

The unipolar illusion: Why new great powers will rise.

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## **The Unipolar Illusion: Why New Great Powers Will Rise**

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### **In lieu of an abstract, here is a brief excerpt of the content:**

The U. polar illusion Why New Great Powers Will Rise | The Soviet Union's collapse transformed the international system from bipolarity to unipolarity. To be sure, the United States has not imposed a "universal monarchy" on the international system. There are other states that are formidable militarily (Russia) or economically (Japan and Germany). However, because only the United States possesses imposing strength in all categories of great power capability, it enjoys a preeminent role in international politics. Following the Gulf War and the Soviet Union's collapse, many commentators suggested that America should adopt a new grand strategy that would aim at perpetuating unipolarity. Belief that unipolarity favors the United States, and hence should be maintained, resonated in official Washington as well. This became apparent in March 1992, when the initial draft of the Pentagon's Defense Christopher Layne teaches international politics at UCLA. I am grateful to the following for their perceptive and helpful comments on the drafts of this article: John Arquilla, Ted Galen Carpenter, Kerry Andrew Chase, John

Mearsheimer, Ben Schwarz, Alan Tonelson, Kenneth Waltz, and an anonymous reviewer. I am also indebted to Harry Kreisler (Institute of International Studies, UC Berkeley) and Jed Snyder (Washington Strategy Seminar) for providing stimulating intellectual forums that helped refine my thinking about unipolarity and prompted me to write this article.

1. Germany, Japan and Russia certainly have the potential to be great powers. Germany and Japan cannot today be considered great powers, however, because they lack the requisite military capabilities, especially strategic nuclear arsenals that would give them deterrence self-sufficiency. Notwithstanding Russia's still formidable nuclear and conventional military capabilities, economic difficulties and domestic political uncertainties have undercut its great power status. China will be a strong contender for great power status if it can maintain its internal cohesion. Buoyed by its vibrant economy, China has embarked on a major modernization and expansion of its air, naval, and ground forces, including its power-projection capabilities. Nicholas D. Kristof, "China Builds Its Military Muscle, Making Some Neighbors Nervous," *New York Times*, January 11, 1993, p. A1.
2. I define a unipolar system as one in which a single power is geopolitically preponderant because its capabilities are formidable enough to preclude the formation of an overwhelming balancing coalition against it.
3. Analysts of such diverse views as the liberal internationalist Joseph S. Nye, Jr., and neoconservatives Charles Krauthammer and Joshua Muravchick agree that a unipolar world is highly conducive to American interests. See Joseph S. Nye, Jr., *Bound to Lead: The Changing Nature of American Power* (New York: Basic Books, 1990); Charles Krauthammer, "The Unipolar Moment," *Foreign Affairs: America and the World*, Vol. 70, No. 1 (1990/91) and "What's Wrong With The 'Pentagon Paper'?" *Washington Post*, March 13, 1992; Joshua Muravchick, "At Last, Pax Americana," *New York Times*, January 24, 1991, p. A19. ~~~ *International Security*, Vol. 17, NO.4 (Spring 1993) © 1993 by the President and Fellows of Harvard College and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology.
5. *International Security* 17:4 | 6 Planning Guidance (DPG) for Fiscal Years 1996-99 was leaked to the *New York Times*.
4. Specifically, the document stated that, "We must account sufficiently for the interests of the large industrial nations to discourage them from challenging our leadership or seeking to overturn the established political or economic order" and that "we must maintain the mechanisms for deferring potential competitors from even aspiring to a larger regional or global role."<sup>5</sup> The initial draft of the DPG was controversial, and a subsequent draft deleted the language referring to the goal of preserving unipolarity.<sup>6</sup> Nevertheless, the available evidence suggests that the DPG accurately reflected official views about unipolarity. For example, the 1991 Summer Study organized by the Pentagon's Director of Net Assessment defined a "manageable" world as one in which there is no threat to America's superpower role.<sup>7</sup> The main risk to American security, the study argued, is that of "Germany and/or Japan disconnecting from multilateral security and economic arrangements and pursuing an independent course."<sup>8</sup> During late 1992 and early 1993, the Pentagon's Joint Staff was preparing a "new NSC 68" intended to establish an intellectual framework for America's post-Cold War grand strategy. One of this document's key themes is that a multipolar world is, by definition, dangerously unstable. There is as yet no evidence that...

# The Unipolar Illusion | Christopher Layne

## Why New Great Powers Will Rise

The Soviet Union's collapse transformed the international system from bipolarity to unipolarity. To be sure, the United States has not imposed a "universal monarchy" on the international system. There are other states that are formidable militarily (Russia) or economically (Japan and Germany).<sup>1</sup> However, because only the United States possesses imposing strength in all categories of great power capability, it enjoys a preeminent role in international politics.<sup>2</sup> Following the Gulf War and the Soviet Union's collapse, many commentators suggested that America should adopt a new grand strategy that would aim at perpetuating unipolarity.<sup>3</sup> Belief that unipolarity favors the United States, and hence should be maintained, resonated in official Washington as well. This became apparent in March 1992, when the initial draft of the Pentagon's Defense

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*Christopher Layne teaches international politics at UCF.*

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