regional Integration, and the Sources of a Stable Multipolarity,' *International Security*, 23(2): 79.

The above goes to show that debate over whether the unipolar international system will survive or be replaced continues. Mainstream international relations theories examine the world system in the post-Cold War era from different viewpoints. Liberal institutional theory explains that the hegemonic global structure is likely to persist as long as international institutions are able to keep both the dominant power and secondary nations working together within the existing system, even though the *raison d'être* for their being established has changed.¹⁸ One of the reasons for the great power and others to continue adhering to international institutions is that these institutions provide them with information, and thereby mitigate the incentives for cheating.¹⁹ Also, transactions costs are lowered and uncertainty reduced in the period of transformation. Furthermore, the long-term impact of institutions on the ways in which the participatory states shape their identities and interests is not to be undermined, as these institutions often provide the common norms, rights and rules that govern interactions between and among states.²⁰ They voluntarily tie each other down by locking each other into institutions that mutually constrain their actions.²¹ In an asymmetrical unipolar international system, both the hegemon and the major powers will be willing to observe the *status quo*, if the decision-making process is transparent and the diffusion of power is shared into many hands. In such an order, the legitimacy of the hegemon's dominance will be confirmed.²² Although liberal institutionalism sheds promising light on the explanation of the persistence of co-operative relations among nations within institutional structures, this theory pays less attention to the prospects of unipolarity continuing if these institutions are bypassed.

Constructivist theory interprets the continuing adherence to international institutions by states from normative and cognitive perspectives. Institutions are seen by the constructivists as socially constructed in ways to which the behaviour of states is bound, and their interests and identities shaped. Because rules and practices are embedded into these institutions where players interact, members of institutions are willing to continue the pattern of relations, even though the nature of institution has changed. They do this because they share values and interests within the framework that have taken shape over time.²³ The hegemonic international order thus reflects the relations in which other powers acknowledge the US dominance in the form of institutional

¹⁸ Robert B. McCalla (1996) 'NATO's Persistence after the Cold War,' *International Organization*, 50(3): 445-476.

¹⁹ Lisa Martin (1992) *Coercive Cooperation: Explaining Multilateral Economic Sanctions* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press).

²⁰ Lisa Martin (1999) 'An Institutional View: International Institutions and State Strategies,' In T.V. Paul and John A. Hall (eds), *International Order and the Future of World Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), pp. 78-98; and Oran Young (1991) 'Political Leadership and Regime Formation: On the Development of Institutions in International Society,' *International Organization*, 45(3): 282.

²¹ Daniel Deudney (1996) 'Binding Sovereigns: Authority, Structure, and Geopolitics in Philadelphian Systems,' In: Thomas Biersteiker and Cynthia Weber (eds), *State Sovereignty as Social Construct* (New York: Cambridge University Press), pp. 190-239.

²² Daniel Deudney and G. John Ikenberry (1999) 'The Nature and Sources of Liberal International Order,' *Review of International Studies*, 25(2): 185.

²³ Alexander Wendt (1994) 'Collective Identity Formation and the International State,' *American Political Science Review*, 88(2): 384-396.

co-operation. However, social constructivism does not offer an adequate explanation as to why, in light of diverging values and interests among Western nations, the unipolarity has remained intact.

Among international relations theorists, realists accounting for durability of the unipolarity make up the majority view.²⁴ Within the realist ranks however, there are opposing views as to why the unipolarity persists. These views fall particularly between the balance-of-threat and balance-of-power theses. Balance-of-threat theory suggests that as long as the dominant nation remains a 'benign' power, any unbalancing behaviour on behalf of other nations is likely to be deterred, because the super power is not perceived as a threat to their interests.²⁵ If the superpower continues to engage and reassure other major powers as to its benign nature, the balance-of-threat theorists maintain that unipolarity could be sustained for a long period of time.²⁶ On the other hand, balance-of-power theory posits that any international system inevitably tends towards equilibrium. By perceiving unchecked power as being a potential danger, balancing powers will emerge in a unipolar international system as they seek to fill the asymmetrical gaps.²⁷ Competing powers would pursue balance by forming alliances among states who feel threatened by the hegemon.²⁸ For this reason, balance-of-power realists believe a unipolar order is the least stable of possible international systems, because other great powers will be forced to take vigorous action to strike a balance against the concentration of power.²⁹ This system would then likely see new powers rising fairly quickly to balance the dominant power. These realists, among whom Kenneth N. Waltz and Christopher Layne are the most assertive, anticipate a rapid transition from unipolarity to multipolarity.³⁰ Any assumption then, that the US is able to deter the emergence of new great powers posing a challenge to its dominance, will turn out to be wrong.³¹

By assessing these mainstream international relations theories, we can see that, with the exception of the balance-of-power thesis, support for the durability of a unipolarity can be found in all major theories. By focusing on co-operative and integrative interactions among the commanding power and its allies, both liberal institutionalism and social constructivism claim the utility of institutional organisations in binding the hegemon to stick to the

²⁴ For extended debates, see Kenneth N. Waltz (1979) *Theory of International Politics* (Reading: Mass.); and Robert O. Keohane (ed.) (1986) *Neorealism and Its Critics* (New York: Columbia University Press).

²⁵ Stephen Walt (1987) *The Origins of Alliances* (New York: Cornell University Press); and Mastanduno, 'Preserving the Unipolar Movement,' pp. 59-65.

²⁶ Josef Joffe (1995) 'Bismarck or Britain? Toward an American Grand Strategy after Bipolarity,' *International Security*, 19(4): 94-117.

²⁷ Kenneth Waltz (2000) 'Structural Realism after the Cold War,' *International Security*, 25(1): 5-41; also, Layne, 'The Unipolar Illusion,' p. 13.

²⁸ G. John Ikenberry (1998/1999) 'Institutions, Strategic Restraint, and the Persistence of American Postwar Order,' *International Security*, 23(3): 48.

²⁹ Kenneth N. Waltz (1997) 'Evaluating Theories,' *American Political Science Review*, 91(4): 915-916.

³⁰ Waltz, 'The Emerging Structure of International Politics,' p. 50; Layne, 'The Unipolar Illusion,' p. 7.

³¹ Christopher Layne (1998) 'Rethinking American Grand Strategy: Hegemony or Balance of Power in the Twenty-First Century?' *World Policy Journal*, 15(2): 13.

self-constraining rules and principles of consensual bargaining. According to these two theories, international institutions function as domestic constitutions which constrain both major parties and smaller ones to co-operate, and even to compete, within the framework without upsetting its apple cart. In their view, institutions are capable of confining the dominant nation to within the structure, without it threatening the interests of smaller powers and damaging their willingness to work with the hegemon. As a result, secondary powers are stripped of the incentive to balance the commanding power, or defy the unipolarity. Neo-realism explains the world system from different angle. Where balance-of-power theorists view second-tier powers as always seeing the hegemon as threat to their security, and therefore trying to narrow the gap of power, balance-of-threat theorists are more optimistic about relations between the dominant power and its subordinates, as long as the asymmetries are seen as being necessary to the interests of all.

The world in the post-Cold War era has shown that, as of yet, no major powers have been able to challenge US dominance, and moreover, that other powers are unwilling to vie with the US for the lead, as the benefits of bandwagoning are rewarded and the cost of competing high.³² The benefit of the hegemon being too powerful to balance then, is that it leaves less powerful nations with little uncertainty as to what their alliance choices are, and reduces their misperceptions when calculating their own strength. A unipolar international security system thus creates comparatively few incentives for conflict-prone rivalries in search of security or prestige. By creating a power imbalance in its favour then, the US is able to maintain systemic stability in what is a harshly competitive world. Therefore, it is arguable that the unipolar international system will not only endure, but that it is also more stable.

This being said, major international relations theories do put forward some pre-conditions for the durability of a unipolarity to persist. These pre-conditions concern the dominant power's willingness to adhere to its benign nature, and in influencing world affairs, to exercise its 'soft power' rather than the absolute superiority of its 'hard power.' According to liberals and constructivists, soft power is a country's culture, political ideals, and policies. These are then used to establish rules and institutions that clearly reflect its interests and preferences. As for hard power, a hegemon may exercise its hard power by coercing others to subscribe to, and thus legitimise, the international order it prefers.³³ A commanding power may also use its unrivalled power to meet its own narrow national interests in a way that bypasses existing institutions or considering others' responses. In other words, the sole superpower has the leverage to decide when and whether to adhere to institutions. If a global system, as international law specialist Michael F. Glennon puts it, is characterised by hegemon politics, the hegemon will then have great difficulty in observing or establishing an authentic rule of law.³⁴ According to realists, the international structure influences the behaviour of the dominant power. In the post-Cold War era, the US has been able to deal with international crises through multilateralism. But America is also powerful enough to act alone. If US allies continue to feel that they

³² Wohlforth, 'The Stability of a Unipolar World,' p. 8.

³³ Joseph S. Nye, Jr. (1996) 'America's Information Edge,' *Foreign Affairs*, 75(2): 20; and Nye, 'U.S. Power and Strategy after Iraq,' p. 66.

³⁴ Michael F. Glennon (2003) 'Why the Security Council Failed?' *Foreign Affairs*, 82(3): 30.

are being sidelined, and start to resent the hegemony instead of welcoming it, American leadership would become less desirable. This would lead to increased motivation among other states to challenge the US, and a future coalition against US dominance is not out of the question.³⁵ As Charles A. Kupchan analyses, a combination of the resistance to US unilateralism by Europe and Asia, and the decline of liberal internationalism in the US, may threaten its unipolarity.³⁶ It may be noted that historically, states have constantly joined in coalition to counter the power of any unilateralism exercised by great powers.³⁷

Therefore, it is important for the US to act in a benign manner to sustain its preponderant position. A hegemony can be sustained if the superpower maximises its strength, thereby causing other states to seek balance. Rather, it can only be sustained if the hegemon is willing to refrain from fully exercising its power. Insofar as power-sharing mechanisms go, the superpower should engage in consultative and consensual bargaining with other powers to foster a sense of community where common norms and identities could be nurtured. As a result, the benign nature of the superpower would end up fortifying its dominant position, and in return, causing other major powers to be willing to bandwagon the hegemon for the benefits of stability and security.³⁸ Only when the predominant power interacts with other powers in a way that does not invite resentment and resistance, can the unipolar global order last.

Unilateralism vs. multilateralism:

US foreign policy in the post-cold war era

Whether the current unipolarity will last depends on the extent to which the US is perceived as a benign or imperialist power, like previous superpowers and their ambitions of annexing foreign territories. Modern imperialism, however, requires more than just territorial ambition. An imperialist superpower conducts its foreign policy and military action in a unilateral way, even if the motive is humanitarian.³⁹ If Washington wants to avoid being branded as an imperial power, it needs to convince the rest of the world that the US does not want to exercise its dominant capability at the expense of taking into consideration the concerns and interests of other nations. During the Cold War, the US generally adhered to multilateralism, demonstrating itself as a nation that had constructed international institutions and norms in accordance with its liberal values, despite it being superior in military and economic power.⁴⁰ Washington rendered to its

³⁵ Richard Ned Lebow and Robert E. Kelly (2001) 'Thucydides and Hegemony, Athens and the United States,' *Review of International Studies*, 27(4): 593-610.

³⁶ Charles A. Kupchan (2003) 'The Rise of Europe, America's Changing Internationalism, and the End of U.S. Primacy,' *Political Science Quarterly*, 118(2): 225.

³⁷ Manfred Bertele and Holger H. Mey (1998) 'Unilateralism in Theory and Practice,' *Comparative Strategy*, 17(2): 197-207.

³⁸ Kupchan, 'After Pax Americana,' p. 46.

³⁹ Chalmers Johnson (2004) *The Sorrows of Empire: Militarism, Secrecy, and the End of the Republic* (London: Verso), p. 73.

⁴⁰ G. John Ikenberry and Charles A. Kupchan (2001) *After Victory: Institutions, Strategic Restraint, and the Rebuilding of Order after Major Wars* (Princeton: Princeton University Press).

partners credible assurances of its commitment to confine its power, based on rules and principles of these institutions.⁴¹ For their part, US allies were willing to observe the orientation of the system, and accepted as legitimate the political order dominated by Washington. In this respect, they were reluctant to counter-balance the US hegemon.⁴²

On the contrary, when the Cold War ended, it seemed as if multilateralism was cast aside by the US in favour of unilateralism as the chief US strategy to deal with crucial international affairs. For Washington, unilateralism has become a means to pursue its narrowly defined national interests by exercising unrivalled national power outside the framework of international institutions. As a result, unilateralism exercised by the US is creating a situation in which many nations, including America's closest allies, are beginning to feel sidelined. The US policy in the post-Cold War era is based on its negative judgments on a wide range of issues, such as security, the international judiciary, the environment, and many others. As far as Washington is concerned, the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty and the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty are no longer valid, and the Anti-Personnel Landmine Treaty flawed, because they compromise American determination and capabilities in fighting rogue states and terrorists. It rejects the Kyoto Protocol on global warming, because it would be harmful for the US economy. They view the International Criminal Court as unnecessary because it could put US personnel into jeopardy when prosecuting politically motivated crimes against Americans. In fact, Washington not only fails to participate in newly established international mechanisms, but also denies its responsibilities attached to treaties it has ratified.⁴³ These are just a few of many examples of US unilateral acts that have gone against the wishes of the majority of the world's nations. On these and many other issues, US isolation is increasingly apparent, with only a few allies standing by it, the rest of the world opposing it.⁴⁴

US unilateralism has taken shape gradually during the post-Cold War era, but it has become very marked since the George W. Bush administration took office.⁴⁵ Washington has clearly departed from its Cold War strategies of containment and deterrence, which were strategies designed to discourage enemies from threatening the security of the West, as well as to fit within the United Nations charter of nations' rights to defend their countries. Today, however, ideological conservatives in Washington who see military power as crucial to international affairs, refuse to yield to multilateral constraints on the US's freedom to exercise its supremacy.⁴⁶ Furthermore, the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks in the US homeland affirmed Washington's stance on a world hegemony based on militaristic thinking patterns.⁴⁷ Originally seen as a chance

⁴¹ Ikenberry, 'Institutions, Strategic Restraint, and the Persistence of American Postwar Order,' p. 54.

⁴² David Beetham (1991) *The Legitimation of Power* (London: Macmillan).

⁴³ Johnson, *The Sorrows of Empire*, p. 73.

⁴⁴ Huntington, 'The Lonely Superpower,' p. 41.

⁴⁵ In an article published soon after the end of the first Gulf War, American political scientist Charles Krauthammer already argued that, if necessary, the US should assert its interests and values around the globe unilaterally. See Krauthammer (1991) 'The Lonely Superpower,' *New Republic*, 205(5): 23-26.

⁴⁶ William Wallace (2003) 'Threat to Global Order,' *The World Today*, 59(5): 16-18.

⁴⁷ Roland Bleiker (2003) 'A Rogue Is a Rogue Is a Rogue: US Foreign Policy and the Korean Nuclear Crisis,' *International Affairs*, 79(4): 721.

to soften its unilateral stance, 9/11 rather prompted the US to develop a doctrine of pre-emption that would give Washington the leverage to take action, possibly nuclear action, against rogue states or terrorist groups without first signalling.⁴⁸ It can be said then that the post-9/11 US has exaggerated its vulnerability to external threat, while at the same time has not sufficiently exhausted all options other than military means.⁴⁹

According to international law, this 'go-it-alone' policy cannot be rendered legitimate without conditions. The UN charter gives broad power to its Security Council to decide the measures by which international crises are to be solved. In this sense, any legitimate use of force needs UN authorisation. Pre-emptive actions can be justified only when a nation is facing an immediate, overwhelming, and clearly evident threat, leaving it without other options, and no time for deliberation. These threats include armed invasions, terrorist attacks, menace to citizens living abroad, and danger to humanitarian or peace-keeping operations.⁵⁰ Besides, countries branded by the US as rogue states are not necessarily branded so because of the nature of their regimes, or appalling human rights records, but rather because of their degree of success in defying the Americans.⁵¹ This kind of dismissive US attitude towards international law has not only upset many of its key allies, but has also alienated its potential enemies even further, arguably making the world a more dangerous place.⁵² The post-9/11 and particularly post-Iraq War world has seen the emergence of a new world order that is both enhancing US power and increasing American unilateralism. It is a regressive world order that has upset many who have been calling for an end to inequality. As a result, this new world order has exacerbated tensions between the West, the US in particular, and many others, and does not lend itself to the resolution of key conflicts in world politics.⁵³

Unilateralism is not only a show of US power, but also a means to propagate US universalism in terms of its values and beliefs on a variety of issues regarding democracy, freedom, human rights, equality, and free market economics. The Americans tend to regard their nation's ideals and values as not only universally applicable, but desirable as well. The way Americans champion and pursue these values and beliefs, not only in the US but beyond, constitutes the foundation of this US universalism. Americans believe that the principles of the values they adhere to are based on rationality and should be taken seriously elsewhere. Centred on the belief that the US has unparalleled responsibilities, obligations,

⁴⁸ See, for example, 'The National Security Strategy of the United States of America,' September 2002, < <http://www.whitehouse.gov/nsc/nss.html> >. Dominique Moisi argues that the US has adopted a Bismarckian approach in foreign policy, placing displays of military strength at the heart of its strategy. See Moisi (2003) 'Reinventing the West,' *Foreign Affairs*, 82(6): 67.

⁴⁹ Johnson, *The Sorrows of Empire*, p. 81.

⁵⁰ 'Special Report: America and the World,' (November 22-28 2003), *The Economist*, pp. 25-26.

⁵¹ Robert Dujarric (2001) 'North Korea: Risks and Rewards of Engagement,' *Journal of International Affairs*, 54(2): 467.

⁵² Kupchan, 'The Rise of Europe,' p. 206; and Melvyn P. Leffler (2003) '9/11 and the Past and Future of American Foreign Policy,' *International Affairs*, 79(5): 1059.

⁵³ Steve Smith (2002) 'The End of the Unipolar Moment? September 11 and the Future of World Order,' *International Relations*, 16(2): 171.

and opportunities beyond its borders to safeguard the principles of liberty and the value of free societies, Washington is determined to possess the overwhelming military power that will deter any possible challenge to its hegemony. As a result, the US has self-assigned itself the role of supervising the universal values that it believes should be observed by the world, and is attempting to impose these values on regimes standing in the way of this universalism. And they are willing to do it by threat, or by force if necessary.⁵⁴ In foreign policy terms, Washington has adopted a universalising mission to remake the world as it sees fit. It seems to be that the US believes that only by doing this, can it ensure that its absolute security will not be threatened.⁵⁵

However, US universalism alone does not necessarily mean that the soft dimension of its security – its values and ideology, benign image, and perceived legitimacy of its global leadership – is attainable. This in turn exacerbates international and domestic constraints to US hegemony.⁵⁶ The lack of exercising soft power is costly and less sustainable in US foreign policy, and has resulted in a global ‘coalition of feeling against the US.’⁵⁷ The tireless pursuit of a self-interested unilateralist policy, based on its formidable military strength, will contribute to its own decline in terms of its capability to shape world affairs.⁵⁸ Washington has failed to convince its allies and potential competitors that it is committed to restraining its power and wishes to operate within the rules and principles that have up until now been observed.⁵⁹ In the eyes of many countries, US unilateralism reflects an arrogance of power, and is inducing resentment that in turn is giving rise to a possible move towards trying to counterbalance the US.⁶⁰ This is not because many countries oppose the US war on terror, but because they resent the ease and force with which Washington is willing to dispense with multilateral protocol in its desire to retaliate against or punish relatively less powerful states and populations.⁶¹

East Asia in a unipolar international system

The end of the *global* Cold War was not necessarily followed by the end of *regional* cold wars. In Asia, potential threats to region's stability and security

⁵⁴ Claes G. Ryn (2003) ‘The Ideology of American Empire,’ *Orbis*, 47(3): 384; and Allan Bloom (1987) *The Closing of the American Mind* (New York: Simon and Schuster), p. 153.

⁵⁵ Ted Hopf, ‘The United States and Its Unipolar Delusion: Implications for US-Russia Relations,’ PONARS Policy Memo 188, see http://www.csis.org/ruseura/ponars/policymemos/pm_0188.pdf.

⁵⁶ Evelyn Goh (2003) ‘Hegemonic Constraints: The Implications of 11 September for American Power,’ *Australian Journal of International Affairs*, 57(1): 78.

⁵⁷ Richard N. Haas, ‘Defining US Foreign Policy in a Post-Post-Cold-War World,’ Arthur Ross Lecture, Foreign Policy Association, New York, 22 April, quoted in Goh, ‘Hegemonic Constraints.’

⁵⁸ Joseph S. Nye, Jr. (2002) *The Paradox of American Power: Why the World's Only Superpower Can't Go It Alone?* (New York: Oxford University Press).

⁵⁹ Ikenberry, ‘Institutions, Strategic Restraint, and the Persistence of American Postwar Order,’ p. 54.

⁶⁰ Mastanduno, ‘Preserving the Unipolar Moment,’ p. 88.

⁶¹ Ken Booth and Tim Dunne (eds) (2002) *Worlds in Collision: Terror and the Future of Global Order* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan), pp. 2–3.

have continued to exist, and remain hotspots that can, and are likely to easily involve great powers. The Korean Peninsula nuclear crisis, the Taiwan Straits problem, the Spratly islands dispute, conflicts within the South Asian sub-continent, and regional terrorism are a few of the most obvious cases of cold wars lingering on in this part of the world. In such a complex situation where the global system is unipolar, but the regional order remains largely unchanged since the Cold War period, it is necessary to understand whether the current regional system in Asia is a multipolarity or a unipolarity dominated by Washington; whether the continuing US presence in the region guarantees peace and stability, and by what means Washington can affirm stability in East Asia.

In defining the nature of the regional system, one needs to identify the challengers, if any, to the US monopoly in Asia. In view of their declining influence in the 1990s, Japan and Russia no longer remain a threat to US supremacy in the region. Japan's continuing struggle with its ongoing economic stalemate is a factor in this decline. But more important, its long troubled past, particularly with its regional neighbours, does not inspire these respective nations' trust in Japan's leadership. Russia is mired in its own domestic disarray and is very unlikely to emerge as a competitor vis-à-vis the US in the foreseeable future. This would then leave only China as a contender for the top-tier circle. With its large population, huge gross economic output, high spending on military modernisation, combined with a history of discontent and international ambition, and moreover, its increasing willingness to threaten the use of force, particularly in regard to Taiwan, China has a greater chance of entering the circle of great powers. In fact, in response to, and in attempt to counter-balance the US monopolistic position, China has promulgated its own ‘new security concept’ in recent years by advocating multilateral dialogue, confidence-building measures, arms control and non-proliferation, as well as expanded economic interaction with the world.⁶²

Nevertheless, while China's power has expanded exponentially in the last few decades, it remains far from being a threat to the US's regional leadership and dominance, largely because of two constraints.⁶³ The first constraint concerns with China's willingness to challenge the US alone. Beijing may be eager to have greater influence in regional affairs and like to encourage others to co-operate against US unilateral acts, but it is far more concerned about the US's strong bilateral security alliances in the region, its plans to develop a missile defence system, and US security guarantees for the protection of Taiwan.⁶⁴ So although China seems to favour a multipolar regional order, in which it would no doubt emerge as one of the major powers, its purpose is

⁶² For China's position paper on the ‘New Security Concept,’ 6 August 2002, see <<http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/eng/wjzb/zjzg/gjs/gjzzyhy/2612/2614/t15319.htm>>. For discussions on China's potential threat to the US interests in the post-Cold War era, see Thomas J. Christensen (2001) ‘Posing Problems without Catching Up: China's Rise and Challenges for U.S. Security Policy,’ *International Security*, 25(4): 5–40.

⁶³ Michael Cox (1998) ‘New China: New Cold War?’ In Ken Booth (ed.), *Statecraft and Security: The Cold War and Beyond* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), pp. 224–246.

⁶⁴ Denny Roy (2003) ‘China's Pitch for a Multipolar World: The New Security Concept,’ *Asia-Pacific Security Studies*, 2(1) <http://www.apcss.org/Publications/APSSS/Chinas%20Pitch%20for%20a%20Multipolar%20World.pdf>.

really just to maximise its own manoeuvrability and leverage.⁶⁵ As far as Beijing is concerned, continuing US dominance confirms a favourable regional environment in which China enjoys rocketing economic growth, but at the same time does not become a threat to other countries in the region. The *status quo* in East Asia is in China's interest, and Beijing is unlikely to want to see this regional order destabilised for some time to come yet.

The second constraint on China's global role is related to its capability to balance the hegemon. William C. Wohlforth predicts that, due to the political and social challenges presented by rapid growth in such an overpopulated country governed by an authoritarian regime, China will not be able to threaten the US's dominant position, for at least three decades.⁶⁶ Other analysts also contend that China will not be able to challenge American preponderance based on a mixture of military incapability, its intentional focus on economic development, and its ability or willingness to adapt to international institutions.⁶⁷ The overall picture in Asia then, is that no immediate challenge to US hegemony seems possible in the near future.⁶⁸ And like the global order, the regional order in East Asia, and in Asia as a whole, finds itself within a unipolarity, despite potential conflicts involving major powers having not gone away.

US unilateralism in Asia

The lasting presence of a US-led unipolarity in East Asia depends on the US's capability to persuade other powers to bandwagon it, or deter them from trying to balance the US. If Washington instead insists on unilateralism and has less interest in international regimes and institutions, China and other powers may be pushed to join the anti-American campaign that challenges US preferences.⁶⁹ The ongoing Korean Peninsula crisis will illustrate whether Washington will conduct its foreign policy in the region according to the multilateral principle.

After some years of standoff in its relations with the outside world following the 1994 Agreed Framework,⁷⁰ North Korea revealed its uranium enrichment programme in October 2002, expelled International Atomic Energy Agency inspectors, declared its withdrawal from the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), reactivated its mothballed nuclear reactor, and threatened war if the UN Security Council were to adopt a resolution imposing sanctions. It also warned

⁶⁵ Harry Harding (2002) 'China and the International Order,' Remarks to the Open Forum, US Department of State, see <<http://www.state.gov/s/p/of/proc/tr/11589.htm>>.

⁶⁶ Wohlforth, 'The Stability of a Unipolar World,' p. 33.

⁶⁷ Kishore Mahbubani (1995) 'The Pacific Impulse,' *Survival*, 37(1): 105-120; Rosemary Foot (2001) 'Chinese Power and the Idea of a Responsible State,' *The China Journal*, 45: 1-19; and Barry Buzan (2003) 'Security Architecture in Asia: The Interplay of Regional and Global Levels,' *The Pacific Review*, 16(2): 153.

⁶⁸ Kupchan, 'After Pax Americana,' pp. 40-79.

⁶⁹ Harry Harding, 'China and the International Order.'

⁷⁰ The first nuclear crisis in the Korean Peninsula, starting in the early 1990s, seemed to find a solution in 1994 when a deal brokered by former US president Jimmy Carter. The North consented to terminate its nuclear programme while the US agreed to grant aid and construct two light-water nuclear reactors to provide North Korea with energy sources.

of an end to the 1953 armistice.⁷¹ For its part, the US branded Pyongyang as part of its 'axis of evil' and cut off supplies of heavy fuel to the North. Washington refused to engage in direct talks with Pyongyang, and instead, sought to convince its allies and powers involved to adopt a 'multilateral' united front vis-à-vis the Stalinist regime. Both the US and North Korea have different views on the solution to the impasse. Pyongyang seeks regime survival by securing a non-aggression pledge from Washington and mutual recognition, while the Americans insist that the North abandon its nuclear programme unconditionally before the US would pledge not to attack North Korea or relax sanctions on economic assistance from international financial institutions.⁷²

At first glance, it looks as if the US has stuck to 'multilateralism' in East Asia, while in reality, it is another aspect of US 'unilateralism' that refuses as an option a way that most other powers involved prefer in dealing with the North—i.e. bilateral talks. China has repeatedly stressed that the nuclear crisis on the Korean Peninsula is primarily a conflict between Washington and Pyongyang. South Korea itself has reiterated that the key to solving the impasse is direct dialogue between the North and America.⁷³ Instead, Washington *unilaterally* insists on 'multilateralism'. The Korean nuclear crisis shows that the US adopts multilateralism only when it wants it. This type of multilateralism is nothing less than disguised unilateralism. To borrow Robert Kagan's words, the US seeks a multilateral 'rubber stamp' for its unilateral acts.⁷⁴

The potential dangers resulting from US unilateralism in East Asia could be much greater than elsewhere in the world, such as Central Asia or the Middle East, in the sense that the situations in East Asia are much more complicated because many second-tier powers are involved. There were too many dark sides of history among these powers and their relations can turn sour easily. Therefore, if the US takes ever decision to take military action to prevent North Korea's nuclear programme from developing further, Pyongyang may deliver an irreparable counter-strike – if not to the mainland US, at least to South Korea or Japan. Alternatively, a nuclear North Korea may lead to potential fallout—nuclearisation of South Korea, Japan, and even Taiwan.⁷⁵ In that case, China's core security interests would be threatened. The US programme to deploy theatre missile defence would also then be clearly justified. In either of these above scenarios, China's and Russia's reactions would be crucial. Large-scale confrontation could be expected that in turn could lead to a new cold war emerging from conflicts in East Asia to a global level. The nuclear crisis in

⁷¹ The 1994 Agreed Framework froze Pyongyang's plutonium programme, including a five-megawatt experimental reactor, two larger reactors under construction, and the reprocessing facility. The Framework also suspended the deliveries of heavy fuel oil sent to the North. See Leon V. Sigal (1998) *Disarming Strangers: Nuclear Diplomacy with North Korea* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press).

⁷² See James T. Laney and Jason T. Shaplen (2003) 'How to Deal with North Korea,' *Foreign Affairs*, 82(2): 17; also, Bleiker, 'A Rogue Is a Rogue Is a Rogue,' p. 730.

⁷³ Bleiker, 'A Rogue Is a Rogue Is a Rogue,' p. 720.

⁷⁴ Robert Kagan (2002) 'Multilateralism, American Style,' *Washington Post*, 14 September

⁷⁵ North Korea's missile programme has given ammunition to those aspiring 'normalisation' of Japan's military. In 1998, Pyongyang launched the testing of its *Taepo-dong* missiles, flying over Japan's territory into the Pacific. See James Miles (2002) 'Waiting Out North Korea,' *Survival*, 44(2): 38.

North Korea is only one of many examples that explains why US unilateralism, be it military, diplomatic or cultural, is not the solution to securing stability in this part of the world.

The perception of American unilateralism, however, seems to have taken root in East Asia. Already before the US war on terror, the Russians, the Chinese, and even the Japanese had deemed the US a major external threat to their integrity and freedom of action. China has singled out US hegemony as the principal threat to region's stability. The Japanese has also rated the US as the second greatest threat to its sovereignty after North Korea. The Russians meanwhile have embraced the idea that Russia, China and India form a 'strategic triangle' in an attempt to counter US dominance.⁷⁶ In addition, Moscow and Beijing signed a treaty in July 2001 indicating their commitment to a multipolar world. Overall then, it can be expected that the increasingly strong perception of US unilateralism by the major regional powers will serve to undermine the legitimacy of US unipolarity, and will therefore possibly upset the *status quo* in the region.

Multilateralism in a unipolar regional order

Facing potential crises in this region, the question to be asked is whether the US-led unipolarity is essential for stability in Asia, particularly East Asia. The Cold War left East Asia with divided states, nuclear and semi-nuclear regimes, and a weak framework for international co-operation. With the break up of the bipolar order, histories of hatred for one another, coupled with nationalistic aspirations have again been allowed to flourish, and thus has not ruled out the threat or the use of force against each other.⁷⁷ Territorial and sovereign disputes remain as possible triggers to direct conflicts between or among the major powers and the peripheries. The US is the only great power that has no territorial interests in East Asia, a region full of territorial disputes. US leadership is trusted as other regional powers, such as China, Russia and Japan, are not capable of doing so.⁷⁸ Any attempt to augment military capabilities by any of these juniors will simultaneously be perceived as threat by each other and by neighbouring countries in the region.⁷⁹ The US actually acts as a regional arbiter for parties involved in potential conflicts or traditional hostilities, such as Sino-Japanese relations, as well as a protector for countries easily harassed by major powers. Increasingly, the US will act as a balance to China's rapidly strengthening economic and military capabilities. These capabilities indeed are in danger of being perceived by Japan, Korea and Taiwan as regional threats, leading each of them to reinforce their own capabilities that in turn might spiral a regional arms race.⁸⁰

⁷⁶ Huntington, 'The Lonely Superpower,' pp. 42-45.

⁷⁷ Buzan, 'Security Architecture in Asia,' pp. 163-164. Buzan notes that almost no two adjacent countries in the region do not have serious unresolved issues between them and/or active processes of securitisation.

⁷⁸ For example, China seized Mischief Reef in 1995, followed by its sabre-rattling the show of force against Taiwan during Taiwan's presidential campaign in 1996.

⁷⁹ Brooks and Wohlforth, 'American Primacy in Perspective,' p. 24.

⁸⁰ Kupchan, 'The Rise of Europe,' pp. 228-229.

Although China will not be able to challenge US hegemony in East Asia for some time to come, it is worth exploring whether a bipolar regional order shared between the US and China in Asia will act as a better balance to American unilateral acts and bring about more stability than a unipolarity. In view of the nature of its regime, China's rise to power might destabilise the existing order rather than stabilise it. As a model of authoritarian modernisation, China is not constrained by democracy and is vulnerable to nationalism.⁸¹ Its conventional grievances of history and territory tend to reinforce China's hostile attitude towards border disputes and Taiwan. Throughout the 1990s, China strategically focused on the South China Sea and caused rows over some disputed islands with its neighbours. Meanwhile, Beijing constantly went in for sabre-rattling exercises against Taiwan over the island's escalating aspiration for international recognition. As its political and economic capabilities grow, China is likely to increase its assertiveness and influence.⁸² Neighbouring countries would then be cautious about every move taken by China regarding its foreign policy. Until China becomes a democracy in which its foreign and security policy can be supervised by legitimate means, both domestically and internationally, and its conduct fits in with common international norms, the security and stability in East Asia will depend on US leadership. In short, the US dominant position in East Asia has been a driving force for regional co-operation, providing economic, political and military guarantees.

The absence of a security community in East Asia further renders the necessity of the continuing US superiority in the region. The achievement of such a mechanism needs what Barry Buzan asserts a shared culture and well-developed institutions, along with a common view of preserving the *status quo*. The fundamental conditions needed for such a security community will include democracy being adopted by all major powers, as well as norms and interests shared by the players based on democratic principle. In fact, major powers ruled by democratic governments are essential to the preservation of the US-led unipolarity and to the region's security. Democratic regimes tend to pursue foreign policies in a rational way, at least towards other democracies, if not towards all. A democracy with checks and balances within organisational governance tend to constrain its own conduct in foreign affairs. In addition, democratic countries are inclined to transform domestic norms and values to comply with foreign policy, the rule of law and consensual bargaining so as to better address differences and resolve conflicts.⁸³ Looking at East Asia as a whole, the region has not developed a sustainable mechanism where all major powers are democracies and where a sense of community enables them to solve outstanding problems using peaceful methods.

The US should take advantage of power asymmetry and structural hierarchy in East Asia to underwrite institutional norms and value that would guarantee the region's enduring stability and prosperity. For its part, the US

⁸¹ Paul Bracken (1994) 'The Military Crisis of the Nation State: Will Asia Be Different from Europe,' *Political Studies*, 42: 103-109.

⁸² David Shambaugh (1994) 'Growing Strong: China's Challenge to Asian Security,' *Survival*, 36(2): 43-59.

⁸³ For the democratic peace thesis, see Bruce Russett (1993) *Gasping the Democratic Peace* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press).

should engage in a self-binding pattern of relationship and exercise its power in a benign manner. By doing so, the US should aim at building up a community of mutual trust, shared interests and identities.⁸⁴ The socialisation of the major players' dealing with each other, and a belief system could pave the way for a set of commonly accepted norms and rules by which they could solve problems in a constructive way. This consensual framework could encourage major powers and other countries to be willing to recognise the legitimacy of US preponderance. The framework could actually create a reciprocal political order that allows influence to flow in both directions between the centre to the periphery.⁸⁵

To make the framework workable and enduring, the unipolarity should be 'institutionalised.' As Thomas Donnelly argues, 'institutionalising unipolarity' is important because the US has the experience of creating and maintaining the international institutions that helped manage crises during the Cold War. In the post-Cold War era in East Asia, the Americans have allies that share the US's view of a liberal international order. These include Japan, South Korea, Australia, Taiwan, and some others. By contrast, potential enemies that Washington faces are much weaker now than was the Soviet empire. What the US should do to create a favourable situation to 'institutionalise' its unipolarity, is to build a larger security framework in addition to its bilateral relationships.⁸⁶ Current bilateral mechanisms between the US and others, such as the planned Theatre Missile Defence project, would not necessarily enhance regional stability, and is likely to fuel mutual suspicion, instead of fostering trust between participants and outsiders, and possibly exacerbate a global nuclear arms race.⁸⁷ As the only sole power trusted, or recognised by others, the US should take the lead to invite the states in the region, or to enforce them if necessary, to talk about their security needs and exchange their views on regional stability.

An institutionalised US-led unipolarity should also involve measures to handle American relations with potential challengers as well. US policy should focus on engagement and integration rather than containment. The purpose of such an American strategy is to make China a *status quo* power, not a revisionist power, in the sense that Beijing would be willing to abide by rules and orders in the unipolar international order.⁸⁸ Washington should be confident in engaging in such a strategy, because its current superiority over Beijing remains so great. By the same token, the risks of equipping the Chinese to be strong enough to threatening US dominance in the region are minor.

⁸⁴ Kupchan, 'After Pax Americana,' pp. 45-46.

⁸⁵ Deudney and Ikenberry, 'The Nature and Sources of Liberal International Order,' p. 186.

⁸⁶ Thomas Donnelly, 'What's Next? Preserving American Primacy, Institutionalizing Unipolarity,' *National Security Outlook*, AEI Online, see <http://www.aei.org/publications/pubID.16999_filter/pub_detail.asp>. Plans for reforming the US military structure in the western Pacific continue focusing on bilateral security arrangements with its allies in the region, including Korea, Japan, Thailand, the Philippines, Australia and Singapore. The major shift of its policy is from deployments of forces in permanent bases to creating a network of smaller bases. See 'U.S. Strategic Plan for the 21st Century: The Pacific,' *Stratfor*, November 15 2003, <<http://www.stratfor.info/Story.nco?storyId=224772>>.

⁸⁷ Johnson, *The Sorrows of Empire*, p. 85.

⁸⁸ Kenneth Lieberthal (1995) 'A New China Strategy,' *Foreign Affairs*, 74(6): 43.

After all, the most powerful nation has plenty of resources and time to integrate China fully into the reigning international order.⁸⁹

EU role in East Asia

Apart from the institutionalised arrangements on a regional level suggested above to institutionalise the US-led unipolarity for the purpose of global and regional peace, the European Union, as a global player, may be included to form a multilateral framework in which platforms for security dialogue should be created and economic and financial institutions should be strengthened, and in which the European contributions are essential. The American hard-line stance in the post-Cold War era is in sharp contrast with the position adopted by the EU. Even the staunchest US allies in Europe wish to solve international problems on a multilateral basis.⁹⁰ The Europeans have the experience of sharing sovereignty within the EU, and of moving into a world of transitional negotiation and co-operation. Moreover, they show tolerance to nations and cultures that are very different from them. As the US appears to be departing from principles of liberal internationalism that represented the main thrust of US foreign policy during the Cold War, the EU is becoming more united around these principles of global governance.⁹¹ Instead of just being asked to shoulder more of the burden in the clean-up and rebuilding process of the post-cold War world, the Europeans should have more important roles to play in resolving international crises.

Taking advantage of the US protective umbrella in order to pursue regional integration, the Europeans as a whole have been gradually emerging as a global player in terms of international influence. Power is now becoming more equally distributed between Europe and America because of Europe's amalgamation. With the expansion of its membership to the Central and Eastern European countries and its future constitution, the EU will bring about institutional reform and induce deeper integration.⁹² What will make the EU an even more coherent union are mechanisms that will co-ordinate national defence policies in order to formulate a common security policy on which the integration of new structures and procurement programmes of EU members could be based.⁹³

As a matter of fact, European leaders have conceived of a possible role at a global level. For instance, Romano Prodi, outgoing President of the European Commission, disclosed that the chief goal of the EU is to become a superpower

⁸⁹ Brooks and Wohlforth, 'American Primacy in Perspective,' p. 32.

⁹⁰ For instance, though the European nations were divided in their attitudes towards the US war with Iraq in 2003, EU governments stood firm on certain principles, such as the involvement of the UN in the settlement of the crisis.

⁹¹ Nicolas Jabko, 'The European Union and Multilateralism: A Vision for the World?' see <http://www.france.fi/agenda/events/evenement/Colloque_16_mai/intervention_N_Jabko.pdf>

⁹² The establishment of a chief executive and appointment of a single foreign minister, proposed in the draft constitution, will make the EU a more centralised political entity symbolically and substantially. See Kupchan, 'The Rise of Europe,' pp. 209-210.

⁹³ Michael O'Hanlon (1997) 'Transforming NATO: The Role of European Forces,' *Survival*, 39(3): 5-15.

of standing equal to Washington D.C.. Valery Giscard d'Estaing, president of the EU's constitutional convention, stated that the success of the EU's constitution would earn the EU more respect by others as a political and economic power. German Chancellor Gerhard Schröder also outlined the strategy in dealing with US preponderance by indicating that a more integrated and enlarged Europe would have more clout.⁹⁴

Some of the areas where the EU could play a global role are in preventive diplomacy, post-war peace-keeping missions, including humanitarian and rescue tasks, and combat forces in crisis management.⁹⁵ The president of the EU Military Committee, General Gustav Haggland, defines the union's defence role as low-intensity conflict prevention, with the US being responsible for high-intensity international conflagrations.⁹⁶ Washington repeatedly asserts its right to use force against any threat to its national interests, and its deeds meet its words sometimes. In the aftermath of military combat, the US may lack both the willingness and the institutional capacity and training to carry out follow-up missions.⁹⁷ In this sense, Europe is indispensable as being an instrument in avoiding chaos once fighting stops, as well as being able to facilitate trade, aid, and international monitoring. Instead of sitting back and expressing their resentment against US power, Europe should be prepared to share the burden of post-conflict engagement.⁹⁸ As a matter of fact, Europe has been what Andrew Moravcsik terms a 'civilian superpower' in view of its tremendous contribution to foreign assistance in various forms, including humanitarian aid, technical expertise, and nation-building support. Europe alone accounts for 70 per cent of global foreign aid. Moreover, the total of EU soldiers sent to peace-keeping missions and policing operations around the globe is ten times the number which the Americans sent.⁹⁹ The Europeans are particularly concerned about problems caused by economic backwardness, such as poverty, and the threat to development, social justice, peace and democracy. Europe also puts environmental issues at the top of its agenda.¹⁰⁰

However, none of the global players alone can guarantee a peaceful future. The relationship between Europe and the US shapes the outlook of the world system, which in turn determines the foundations for global security or insecurity. Despite the importance of the continuity of their strategic partnership, there would still be downsides to the relationship. The rationale for Americans to ally themselves with the Europeans has declined as the US has become less dependent on the military support of its European allies. Another cause that may lead to divergent worldviews between the US and the EU is their

⁹⁴ Quoted in Kupchan, 'The Rise of Europe,' p. 211.

⁹⁵ See Article 17 of the Treaty on European Union, <<http://europa.eu.int/eur-lex/en/treaties/index.html>.>

⁹⁶ Quoted in 'The Future of European Defense,' *Stratfor*, 24 January 2004, <<http://www.stratfor.info/Story.neo?storyId=227364>.>

⁹⁷ The US spends as little as 1% of the federal budget on international development, while allotting nearly 16 times on military. The Pentagon has also cut back on peace-keeping training. See Nye, 'U.S. Power and Strategy after Iraq,' p. 71.

⁹⁸ Andrew Moravcsik (2003) 'Striking a New Transatlantic Bargain,' *Foreign Affairs*, 82(4): 74-75.

⁹⁹ Andrew Moravcsik, 'Striking a New Transatlantic Bargain,' pp. 86-87.

¹⁰⁰ Jannis Sakellariou and Tamara Keating (2003) 'Safeguarding Multilateralism: The Urgency of European Defense,' *The Brown Journal of World Affairs*, IX(2): 84.

different perceptions of threat. The Americans view their national interests globally and see international terrorism, weapons of mass destruction, and rogue states as threats to world peace. The Europeans tend to confine their interests regionally and act accordingly. While the US insists on its discretion of using force in the face of threat, Europe is inclined to solve crises through economic means and foreign aid within multilateral institutions.¹⁰¹ The different ways of dealing with global threat to security by America and Europe after 9/11 and now particularly after the Iraq War, highlights the different senses of security and conflicting preferences for solutions. The US is obsessed with military technology in response to terrorist threats. Missile defence programmes, for example, are major means in the American policy of hunting down terrorist networks. Europe is concerned with the implications of strictly military measures, and attaches more attention to non-military strategies, such as preventive diplomacy and development aid.¹⁰²

East Asia may be an area where the Americans and the Europeans could work together in reducing the tensions between them, thereby helping them to converge their differences regarding global and regional security. In addition to the traditionally dominant role played by the US in Asia, the EU could play a much more active role in making East Asia a safer region. The Europeans are more inclined to reconcile with Pyongyang than the Americans are. This is most obvious in the decision by the EU actually having established diplomatic relations with North Korea, while the US still balks at closer ties. The EU has particularly focused on engagement in North Korea by providing aid worth around €400 million in the forms of food aid, support for agricultural rehabilitation, non-food humanitarian assistance, and technical assistance through the Korean Peninsula Energy Development Organisation (KEDO), a mechanism to implement the key provisions of the Agreed Framework.

The EU engagement policy in the Korean Peninsula met with some success in 2001. A EU delegation, led by Swedish Prime Minister Göran Persson, the rotating president of the European Council, Javier Solana, high representative for common foreign and security policy of the EU, and Chris Patten, commissioner for external relations of the European Commission, made a two-day ground-breaking visit to Pyongyang in May 2001. In their meetings, North Korean leader Kim Jong Il confirmed his regime's commitment to the Agreed Framework, pledged to maintain his moratorium on missile testing until 2003, and declared his interest in economic reform. Later, the EU delegation visited Seoul in exchange of its view on search for a solution to bring peace to the peninsula.

Given its engagement in assistance and diplomatic efforts, the European Union could be seen as an impartial mediator between South and North Korea.¹⁰³ However, the EU lacks the willingness to assume such a role, particularly at times of crises in the peninsula. When North Korea suspended its co-operation with the West in late 2002, and the negotiation stalemate between Pyongyang and Washington emerged, the EU played a rather insignificant role in the subsequent multinational talks. As a result, the major

¹⁰¹ Andrew Moravcsik, 'Striking a New Transatlantic Bargain,' p. 76.

¹⁰² Nicole Gnesotto (2002/2003) 'Reacting to America,' *Survival*, 44(4): 99-106.

¹⁰³ Miles, 'Waiting Out North Korea,' pp. 46-47.

powers in the region do not yet necessarily regard the EU as an indispensable player in the peace process. One of the main reasons for why the EU expressed little interest in getting involved in the nuclear crises in the Korean Peninsula is that it fails to recognise the implications for Europe if the situation ever gets out of control. Furthermore, the EU underestimates its capabilities, particularly in economic terms, in influencing the crisis. Also, the EU is not prepared to use every means at its disposal to support its diplomatic goals. For these reasons, the Europeans will find it hard to convince others that the EU is an ideal mediator.

To fill the role it deserves in East Asia and other regions, Europe should make an effort in two aspects. The first is that mutual co-operation and understanding should be strengthened before concrete actions are to become reality. The Europeans should pay more attention to East Asian and other regional affairs, and take part in multilateral international frameworks on a regional level. Secondly, Europe should spend more of its resources fortifying its power, in order to be able to curtail US unilateralism whenever necessary.¹⁰⁴ Although European leaders have already indicated at the Cologne Summit that the EU must have credible military forces in order to take autonomous action that will contribute to international peace and security, Europe needs deeds to match its words.¹⁰⁵ Apart from training and capabilities for peace-keeping mission, Europe needs to strengthen its capacity to wage low-casualty, if not high-intensity, war in the event that it has to deal with threat to stability in its own region and beyond. To make up for its relative weak military due to its limited defence spending—about half that of the America's—the EU needs to co-ordinate greater military procurement and planning on a strategic level. In addition, Europe's military capabilities should come under a centralised command. Without a real projection of military capability in support of a harmonised foreign policy with precise goals, Europe will not be treated seriously by the US and by many countries in Asia. More important, however, is Europe's willingness, apart from its military might, to transform its economic power into a political and diplomatic heavy-weight player in world affairs.

Conclusion

There is no doubt that the post-Cold War era, and now particularly after September 11th, that the world is a US-dominated international order.¹⁰⁶ Whether the unipolar international system is more stable than bipolarity or

¹⁰⁴ NATO secretary-general, Lord George Robertson, has constantly urged the European leaders to reinforce their military effectiveness to balance US unilateralism. See 'London Attempts to Mitigate US Unilateralism,' *Stratfor*, February 3 2002, <<http://www.stratfor.info/Story.neo?storyId=203037>>.

¹⁰⁵ For the Cologne presidency conclusions, see <http://europa.eu.int/council/off/conclu/june99/june99_en.htm>.

¹⁰⁶ Before the September 11 events, some commentators were able to claim that the US was self-refrained to exercise its hegemonic power and Washington was willing to maintain co-operative relations with its allies, exactly as it had done during the Cold War era. For example, Ikenberry, 'Institutions, Strategic Restraint, and the Persistence of American Postwar Order.'

multipolarity is debatable, but it is beyond dispute that a US-dominant regional unipolarity in Asia is essential for security and prosperity, at least for the near future. The US is the only power capable of maintaining security in the world's most troubled spots, and also able to guarantee East Asia's economic development, political stability, and international security. No any other single power or combination of nations is able to do this job.¹⁰⁷ Moreover, any emerging power menacing the unipolarity will only invite others to follow suit and the region's *status quo* will then be destabilised.

To sustain the regional unipolarity depends both on the relative distribution of capabilities as well as the US's grand diplomatic strategy. In terms of the distribution of power, US superiority will not easily be challenged by other powers for decades to come. But what is more important for the US to maintain its sole superpower position is how it conducts its foreign policy. The exercise of power, both soft and hard, by the US will decide how others perceive American dominance. The US needs to convince potential challengers that American intentions in world politics are benign and non-threatening.¹⁰⁸ These potential challengers then in turn will be able to sense the necessity of maintaining the *status quo* in a US-led world system for their own benefits.¹⁰⁹ It is US competence, not its incompetence, in playing a dominant global power that serves the interests of the majority of the nations around the globe, and world peace as a whole.¹¹⁰

Historically, however, dominant powers have been easily tempted to exercise unilateralism over what they deemed as inefficient multilateral decision-making procedures. If the US continues to exercise an 'undemocratic hegemony,' as liberal political theorists argue, the values and ideas of the US-inspired international structure will then be shattered. On the contrary, a 'democratic hegemony' will strengthen liberal values and spread American power.¹¹¹ What 'democratic' means here is that the US needs the participation of other powers in its decision-making for world affairs in order to convince them that their interests are being taken care of by the hegemon.¹¹² Simply portraying international conflicts as ones between good and evil cannot hold together the kind of coalition the US needs to solve these problems. Such dichotomy creates tremendous difficulties for the US in coalition building, not only with countries where 'other civilisations' dominate, but also with those sharing similar values.¹¹³ One of the dimensions of multilateralism that Washington should devote its time to is to attract more allies to side with it instead of pushing them away. A durable international order depends on US

¹⁰⁷ Samuel Huntington (1993) 'Why International Primacy Matters,' *International Security*, 17(4): 82.

¹⁰⁸ Luke McNerney, 'Unipolarity in Post-Cold War International Politics,' see <<http://www.anselm.edu/NR/rdonlyres/C41176A1-7A35-4624-B395-8F3C533544A2/0/lukeVo2.pdf>>.

¹⁰⁹ Cox, 'September 11th and US Hegemony,' p. 67.

¹¹⁰ This argument is thoroughly examined in the 'Special Issue on America: A Nation Apart,' *The Economist*, 8-14 November 2003.

¹¹¹ Jean-Marc Coicaud (2001) 'Legitimacy, Socialization, and International Change,' In: Charles A. Kupchan *et al.*, *Power in Transition: The Peaceful Change of International Order* (Tokyo: United Nations University Press).

¹¹² Mastanduno, 'Preserving the Unipolar Moment,' p. 61.

¹¹³ Smith, 'The End of Unipolar Moment?' pp. 177-178.

commitment to the institutionalisation of the political process in exchange for the compliant participation of others.

Europe should be largely involved in this democratic process. European foreign assistance through multilateral means is more legitimate internationally than unilateralism is. For global and regional stability, the US unipolarity needs to be balanced to avoid unilateralism from threatening such a purpose. Europe, with its potential concentration of political, economic and military power, and more important, its adherence to a common value system shared by the Americans, is the only other prospective balance to US unilateralism.¹¹⁴ East Asia is a place where the Europeans can exercise their influence in order to counter-balance the US unilateralism in political, security, and economic terms, as well as make the world more peaceful through multilateral means, regionally and globally. Overall, both global and regional security depend on continuing US unipolarity, strengthened by the co-operation of the EU in the form of multilateralism. On the contrary, US unilateralism without a EU counter-balancing it, only invites potential challengers, such as China, to threaten the US's preponderant position, thereby destabilising world peace.

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¹¹⁴ Wallace, 'Threat to Global Order,' p. 18.

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