CHAPTER THREE

THE HITS JUST KEEP ON COMING:

HISTORY AND THE RHYTHM OF GREAT POWER POLITICS

In the previous chapter, I set out Hegemonic Instability Theory (HIT). This chapter shows that the diplomatic historical record from the 17th century to the end of World War II supports this explanatory framework. When it comes to understanding hegemony’s - and, unipolarity’s - effect on international politics, we are not sailing in uncharted waters. There is plenty of historical evidence on which we can draw to show why it was never in the cards that America’s post-1989 unipolar dominance would be long-enduring. Hegemonic powers always are undone by the resistance of others, over-extension, and economic decline.

Before the United States’ post-Cold War unipolar moment, there were two previous unipolar moments in modern international history. In the 17th century, Louis XIV’s France was, for a time, the only great power on the European Continent. And, in the mid-19th century, Victorian Britain achieved a position of global dominance, the Pax Britannica. As HIT predicts, these earlier unipolar moments provoked push-back by great powers-in-waiting that emerged, respectively, as counterweights to Louis XIV’s France, and Victorian Britain The strategies of the challengers testify to the strength of the “sameness effect” in great power politics.

In the marketplace, the competition for profit, market share, and survival impels firms to mimic the strategies and practices of the most successful competitors. The same dynamic exists in great power politics. For the hegemonic powers, and their challengers, alike state building and internal change were driven by geopolitical imperatives. The new great powers that emerged to offset the hegemonies of 17th century France, and mid-Victorian Britain, emulated the dominant
powers’ strategies by undertaking internal reforms that enabled economic self-strengthening, the extraction of fiscal resources, and the cultivation of military power.

In the last third of the 19th century, the prevailing international order, the *Pax Britannica*, was challenged by the near-simultaneous the rise of three new great powers: Germany, the United States, and Japan. Their entrance onto the geopolitical stage sparked power transition dynamics. In London, Germany was perceived as seeking dominance on the Continent, and, by so doing, threatening Britain’s historic interest in preserving Europe’s balance of power. At the same time, the United State was working to eject British military and naval power from North America. Both Germany and the U.S. sought to wrest the mantle of commercial and economic supremacy from Britain’s hands. In East Asia, Japan sought to replace Britain as the dominant regional power. It took the 20th century’s two world wars to sort out this power transition. In the end, a new international order, the *Pax Americana* - which signified Europe’s displacement by the United States as the fulcrum of global power - arose from the *Pax Britannica’s* ashes.

There is a consensus among diplomatic historians that in 1660, when Louis XIV ascended the French throne, France was Europe's sole great power - and, hence, in a position of unassailable hegemony. As the historian G. R. R. Treasure put it, France was, "the strongest and richest state in the world: a rare situation of preeminence."¹ France's ascendancy reflected its own strength, and the relative weakness of its potential European rivals. In 1660, France: had Europe's largest population; its most efficient centralized administration; was (by the standards of

the age) rich agriculturally; and had the potential to develop a dynamic industrial base.\textsuperscript{2} In contrast, France's rivals either were declining powers (Spain), beset by internal troubles (England), or lacking the administrative machinery to efficiently mobilize sufficient resources to match French power (Habsburg Austria).\textsuperscript{3}

The foundation of France’s primacy was its highly developed state capacity, which allowed Paris effectively to convert its economic assets into instruments of diplomatic, military, and economic power.\textsuperscript{4} As historian Brendan Simms comments, French ambitions under the Sun King “required a thoroughgoing program of domestic transformation to sustain them.”\textsuperscript{5} Louis XIV’s France was responsible for what G. R. R. Treasure calls the "etatisation" of war: “the mobilization of the total resources of the state, of the economy, as well as of manpower.”\textsuperscript{6} Under War Minister Michel Le Tellier, and his son and successor Louvois, the army was brought under the administrative control of the central government, and a standing, professional military force was created. Louvois “embarked on a round of military reforms, establishing commissioners of war, appointing quartermasters, and standardizing weapons. Under his supervision the French nobility was conscripted into military service....The Royal Army was transformed into a formidable fighting machine, enjoying a complete monopoly of force within the kingdom and a


\textsuperscript{3} For discussion of the relative weakness of the other European powers compared to France, see Treasure, \textit{Seventeenth Century France}, pp. 210-215.


\textsuperscript{6} Treasure, \textit{Seventeenth Century France}, pp 219-220
fearsome reputation throughout Europe.”7 Finance Minister Jean-Baptiste Colbert strengthened France's financial and economic base to provide the wherewithal to support its enhanced military capabilities. As Simms says, he:

sorted out the royal finances, enforced the payment of taxes, stimulated manufactures and commerce. He also promoted the establishment of a ‘New France’ overseas, especially in Canada, designed to secure prestige and resources for the European struggle and deny the same to enemies of the monarchy. For Colbert economic activity was simply the continuation of conflict by other means.”8

These military, economic, and financial initiatives were facilitated by the administrative reforms that increased the power and reach of the central government.9

Although France was Europe's only great power in 1660, by 1713 at the latest England and Habsburg Austria (and Russia) had emerged as great powers.10 The rise of England and

7 Simms, Europe, pp. 49-50.
8 Simms, Europe, p. 50.
9 For brief discussions of the administrative, military and economic bases of French power see Wolf, Emergence of the Great Powers, pp 97-103, pp 181-187; Treasure, Seventeenth Century France, pp 231-244, 288-320; and William Doyle, The Old European Order, 1660-1800 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978), pp. 244-245. Ultimately, of course, fiscal reforms were only partially successful and France was unable to bear the huge financial costs of the Nine Years' War and War of the Spanish Succession.

10 Although Russia's rise to great power status paralleled England's and Austria's, I do not discuss it at length because it was unconnected to the wars against French hegemony. As was the case with England and Austria, internal reforms patterned after those of England, Holland, and Austria were adopted to increase Russia’s power. For Peter the Great, “‘westernization’ meant the creation of a modern absolutist state capable of increased economic growth and resource extraction. Indeed, the entire society and government of Russia was geared toward military mobilization.” Simms, Europe, p. 89.
Habsburg Austria - that is, the international system's transformation from unipolarity to multipolarity - was a direct response to France’s preponderance, which threatened their security. London and Vienna engaged in both external, and internal, balancing. Externally, London and Vienna organized the Grand Alliances that, in the Nine Years' War (1688-1697), and War of the Spanish Succession (1701-1714), sought to contain, and defeat, France. Internally, Britain, and, to a lesser extent, Austria, overhauled themselves administratively, militarily and economically - which enabled them to acquire great power capabilities comparable to France's. “The great European struggle,” between France, on the one hand, and Britain, Austria, and their allies on the other, “drove a new round of extraction, mobilization, and bureaucratic consolidation within many states.” As Treasure observes, “France's example forced change on other states.” McKay and Scott point out that, to compete with the Sun King, France's opponents "had begun to copy the French model." William Doyle makes it clear that, for Britain and Austria alike, the expansion, and centralization, of governmental power was a response to external danger. “International competition and war,” he says, "were the main spur to domestic innovation.” The danger to their security posed by French hegemony forced England and Austria to emulate France by improving their respective state capabilities to build, 

11 As Simms insightfully notes, by provoking counter-hegemonic balancing against France, no one “contributed more than Louis to the interconnection of the various parts of the European system, and nobody was to suffer more from it in the long run.” Simms, *Europe*, p. 58.


15 Doyle, *The Old Order*, p. 265.
and finance, the military power they needed to go head-to-head with Louis XIV. In other words, just like firms fighting for market share - and survival - in a environment dominated by one big firm, French hegemony compelled Britain and Austria to change their respective “business models” for producing security.

England’s rise to great power status was a defensive response to French dominance. The English King, William III, sought to establish a balance of power to preserve “the peace, liberties, and well-being of Europe, which happened in his lifetime to be threatened by overgrown French power.”\(^\text{16}\) As Secretary of State Charles Hedges said, “We are awake and sensible to the too great growth of our dangerous neighbor, and are taking vigorous measures for the preservation of ourselves, and the peace of Europe.”\(^\text{17}\) After 1688, England was at war with France almost continuously for twenty five years. In addition to its powerful navy, England also maintained a sizeable standing army. Indeed, the British and allied troops under the command of the Duke of Marlborough were instrumental in bringing France to heel.

The imperatives of war meant that the English state had to improve its ability to extract, and effectively employ, the nation's wealth. During the 1690's Britain built the the economic foundations of its power by creating: the Bank of England, a funded national debt; a sophisticated


stock market; and the British East India Company.\textsuperscript{18} England's administrative capabilities were greatly expanded for this purpose between 1688 and 1713. As John Brewer observes, France's hegemonic challenge was the most powerful stimulus to the growth of the English state's power: England “became, like her main rivals, a fiscal-military state, one dominated by the task of waging war”.\textsuperscript{19}

Habsburg Austria, too, emerged as a great power in response to French hegemony (and also the Ottoman threat to Austria's eastern interests). The goals of Austria's western policy were “establishment of a recognized great power position and the fight against the supremacy of France.”\textsuperscript{20} In this context, for Austria, the stakes in the War of the Spanish Succession were its survival, and its great power status.\textsuperscript{21} Like Britain and France, Austria pursued administrative reforms aimed at increasing the state's war-making capabilities. As Thomas Barker says, “The centralizing drive of the Habsburg government, latent in the sixteenth and conscious in the seventeenth centuries was based upon a desire to consolidate power for the purpose of state security.”\textsuperscript{22} To be sure, Austria was considerably less successful than France and England in

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\textsuperscript{18} Simms, \emph{Europe}, p. 61.
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\textsuperscript{19} John Brewer, \emph{The Sinews of Power: War, Money, and the English State, 1688-1783} (London: Unwin Hyman, 1989), p. 27.
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\textsuperscript{20} Robert A. Kann, \emph{A History of the Habsburg Empire} (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1974), pp. 77-78.
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\textsuperscript{21} Ibid., pp. 84-85.
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\textsuperscript{22} Thomas M. Barker, \emph{Double Eagle and Crescent: Vienna's Second Turkish Siege and Its Historical Setting} (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1967), p. 19. In the administrative sphere: efforts were stepped up to subject Hungary (the bulk of which only came under firm Austrian control after the Ottomans were defeated in 1683) to Vienna's authority so that Austria could draw upon its resources; a central organ, the \textit{Hofkanzlei}, was established to
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upgrading its state capacity, and war-making capabilities. Nevertheless, it remains the case that the need for security in the face of French hegemony forced Austria (like England) both to emulate France, and balance against it, by transforming itself from a great power-in-waiting to a full-fledged great power.

The victory of the Anglo-Austrian led coalition in the war of War of Spanish Succession - codified in the 1713 Treaty of Utrecht - ended Louis XIV’s bid to entrench France’s hegemony on the Continent. But it did not mark the definitive end of France’s hegemonic pretensions in Europe. France remained the most powerful state in Europe - potentially hegemonic - and continued to harbor aspirations of continental dominance. It took a century of near-constant Anglo-French warfare - often referred to as the “Second Hundred Year’s War” - culminating in the 1815 Battle of Waterloo for Britain (and its European allies) to put paid once and for all to France’s hegemonic hopes. At least as important, its triumph over Napoleon vaulted Britain into first place in the geopolitical pecking order, and ushered in the era of the Pax Britannica.

Capitalizing on its role at the first-mover in the industrial revolution, following Napoleon’s defeat London constructed an open international economic system. Britain established its global commercial and manufacturing dominance, and, by 1860, accounted for 53.2% of world manufacturing output (a bit more than America's share in 1945). Britain

conduct foreign and domestic affairs; the Hofkammer was established to exert central control over the finances of Habsburg Austria's possessions; and the Hofkreigsrat was created to administer Austria's army centrally, and remodel it as a French-style standing professional. See Wolf, Emergence of the Great Powers, pp. 126-137; R. J. W. Evans, The Making of the Habsburg Monarchy (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979), pp. 148-150. Also, see Simms, Europe, pp. 62-63.

Kennedy, Rise and Fall of the Great Powers, p. TBA
expanded both its formal overseas empire, and also its informal “empire of free trade.” The *Pax Britannica* rested on three pillars: London’s role as the world’s financial center, the Royal Navy’s unchallenged command of the seas (the Royal Navy was as big as the combined strength of the next three or four largest navies), and - not least - the fact that the continental great powers were too consumed by their rivalries with each other to contest preponderant British power. The internecine competition among the continental European great powers effectively canceled out the great power system’s nominal multipolarity. Consequently, for all practical purposes, at the apogee of Victorian Britain’s power, the international system was unipolar. Simply stated, as the historian Paul Kennedy puts it, in 1860, Britain was in a position of “unequaled dominance.”

In 1860 the world seemingly was Britain’s oyster. Appearances can be deceiving.

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24 Robinson and Gallagher & TBA


26 This is Paul Kennedy’s description. Kennedy, *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers*, p. 152. As Fareed Zakaria observes, because it was Europe's arbiter and possessor of a worldwide (and unrivaled) colonial empire, "Britain could not have been met with an overwhelming balancing coalition." Zakaria, "Realism and Domestic Politics," p. 187.
however. Nothing lasts forever in great power politics - *sic transit gloria mundi* - and the forces that eventually caused the long, slow slide from the geopolitical pinnacle that, in the end, dropped Britain out of the great power ranks already had begun. Externally, two factors in particular were greasing the skids for the “collapse of British power:” the geopolitical blowback of Britain’s free trade policies, and the emergence of new rivals that self-consciously advanced themselves from great powers-in-waiting to full great power status for the purpose of countering British hegemony.\textsuperscript{27}

With respect to free trade, as the historian John Darwin observes, Britain’s international predominance made possible the first era of globalization, which had come to full flower by the middle of the 19\textsuperscript{th} century\textsuperscript{28} In the short term, Britain was the big winner from globalization, which enhanced both its wealth, and its relative power. Paradoxically, however the *Pax Britannica* contained the seeds of its own demise. Over time, instead of bulwarking British power, the liberal - free trade - international system installed by London began to undermine Britain by facilitating the diffusion of capital, technology, innovation, and managerial expertise to emerging new centers of power. That, in turn, fueled the rise of the economic and geopolitical rivals that would contest British hegemony.\textsuperscript{29} For example, although the geopolitical impact


\textsuperscript{29} In other words, a hegemon’s economic dominance is inherently tenuous because the sources of wealth - and, ultimately, power - flow outward from it to other states. In other words, through trade and overseas investments, hegemons midwife the very rivals that at some point will lay them low. The classic description of this process is, Gilpin, *War and Change.*
would not be felt for another several decades, by the 1870s, the United States - a major beneficiary of British investment - had already eclipsed Britain as the world’s largest economy.\footnote{It is one of history’s great ironies that British investment fueled the rise of the nation = the United States - that ultimately would wrest the mantle of global leadership away from Britain. British capital was largely responsible for the construction of the infrastructure - ports, canals, railways - that made possible America’s surging economic growth in the 19th century. The impact of British investment in the U.S. is plainly visible on my campus. Texas A & M University is bisected by a heavily trafficked railway line that now belongs to the Union Pacific railroad. However, the original railway route was built with British money before the War Between the States to transport cotton from the Brazos Valley to the port of Galveston, whence it was shipped to the textile mills in the Midlands and Lancashire.}

Eventually, the U.S. dethroned Britain as the dominant global power.

As HIT predicts, it was the long shadow of Britain’s mid-19th century preeminence that spurred the near-simultaneous emergence of three new great powers: Germany, the United States, and Japan. Each of these three new great powers was concerned about the security implications of an over-mighty Britain. Their ascendance to the great power ranks also introduced two new levels of complexity to international politics. First, although the need to offset unbalanced British power was the initial stimulus for Germany, the United States, and Japan to become heavyweight contenders, over time they found themselves at loggerheads with each other, as well as with Britain. Second, the arrival onto the great power stage of the United States and Germany signaled an important geopolitical transformation.

By 1880, it was widely (and correctly) perceived by leading policymakers and students of geopolitics that the traditional European great power system was evolving into a system of three or four "world" powers (what today are called superpowers), with Germany and the U.S. joining
the British Empire and Russia as contenders for membership in this elite club. Indeed, from the late 19th century until the Cold War’s end, great power politics was a prolonged competition to determine which of these states could successfully claim, and hold onto, world power status. In Britain, geopolitical thinkers like the Cambridge University scholar J. S. Seeley recognized that British supremacy would be gravely endangered by the potential emergence of continental-sized great powers like the United States, Russia, and (potentially) Germany. Similar fears underlay the famous “heartland” theory articulated by the renowned British student of geopolitics, Sir Halford Mackinder.

By the end of the 19th century, fears that Britain was not holding its own in the competition for world power status was an important theme in British politics. Politicians like Colonial Secretary Joseph Chamberlain argued that to compete with the U.S. Germany, and Russia, Britain needed to promote imperial federation, improve national efficiency, and adopt 

31 See the discussion and statistics in Kennedy, *Rise and Fall of Great Powers*, pp. 194-202. This geopolitical transformation is illustrated by looking at shifts in the great powers’ respective total world industrial potential, and world manufacturing output. In 1880 Germany, France and Russia were tightly bunched (well behind Britain and the United States) in terms of both metrics. However, by 1913, Britain, the United States and Germany had pulled away from the rest of the great power pack. In terms of total industrial potential and share of world manufacturing output, third place Germany held nearly a 2:1 advantage over the next ranking power (Russia). The term “superpower” was coined by Columbia University professor William T. R. Fox, who predicted in 1944 that the post-World War II world would be dominated by the U.S., the Soviet Union, and Britain. See, William T. R. Fox, *The Superpowers* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1944).

32 J. S. Seeley, *The Expansion of England* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1971). The book originally was published in 1883. Seeley argued that once the U.S. and Russia fulfilled their superpower potential, Britain would be need to turn the empire (or at least the white dominions and India) into an integrated federal state if it was going to stay in the great power game.

33 TBA- add cites. Explain “heartland theory.”
tariff reform - that is, abandon free trade. Similarly, as the 19th century drew to a close, German statesman and geopolitical thinkers mirror-imaged the views of their British counterparts. They argued that to avoid being squeezed out of the world power ranks, Germany needed to adopt a three-pronged strategy: using its economic power to achieve continental hegemony through a Mitteleuropa economic federation (a concept that was a forerunner of today’s European Union); pursuing Weltpolitik (world policy) by acquiring overseas markets and colonies; and building a powerful navy.34

The dawning age of the world powers had a big impact on great power politics, which became hyper-competitive. This reflected policymakers heightened awareness of the security and economic consequences of the relative distribution of power. After 1880, there was among statesmen “a prevailing view of the world order which stressed struggle, change, competition, the use of force and the organization of national resources to enhance state power.”35 The influence of the sameness effect was evident: because the first world power, Britain, was the model after which the rising states patterned themselves as they climbed the ladder to great power status. As Paul Kennedy observes, for world power contenders like Germany, aspirants to regional hegemony like Japan, and even a marginal great power wannabe like Italy, “there were impulses to emulate the established powers. By the 1880s and 1890s each was acquiring overseas territories; each, too, began to build a modern fleet to complement its standing army. Each was a significant element in the diplomatic calculus of the age and, at the least by 1902, had become an


35 Kennedy, Rise and Fall of the Great Powers .p. 196. Also, see Bonker, Militarism, Chapter 1.
alliance partner of an older power.”

Across the Atlantic, the United States was following a similar path, and during the 1890s it transformed itself from a great power-in-waiting into one of the top-ranked great powers - complete with a big navy, overseas interests, and colonies.

The World War I centenary, of course, has refocused attention on the pre-1914 competition between Germany and Britain, which was the most dramatic example of great power resistance to Britain’s dominance. 

Ironically, at first London was pretty much oblivious to the security implications of Germany’s 1871 unification under the leadership of Prussian Chancellor Otto von Bismarck. Far from regarding German unification as a threat, British elites initially were inclined to see it as benefitting London’s interests. For a time, it appeared things might play out that way. Indeed, because France and Russia were rivals of both London and Berlin, during the 1880s Britain tacitly aligned with the Triple Alliance of Germany, Austria-Hungary, 


36 Kennedy, Rise and Fall of the Great Powers, pp. 202-203. Kennedy’s inclusion of Italy in this discussion highlights an important point about how states respond to the competitive pressures of international politics. The impetus for Italian unification was the realization that the small states of the Italian Peninsula “would have to stick closer together if they were to survive in an increasingly predatory world where the trend was toward ever large state formations.” Simms, Europe, p. 187. And while it is true that, once unified, Italy was the the “least of the great powers,” the fact that a state with marginal great power capabilities strove so hard to become a member of the great power club, is powerful evidence of how the sameness effect shapes the security strategies of great powers. TBA - Italy cite


38 Standing on the sidelines during the 1870-71 Franco-Prussian War, most members of the British elite were cheering for a Prussian victory. Shared dynastic ties, Protestantism, racial kinship, and close commercial links led most of the British political nation to believe that Bismarck’s triumph in 1871 would prove triply beneficial: the threat from Britain’s hereditary enemy across the Channel would be reduced, the new unified Germany would align with London, and Germany would enhance Britain’s security by containing both France and Russia. See Kennedy, Rise of the Anglo-German Antagonism; Simms, Euopre, p. 245; Mosse
and Italy. But by the beginning of the 1890s, the Anglo-German relationship was heating up as London belatedly began to wake up and smell the coffee with respect to the implications of Germany’s bourgeoning power.

As is usually the case in great power politics, uneven growth rates - Germany’s economy was growing faster than Britain’s - were the root cause of the deepening Anglo-German antagonism. Indeed, between 1880 and the outbreak of the Great War, Germany's economic growth was "explosive." This fueled an increasingly widespread belief among British political elites that their nation was in decline. It is easy to grasp why they were apprehensive. In 1880, Britain’s total industrial potential was nearly three times as great as Germany’s. Moreover, the total industrial potential of Germany, France, and Russia was pretty much equal. By 1900, however, things were changing quickly. Germany was closing the gap with Britain, and its total industrial potential was about double that of both France, and Russia. With respect to shares of world manufacturing output, the story was similar. In 1880, Britain’s share was about triple Germany’s. At the same time, Germany, Russia, and France were in a virtual tie. By 1900, however, Germany (13.2%) was rapidly catching up with Britain (18.5%), and had opened a significant lead over Russia (8.8%) and France (6.8%). On the First World War’s eve in 1913, Germany (14.8%) had edged ahead of Britain (13.6%), while maintaining a comfortable lead over both Russia (8.2%), and France (6.1%).

A century after the fact, it seems inevitable that the pre-1914 Anglo-German rivalry

40 The data on the respective British, German, Russian, and French shares of both total industrial potential, and world manufacturing output are from Paul Kennedy, *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers*, pp. 201-202.
culminated in war between the two powers.\textsuperscript{41} By the beginning of the 20\textsuperscript{th} century Berlin was feeling its oats. It was ready to make its bid for world power, and to revise the existing international order. In the game of great power politics, this is what fast-rising great powers tend to do. They want to knock the leading power off its pedestal, and claim it for themselves. It is unsurprising, therefore, that, as the diplomatic historian William Langer noted, that “the Germans came to resent British power and even British efforts to maintain their position unimpaired.”\textsuperscript{42}

The years between 1890 and 1914 were characterized by intense global competition between the leading great powers for markets and economic advantage, colonies, and spheres of influence. Against this backdrop, Germany’s political, commercial, and military elites believed that “only the pursuit of global empire and maritime force could preserve Imperial Germany’s prominence and independence as a great power at a time when world powers were redistributing and accumulating political and economic resources on a massive scale.”\textsuperscript{43} As Berlin saw it, Britain blocked Germany’s road to world power status. German leaders believed that unless they matched British power, London would impinge on Berlin’s diplomatic freedom of maneuver, and it interests. Around the turn of the 20\textsuperscript{th} century Germany was in a position to challenge Britain. As Kennedy observes, Germany "either already possessed the instruments of power to

\textsuperscript{41} The Great War’s one hundredth anniversary, produced several outstanding accounts of the run-up to the war, and the July Crisis. Notable are Christopher Clark, \textit{The Sleepwalkers}; Margaret Macmillan, \textit{The War that Ended Peace}; Sean McMeekin, \textit{July 1914: Countdown to War}; T. G. Otte, \textit{July Crisis: The World’s Descent into War}


\textsuperscript{43} Bonker, \textit{Militarism}, p. 29.
alter the status quo or had the material resources to create such instruments.\textsuperscript{44} This buoyed the confidence of German decision makers in their decision to pursue a muscular foreign policy. They had - or believed they had - the opportunity to change the geopolitical status quo, and move up to the top of the great power league table - and they decided to take their shot. Berlin’s aspirations, however, threatened to upend the \textit{Pax Britannica}, and thus collided head-on with Britain’s perception of its core interests.

The power transition that began in the latter part of the 19\textsuperscript{th} century was complex. While the Anglo-German rivalry posed the most saline threat to British hegemony it was not the only game in town with respect to great power politics. The rise of the United States ultimately transformed the contest for global supremacy into a three player game. Just as Germany pushed back against Britain’s preponderant power by seeking world power status, the shadow of Britain's preeminence also propelled America’s transformation from great power-in-waiting to actual great power status. America’s rise reflected Washington’s deepening apprehension about the Western hemisphere's vulnerability to European predations, especially if the European great powers shifted the focus of their colonial ambitions from Asia to the Americas.\textsuperscript{45} As the diplomatic historian Walter LaFeber notes, U.S. policymakers became convinced that “American claims in Latin America would only be as strong as the military force behind them. Consequently, as American stakes in Central and South America increased, so did American military [i.e., naval]

\textsuperscript{44} Kennedy, \textit{Rise and Fall of Great Powers}, p. 211.

\textsuperscript{45} See Richard D. Challener, \textit{Admirals, Generals and Foreign Policy, 1898-1914} (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1973); Grenville and Young, \textit{Politics, Strategy and American Diplomacy}. 
strength.”

Until 1898, the United States regarded Britain as the chief menace to its strategic and commercial interests in the Western hemisphere.

Some have argued that rather than deliberately pursuing great power status, the U.S. had that status thrust upon it. However, given America’s economic, technological, and resource advantages, it is more accurate to say that there “was a virtual inevitability to the whole process” of its great power rise. Indeed, as early as the mid-1870s, albeit somewhat tentatively, the United States was contemplating a new, more assertive, role in world affairs. The United States’ leap into the great power ranks was, like Germany’s, the result of uneven economic growth rates. The rapid increase in U.S. economic power provided the material resources that

46 LaFeber, New Empire, p. 229.

47 Kinley J. Brauer has argued that between 1815 and 1860, American leaders were concerned about the implications of Britain's expanding global interests, and various strategies were contemplated to counter the threat posed by Britain's naval and economic power and its formal and informal empire. Although these proposed strategic responses to British power did not come to fruition before the War Between the States, they nevertheless laid the groundwork for America's subsequent rise to world power status. Kinley J. Brauer, “The United States and British Imperial Expansion,” Diplomatic History, Vol. 12, No. 1 (Winter 1988).


49 Kennedy, Rise and Fall of Great Powers, p. 242.

50 See, Milton Plesur, America's Outward Thrust: Approaches to Foreign Affairs, 1865-1890 (DeKalb, Ill.: Northern Illinois University Press, 1971). As Plesur states (pp. 9-10): “Whether great power status came in the 1890s or earlier, it is certain that the United States did not make the decision for colonialism and world involvement in a sudden movement which caught the national psyche off-guard. The new departure had its roots in the quiet years of the Gilded Age.” In his survey of the historiography of late 19th century American foreign policy, Edward P. Crapol concluded that many take the view that the United States consciously sought world power status.” Crapol, “Coming to Terms with Empire: The Historiography of Late Nineteenth Century American Foreign Relations,” Diplomatic History, Vol. 16, No. 4 (Fall 1992).
underpinned America’s great power emergence, and simultaneously drove the expansion of its overseas commercial interests. In the decades after the War Between the States, the United States amassed enormous economic capabilities including: a rapidly expanding manufacturing/industrial base, leadership in advanced technology, a highly productive agricultural sector, abundant raw materials, ample foreign (and later, internally generated) capital.\(^{51}\) In 1880, the United States (14.7\%) ranked second behind Great Britain (22.9\%) in world manufacturing output. By 1913, however, the United States (32\%) had blown past both Germany (14.8\%) and Britain (13.6\%).\(^{52}\)

In the late 19th century, the eminent historian Frederick Jackson Turner observed that, because states develop significant international political interests as their international economic stakes deepen, the United States was already well on the way to becoming a great power.\(^{53}\) During the Benjamin Harrison administration (1889-1893), the United States began engaging in what Secretary of State James G. Blaine (echoing British Prime Minister William Pitt the younger) called “the annexation of trade.”\(^{54}\) Initially focused on Latin America and the Caribbean, the United States' overseas economic interests soon encompassed Asia and Europe as well. As was the case with Germany, as America's prosperity increasing rested on overseas trade

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\(^{54}\) Quoted in LaFeber, *The New Empire*, p. 106.
and investment (or was so perceived), its involvement in international politics also increased.\footnote{American policymakers believed that overseas markets were more crucial to the nation's economic health than actually was the case. By 1913, foreign trade accounted for only 8\% of GNP, compared with 26\% for Britain. Kennedy, \textit{Rise and Fall of Great Powers}, p. 244. This point is also made in Williams, \textit{Tragedy of American Diplomacy}}

Demonstrating the impact of the sameness effect, the result was that, the “growth of American industrial power and overseas trade was accompanied, perhaps inevitably, by a more assertive diplomacy and by an American-style rhetoric of \textit{Weltpolitik}.”\footnote{Kennedy, \textit{Rise and Fall of Great Powers}, p. 246.}

As America's overseas trade and investment increased, Washington began acquiring the naval capabilities to guard its interests. As early as the 1870s, proponents of naval expansion argued that absent an enlarged and modernized fleet, the United States would be vulnerable, and powerless to protect its interests abroad.\footnote{J.A.S. Grenville and George B. Young, \textit{Politics, Strategy, and American Diplomacy: Studies in American Foreign Policy, 1873-1917} (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1966), pp. 5-6.} In his influential 1890 book, \textit{The Influence of Seapower on History}, U.S. Navy officer and geostrategist Alfred Thayer Mahan argued that attainment of world power status was a prerequisite for the America’s security, power, and prosperity.\footnote{Alfred Thayer Mahan, \textit{The Influence of Seapower Upon History, 1660-1783} (Gretna, LA: Pelican, 2003).} Mahan’s thesis about seapower’s importance displayed an intuitive understanding of the sameness effect, and he presciently argued that, to become a world power, the United States would have to emulate Britain's naval, colonial, and trade policies.

America's naval buildup began during the Harrison Administration when Navy Secretary
Tracy persuaded Congress to authorize construction of a modern battleship fleet.\textsuperscript{59} This building program signaled a break with the U.S. Navy's traditional strategy of coastal defense and commerce protection. In its place, the Navy adopted a new, Mahanian, strategy of building a large fleet of battleships capable of challenging the existing big naval powers for command of the sea. Responding to an increasingly competitive international environment, the Navy chose “to make itself into a European-style force ready for combat with the navies of the other major powers.”\textsuperscript{60} America's naval buildup was underpinned by its imposing economic power. Naval expenditures as a percentage of federal spending rose from 6.9% in 1890 to 19% in 1914.\textsuperscript{61} On a 1904 visit to the United States, a famous British warship designer was shocked when he discovered that because of its vast industrial capabilities, the United States was simultaneously building 14 battleships and 13 armored cruisers.\textsuperscript{62}

Doubtless, it is true that American policymakers’ views about British power were ambivalent during much of the 19\textsuperscript{th} century. Trade and British investment in the U.S. made the two nations interdependent economically, and, over time, potential flashpoints - such as disputes over the U.S.-Canadian border - were largely resolved. Most importantly, as the noted historian C. Vann Woodward argued - during most of the 19\textsuperscript{th} century British naval supremacy enabled the U.S. to enjoy “free security.”\textsuperscript{63} Although the United States proclaimed the Monroe Doctrine


\textsuperscript{60} Hagan, \textit{The People’s Navy}, p. 186.

\textsuperscript{61} Kennedy, \textit{The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers}, p. 247.


\textsuperscript{63} TBA - CITE
(1823) - which warned the European great powers not to meddle in the Western hemisphere - it was far too weak militarily to enforce it. Because British interests paralleled America’s, it was the Royal Navy that kept the other European powers from mucking around in the Western Hemisphere. Nevertheless, Washington tolerated Britain's predominance only until the U.S. was powerful enough to challenge it.

Standing on the cusp of great power - indeed, world power - status, as HIT predicts the United States sought hegemony in the Western Hemisphere. Backed by growing naval power and unlimited industrial potential, in 1895-96, the United States launched a diplomatic offensive against Britain by provoking a crisis over the seemingly obscure issue of the boundary between Venezuela and British Guiana. London was compelled to back down, and to acknowledge America's hemispheric primacy. That was the beginning of London’s precipitous strategic withdrawal from the Western Hemisphere. By 1904, Britain had given in completely to American demands concerning control over the proposed Isthmanian (Panama) canal, and the Alaska-Canada boundary. Shortly thereafter, Britain bowed to the reality of America's overwhelming regional power and withdrew its remaining naval and military forces from North America. Coupled with the American victory in the “splendid little war” against Spain (1898),


the ousting of British power from the Western Hemisphere enabled the United States to consolidate its regional hegemony. This was the stepping stone to America’s attainment of world power status - which didn’t take long. Indeed, among America’s east coast political and commercial elites, and within the U.S. Navy’s officer corps, “visions of eventual U.S. global supremacy” already were entrenched by the turn of the 20th century.67

With the British threat to U.S. interests effectively neutered, American strategists turned their attention to a newly emerging potential geopolitical rival: Wilhelmine Germany. For both Germany and the United States, push-back against British preeminence - avoiding “integration in a British dominated world order” - was the initial driver of their respective great power rises.68 Demonstrating the sameness effect, the United States and Germany “moved along strikingly similar, and parallel trajectories in the new global age.”69 Both of these rapidly growing industrial behemoths first pursued strategies of domestic economic development, and modernization, and then used their enlarged material capabilities to pursue “mutually entangled strategies of maritime arming, empire-building, and global projection.”70 As the 20th century dawned, the expanding global ambitions of Berlin and Washington not only clashed with Britain’s but also increasingly with each other. Thus, what the military historian Dirk Bonker calls the German-American antagonism, was superimposed on the already extant Anglo-German,


69 Bonker, Militarism, p. 4.

70 Bonker, Militarism, p. 4.
and Anglo-American rivalries.\textsuperscript{71} In China, the Philippines, Samoa, and the Caribbean, tensions between the U.S. and Germany were rising. Indeed, the historian Brendan Simms suggests that as early as the 1870s these two newly arrived, and increasingly assertive, great powers - each having fought a recent war of national unification, and both now established as economic powerhouses - were destined to wrestle with each other, as well as with Britain, for global dominance.\textsuperscript{72} Well before World War I’s outbreak, on both sides of the Atlantic there was a growing belief that an eventual war between the two nations was inevitable. And so it was. In April 1917, the United States declared war on Germany, and entered the Great War in support of Britain and France.

World War I had a hugely consequential geopolitical impact, and is a textbook example of how power transitions affecting the top tier of the great power league table typically result in - and ultimately are resolved - by - war. In effect, the First World War was Round One of the power transition face-off that began in the latter third of the 19\textsuperscript{th} century with the great power ascents of Germany and the United States. The Great War did not conclusively settle this power transition, but it foreshadowed the ultimate outcome. Germany, of course, was defeated in November 1918. But, although Germany was knocked to the canvass, it was not out of the world power game. Notwithstanding territorial losses (including the Silesian industrial hub), substantial dismantling of its military capabilities, and burdensome reparations payments imposed on it by the 1920 Versailles Treaty, in terms of latent (or potential) power, Germany

\textsuperscript{71} Bonker, \textit{Militarism}, p. 5

\textsuperscript{72} Simms, \textit{Europe}, p. 237. Dirk Bonker reaches a similar conclusion. Bonker, \textit{Militarism}, p. 5. ADDITIONAL CITES
was well positioned to make another run at European hegemony.73

Great Britain, of course, was one of the victorious powers. Nevertheless, in terms of relative power, Britain emerged the Great War significantly weakened. The war accelerated its pre-1914 economic decline, resulted in the loss of key export markets (especially to the United States), and eroded its claim to global financial leadership. The decline in Britain’s financial fortunes was especially evident in comparison to the United States. Before the outbreak of World War I, Britain had been the international economy’s leading creditor, and the United States was a debtor nation. In 1914, London was the financial hub of the global economy. When the war ended, however, Britain had become debtor nation, and the U.S. had replaced it as the leading international creditor. Moreover, the baton of international financial leadership had been passed from London to New York.

From today’s vantage point World War I seems like another - albeit big - step in Britain’s inexorable slide from the ranks of the contenders for world power. At the time, however, this was not obvious. By one yardstick, the war’s outcome increased Britain’s geopolitical heft by expanding its formal and informal empire (especially in the Middle East where League of Nations mandates gave London effective control of Iraq, Jordan, and Palestine). Moreover, pointing to its still impressive naval power, considerable - if lessened - industrial and financial clout, diplomatic capabilities, and prestige, the historian B. J. C. McKercher claims that as late

73 The received wisdom that reparations crippled Germany, and paved the way for Adolph Hitler’s rise to power, has been challenged by more recent studies. On the reparations issue, see ADD CITES
as 1930 Britain was “the greatest of the great powers.” If so, however, it was only because in the Great War’s wake the United States refrained from harnessing its formidable industrial and financial capacity to seize the mantle of global leadership.

The Great War’s most important geopolitical outcome was to underscore the immensity of American power. The historian Adam Tooze implies that at the end of World War I, the historic Europe-centric international system of multiple great powers (multipolarity) was on the verge of being displaced by a system dominated by a single great power (unipolarity): the United States. As he puts it:

The one nation that emerged apparently unscathed and vastly more powerful from the war was the United States. Indeed, so overwhelming was its pre-eminence that it seemed to raise once more the question that had been expelled from the history of Europe in the seventeenth century. Was the United States the universal, world-encompassing empire similar to the one which the Catholic Hapsburgs had once threatened to establish? The question would haunt the century that

B. J. C. McKercher, *Transition to Power: Britain’s Loss of Global Preeminence to the United States, 1939-1945* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), p. 1. McKercher explicitly rejects what he calls the “economic determinism” of Paul Kennedy and others, whom he claims adopt a one-dimensional definition of power based on economic dynamism. Thus, he says (p. 5), “Relative decline in manufacturing, accumulating capital, and investment does not necessarily produce a concurrent political and strategic decline.” He rejects (p. 5) “the image of Britain irrevocably moving down the slippery slope to second-rank status, with the United States rising inevitably to become a superpower.” McKercher’s argument, is something of a outlier, however. Anyone who has closely studied British grand strategy during the inter-war years understands that although British policymakers still regarded Britain as one of the leading great powers, they also were acutely conscious of the U.K.’s relative decline and imperial overstretch. Hence, the were all too aware that Britain’s hold on world power status, and its empire, were becoming increasingly tenuous. The classic - and largely correct - economic determinist account of Britain’s great power decline is Correlli Barnett, *The Collapse of British Power* (William Morrow)
Of course, if the United States was as dominant after World War I as Tooze suggests the obvious question is why did it not capitalize on its vast accretion of relative power to seize the mantle of global dominance? The answer is simple: in the inter-war years there was no clear path to an American version of “universal monarchy” - that is, a hegemonic international system in which the U.S. stood alone as the sole great power.

For sure, World War I foreshadowed 1945 and 1989, but in the Great War’s aftermath the international system was a long way from an updated version of “universal monarchy.” Although the United States emerged from World I as the world’s leading economic power, and potentially the dominant military power, there still were other important great power players in the game that could block America’s ascent to unchallenged geopolitical preeminence. For example, Britain and Germany still had the actual, or potential, economic and military capabilities to counter the United States, as would the Soviet Union when it finally emerged from the throes of revolution and civil war. Moreover, in the next tier of great powers, France and Japan were still important factors geopolitically - Japan especially do in East Asia. During the 1920s and 1930s, therefore, any U.S. bid for hegemony would have been resisted. For sure, however, during the 1920s and 1930s policy elites in Europe and Japan understood that the possibility of American hegemony loomed over the international system. This prospect was not welcomed by any of the other great powers. Indeed, as Tooze argues, by the 1930s, Hitler’s

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76 During the 1920s and 1930s British worried continuously that the US. would attempt to knock Britain off its world power perch. CITES
Germany, Stalin’s Soviet Union, and Imperial Japan were “insurgent” powers that explicitly ramped up their economic and military capabilities to resist the potential of what they saw as a “powerful and oppressive world order” shaped by America’s power and its liberal ideology.77

The received historical wisdom is that by failing after 1918 to exercise its potential hegemonic muscle to lead the international system and build a stable postwar order, the U.S. retreated into “isolationism.” This is not true. Although it stayed out of the League of Nations, and refrained from joining with Britain to give France a security guarantee against Germany, the United States was an active player in the international politics of the 1920s. The U.S. took the lead in convening the Washington Naval Conference in 1921. The resulting Naval Treaty, and the accompanying Nine Power Treaty, averted both a U.S. naval arms race with Britain and Japan, and a re-intensification of great power competition for influence in China. Moreover, although the U.S. chose not to directly involve itself in managing European security during the 1920s, it did play the leading role in trying to restore economic - and hence, political - stability to the war-convulsed continent.78 Indeed, throughout the 1920s, the United States exercised what

77 Tooze, The Deluge, p. 7.

the diplomatic historian Frank Costigliola described as an “awkward dominion” in Europe. The goals of Washington’s post-World War I European policy prefigured its post-World War II Continental objectives. Believing that America’s prosperity was linked to its trade with Europe, Washington wanted to foster an integrated, interdependent European economy. During the 1920s, therefore, Washington promoted Germany’s economic reconstruction, and its political reintegration into Europe through the Dawes and Young plans that attempted to address the troublesome issue of German reparations.

World War I resulted in an incomplete power transition. The Great War put the U.S. in the pole position for hegemonic leadership but it was as yet unable to consolidate its predominance. Britain was still in the race but fading. Germany would soon make a sprint to grasp the top rung of the great power ladder. And, from far back in the pack, Soviet Russia would try to propel itself into the race. This competition had yet to sort itself out definitively. The Great War also had other consequences that would bear on the outcome of the power transition. By letting the genie of nationalism and self-determination out of the bottle, the war set in motion a chain of events that would erode the influence of the European powers in what ultimately would become known as the Third World. Moreover, for Europe 1914-1918 marked the beginning of the end of the Euro-centric era of great power politics that had begun around 1500. When World War I ended, the European participants - victors and vanquished alike - were materially and psychologically exhausted by the war’s devastating toll. Across the continent, the Great War unleashed powerful political, ideological, social, and cultural forces that weakened -

and in some places (notably Russia) swept away completely - the continent’s pre-1914 “Old Order.”

Still, it was not evident that Europe’s days as the fulcrum of international politics were finished. Indeed, the 1920s can be see as an Indian summer for Europe. Britain was still a major - if diminished - world power. As a result of the war, the British and French colonial empires had expanded. With American help, the Europe’s war-torn economy seemed to be on the mend. The European balance of power established by Versailles, appeared to favor France - so much so, that during the 1920s British statesmen worried about French, not German, hegemony in Europe. At the same time, the “Spirit of Locarno” (1925) appeared to presage reconciliation between France and Germany, and the beginnings of a new European concert among London, Paris, and Berlin that would peacefully accommodate Germany’s desire for revision of the Versailles Treaty’s more onerous terms. The inter-war era’s Indian summer came to an end with the Great Depression.

In both Europe and East Asia, the economic cataclysm of the late 1920s and early 1930s had profound geopolitical consequences. As E. H. Carr so brilliantly detailed in his classic work, *The Twenty Years’ Crisis*, the Versailles system was inherently flawed. It finally cracked, Carr

80 During the 1920s and 1930s, policymakers grasped that had lost economic power relative to the United States. However, London saw itself as a powerful factor in international politics, and was not prepared to play second fiddle by ceding primacy to Washington. As they London saw it, while Britain - and its Empire - had tangible military, and strategic assets in being, much of America’s economic might had yet to be converted into commensurate hard power. second fiddle to the United States. See,

81 Wilson could not convince his own countrymen to join his cherished League of Nations; the European powers remained stubbornly committed to *realpolitik*; embittered by the peace terms it was forced to accept, Germany was determined on a policy of revisionism; and the Soviet Union posed both an external threat and an internal one to stability in a fragile continent.
argued, because of the widening gap between the international order it represented and the actual
distribution of power in Europe. Even during the 1920s, Germany’s latent power raised the
prospect that eventually Berlin would renew its bid for hegemony on the Continent. The Great
Depression brought Adolph Hitler to power, and his Nazi regime unleashed the military potential
of Germany that had been suppressed during the 1920s. Ultimately France and Britain lacked the
material capabilities to enforce the post-1918 settlement, and prevent Germany from making a
second grab for European hegemony. In East Asia, the depression discredited the liberal foreign
and economic policies that Japan had pursued during the 1920s. The expansionist elements of
the Japanese army gained the upper hand in Tokyo and sought to carve out spheres of influence
in Manchuria and China. In response to the economic dislocation caused by the Great
Depression, all the great powers - including even the U.S. during the first years of Franklin D.
Roosevelt’s presidency - abandoned international economic openness in favor of economic
nationalism and mercantilism.

The crisis of the 1930s culminated in what the historian John Lukacs called “the last
European war.” For two reasons it did not remain a European war for long, however. First, the
war spread geographically from Europe to East Asia. Second, it required the efforts of two great
power’s on the Continent’s periphery - the United States and the Soviet Union - to defeat Nazi

Yet, as the historian Zara Steiner reminds us, 1920s should not be viewed through the lens of the
1930s. Zara Steiner, The Lights That Failed: European International History, 1919 - 1933
(Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005). The first decade after the Great War’s end was a post-
war era, not a pre-war one.

Edward Hallett Carr, The Twenty Years’ Crisis:, 1919-1939: An Introduction to the
Germany and Japan. World War II reshaped international politics in three ways. First, the war resulted in what the historian Hajo Holborn termed the political collapse of Europe - thus finishing what World War I had started by bringing down the final curtain on the Eurocentric epoch of international politics. Second, in Asia, the wartime defeats of the British, French and Dutch - especially the humiliating 1942 British capitulation of Singapore - shattered the myth of European invincibility, and thus set in motion the anti-Western revolt that ended in the liquidation of European colonial empires. This laid the foundation for the rise of Asia that began to gather steam in the 1970s. The post-World II anti-colonial revolt also presaged today’s Islamic insurgency against Western influence in the Middle East.

World War II’s third - and most important - geopolitical outcome, was to definitely resolve the power transition that had begun in the 1870s. Germany was crushed by the weight of American and Soviet military power. Germany was occupied by the victorious Allied powers, and, by 1949, it had been split by the deepening Cold War into an American dominated sphere (which became the Federal Republic of Germany), and a Soviet one (which became the German Democratic Republic). The “German Question” - and with it Germany’s hope of becoming the dominant world power - was conclusively answered. Although the Second World War may have been Britain’s “finest hour,” its economic and financial exertions put paid to Britain’s days as leading world power. A decade after the war, the Suez Crisis (1956), and what Prime Minister Harold Macmillan called the “winds of change” in Britain’s colonial empire put, an exclamation point to the reality of British decline. Although anointed as a superpower, after World War II the Soviet Union was far from being on an equal footing with the United States in terms of geopolitical clout. The Soviets suffered some 27 million killed in the war (civilian and military),
and because the first three years of the war in the East were fought on its soil, the Soviet Union incurred huge physical destruction to factories, farms, homes, and railways.

Simply put, by weakening its rivals while sparking its own economic recovery from the Great Depression and a vast expansion of its military capabilities, World War II vaulted the United States to geopolitical and economic predominance. In fact, 1945 was America’s first unipolar moment. The United States was, as Paul Kennedy, observed “the only country that became richer - in fact, much richer - rather than poorer because of the war.”83 And Robert Gilpin has, noted, “In terms of absolute power, the United States, in 1945, greatly surpassed the rest of the world. In addition to her vast industrial capacity, the U.S. virtually monopolized or controlled the three sources of power in the modern world: nuclear weapons, monetary reserves, and petroleum. She alone had the atomic bomb and the knowledge to produce what at the time was called the absolute weapon. American factories produced over 50 percent of the world’s output, and America held approximately 50 percent of the world’s monetary reserves.”84 In terms of naval power, in 1945 it was the United States Navy had unchallenged control of the sea. The same was true with respect to strategic air power; the U.S. along had long range strategic air power. Moreover, the war left the U.S. in possession of a global network of military bases, and only the United States had the ability to project power to all regions of the world.

83 Paul Kennedy, The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers, p. 358.
After World War II, America used its commanding, hegemonic position to construct the postwar international order - the *Pax Americana* - which endured for more than six decades. During the Cold War, the *Pax Americana* reflected the fact that outside the Soviet sphere, the U.S. was the hegemonic power in the three regions of the world it cared most about: Western Europe, East Asia, and the Persian Gulf. The *Pax Americana* rested on the foundational pillars of U.S. military dominance and economic leadership and was buttressed by two supporting pillars: America’s ideological appeal (“soft power”) and the framework of international institutions that the U.S. built after 1945. Following the Soviet collapse (1989-91), the United States used its second unipolar moment to consolidate the *Pax Americana* by expanding both its geopolitical and ideological ambitions.

Today, the overriding grand strategic question for the United States is whether the hegemony it gained as a result of the power transition that took place between 1870 and 1945 - augmented by the Soviet collapse - can endure. Did America’s “unipolar moment” that began in early 1990s mark the end of the pattern of great power politics described in this chapter? Put another way, how stable and durable is the unipolar system dominated by the United States? Since the beginning of the modern international political system in the 16th century, time and again hegemons have stopped by interplay of three phenomena: push-back by other great powers, strategic over-extension (what the historian Paul Kennedy terms “imperial overstretch”), and relative economic decline. Can the U.S. break the historical mold of hegemonic failure? Will American hegemony trigger resistance? Will the sameness effect prompt great powers-in-waiting rise to great power status and challenge U.S. preeminence? These are the central geopolitical issue of our time, and is to them that I turn next.