

# LEGITIMACY, HYPOCRISY, AND THE SOCIAL STRUCTURE OF UNIPOLARITY

## Why Being a Unipole Isn't All It's Cracked Up to Be

By MARTHA FINNEMORE\*

ONE would think that unipoles have it made. After all, unipolarity is a condition of minimal constraint. Unipoles should be able to do pretty much what they want in the world since, by definition, no other state has the power to stop them. In fact, however, the United States, arguably the closest thing to a unipole we have seen in centuries, has been frustrated in many of its policies since it achieved that status at the end of the Cold War. Much of this frustration surely stems from nonstructural causes—domestic politics, leaders' poor choices, bad luck. But some sources of this frustration may be embedded in the logic of contemporary unipolarity itself.

Scholarship on polarity and system structures created by various distributions of power has focused almost exclusively on material power; the structure of world politics, however, is social as much as it is material.<sup>1</sup> Material distributions of power alone tell us little about the kind

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<sup>1</sup>The contributions to Paul, Wirtz, and Fortmann are representative of the materialist orientation of this literature. Only one contribution to this volume, Michael Bartletta and Harold Trinkunas, "Regime Type and Regional Security in Latin America: Toward a 'Balance of Identity' Theory," grapples in depth with nonmaterial factors. T. V. Paul, James J. Wirtz, and Michel Fortmann, eds., *Balance of Power: Theory and Practice in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004). Ikenberry similarly contains only one essay that explores nonmaterial factors explicitly. See Thomas Risse, "U.S. Power in a Liberal Security Community," in G. John Ikenberry, ed., *America Unrivaled: The Future of the Balance of Power* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2002). The materialist orientation of the project of which this essay is a part draws on this tradition. See articles by Wohlforth and by Ikenberry, Mastanduno, and Wohlforth, in this issue.

of politics states will construct for themselves.<sup>2</sup> This is particularly true in a unipolar system, where material constraints are small. Much is determined by social factors, notably the identity of the unipole and the social fabric of the system it inhabits. One would expect a U.S. unipolar system to look different from a Nazi unipolar system or a Soviet one; the purposes to which those three states would use preponderant power are very different. Similarly, one would expect a U.S. unipolar system in the twenty-first century to look very different from, say, the Roman world, or the Holy Roman Empire (if either of those counts as a unipolar system). Social structures of norms concerning sovereignty, liberalism, self-determination, and border rigidity (among other things) have changed over time and create vastly different political dynamics among these systems.<sup>3</sup> Generalizing about the social structure of unipolarity seems risky, perhaps impossible, when so much depends on the particulars of unipole identity and social context, but in the spirit of this project, I will try.

Even a very thin notion of social structure suggests some reasons why contemporary unipolar power may be inherently limited (or self-limiting) and why unipoles often cannot get their way.<sup>4</sup> Power is only a means to other, usually social, ends. States, including unipoles, want power as a means of deterring attacks, amassing wealth, imposing preferred political arrangements, or creating some other array of effects on the behavior of others. Even states with extraordinary material power must figure out how to use it. They must figure out what they want and what kinds of policies will produce those results. Creating desired social outcomes, even with great material power, is not simple, as the

<sup>2</sup>The type of system states construct may not reflect the material distribution of power at all. After 1815, the European great powers consciously constructed a multipolar system under material conditions that might be variously categorized as hegemony or bipolarity, depending on how one measures, but are not multipolar by any material measure. See Martha Finnemore, *The Purpose of Intervention: Changing Beliefs about the Use of Force* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2003), chap. 4, for an extended discussion.

<sup>3</sup>See inter alia Hedley Bull and Adam Watson, eds., *The Expansion of International Society* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984); Gerrit W. Gong, *The Standard of 'Civilisation' in International Society* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984); Christian Reus-Smit, *The Moral Purpose of the State: Culture, Social Identity, and Institutional Rationality in International Relations* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999); idem, *American Power and World Order* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2004); Robert H. Jackson, *The Global Covenant: Human Conduct in a World of State* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000); Stephen D. Krasner, *Sovereignty: Organized Hypocrisy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999); John G. Ruggie, "Territoriality and Beyond: Problematizing Modernity in International Relations," *International Organization* 46 (Winter 1993), 139–74; and Mlada Bukovansky, *Legitimacy and Power Politics: The American and French Revolutions in International Political Culture* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002).

<sup>4</sup>For a related conclusion derived from a somewhat different theoretical perspective and reasons, see Joseph P. Nye, Jr., *The Paradox of American Power: Why the World's Only Superpower Can't Go It Alone* (London: Oxford University Press, 2002).

U.S. is discovering. By better understanding the social nature of power and the social structures through which it works its effects, we might identify some contingently generalizable propositions about unipolar politics and, specifically, about social-structural reasons why great material powers may not get their way.<sup>5</sup>

In this article I explore three social mechanisms that limit unipolar power and shape its possible uses. The first involves legitimation. To exercise power effectively, unipoles must legitimate it and in the act of legitimating their power, unipoles must diffuse it. They must recognize the power of others over them since legitimation lies in the hands of others. Of course, unipoles can always exercise their power without regard to legitimacy. If one simply wants to destroy or kill, the legitimacy of bombs or bullets is not going to change their physical effects on buildings or bodies. However, simple killing and destruction are rarely the chief goal of political leaders using power. Power is usually the means to some other end in social life, some more nuanced form of social control or influence. Using power as more than a sledgehammer requires legitimation, and legitimation makes the unipole dependent, at least to some extent, on others.

The second involves the institutionalization of unipolar power. In the contemporary world powerful Western states, including the U.S., have relied on rational-legal authorities—law, rules, institutions—to do at least some of the legitimation work. Unipoles can create these institutions and tailor them to suit their own preferences. Indeed, the U.S. expended a great deal of energy doing exactly this kind of rational-legal institution building in the era after WWII.<sup>6</sup> Constructing institutions involves more than simple credible commitments and self-binding by the unipole, however. Laws, rules, and institutions have a legitimacy of their own in contemporary politics that derives from their particular rational-legal, impersonal character.<sup>7</sup> Once in place these laws, rules, and institutions have powers and internal logics that unipoles find difficult to control.<sup>8</sup> This, too, contributes to the diffusion of power away from unipole control.

<sup>5</sup>For a fuller exploration of the nature of power in world politics see Michael Barnett and Raymond Duvall, "Power in International Politics," *International Organization* 59 (January 2005), 39–75; and Michael Barnett and Raymond Duvall, eds., *Power in Global Governance* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

<sup>6</sup>G. John Ikenberry, *After Victory: Institutions, Strategic Restraint, and the Rebuilding of Order after Major Wars* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), esp. chap. 3.

<sup>7</sup>Max Weber, *Economy and Society*, ed. Guenther Roth and Claus Wittich (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978), chap. 3, esp. 212–15.

<sup>8</sup>Michael Barnett and Martha Finnemore, *Rules for the World: International Organizations in Global Politics* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2004); and Darren G. Hawkins, David A. Lake, Daniel L.

These social structures of legitimation and institutionalization do more than simply diffuse power away from the unipole. They can trap and punish as well. Unipoles often feel the constraints of the legitimation structures and institutions that they, themselves, have created and one common behavioral manifestation of these constraints is hypocrisy. Actors inconvenienced by social rules often resort to hypocrisy proclaiming adherence to rules while busily violating them. Such hypocrisy obviously undermines trust and credible commitments but the damage runs deeper: hypocrisy undermines respect and deference both for the unipole and for the values on which it has legitimized its power. Hypocrisy is not an entirely negative phenomenon for unipoles, or any state, however. While unrestrained hypocrisy by unipoles undermines the legitimacy of their power, judicious use of hypocrisy can, like good manners, provide crucial strategies for melding ideals and interests. Indeed, honoring social ideals or principles in the breach can have long-lasting political effects as decades of U.S. hypocrisy about democratization and human rights suggests.

These three mechanisms almost certainly do not exhaust the social constraints on unipolar power, but they do seem logically entailed in any modern unipolar order. Short of such sweeping social changes as the delegitimation of all rational-legal forms of authority or the establishment of some new globally accepted religion, it is hard to see how a unipole could exercise power effectively without dealing with these social dynamics. Each mechanism and its effects are, in turn, discussed below.

#### THE LEGITIMACY OF POWER AND THE POWER OF LEGITIMACY

Legitimacy is, by its nature, a social and relational phenomenon. One's position or power cannot be legitimate in a vacuum. The concept only has meaning in a particular social context. Actors, even unipoles, cannot create legitimacy unilaterally. Legitimacy can only be given by others. It is conferred either by peers, as when great powers accept or reject the actions of another power, or by those upon whom power is exercised. Reasons to confer legitimacy have varied throughout history. Tradition, blood, and claims of divine right have all provided reasons to confer legitimacy, although in contemporary politics conformity with

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Nielson, and Michael J. Tierney, eds., *Delegation and Agency in International Organizations* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

international norms and law is more influential in determining which actors and actions will be accepted as legitimate.<sup>9</sup>

Recognizing the legitimacy of power does not mean these others necessarily like the powerful or their policies, but it implies at least tacit acceptance of the social structure in which power is exercised. One may not like the inequalities of global capitalism but still believe that markets are the only realistic or likely way to organize successful economic growth. One may not like the P5 vetoes of the Security Council but still understand that the United Nations cannot exist without this concession to power asymmetries. We can see the importance of legitimacy by thinking about its absence. Active rejection of social structures and the withdrawal of recognition of their legitimacy create a crisis. In domestic politics, regimes suffering legitimacy crises face resistance, whether passive or active and armed. Internationally, systems suffering legitimacy crises tend to be violent and noncooperative. Post-Reformation Europe might be an example of such a system. Without at least tacit acceptance of power's legitimacy, the wheels of international social life get derailed. Material force alone remains to impose order, and order creation or maintenance by that means is difficult, even under unipolarity. Successful and stable orders require the grease of some legitimation structure to persist and prosper.<sup>10</sup>

The social and relational character of legitimacy thus strongly colors the nature of any unipolar order and the kinds of orders a unipole can construct. Yes, unipoles can impose their will, but only to an extent. The willingness of others to recognize the legitimacy of a unipole's actions and defer to its wishes or judgment shapes the character of the order that will emerge. Unipolar power without any underlying legitimacy will have a very particular character. The unipole's policies will meet with resistance, either active or passive, at every turn. Cooperation will be induced only through material quid pro quo payoffs. Trust will be thin to nonexistent. This is obviously an expensive system to run and few unipoles have tried to do so.

More often unipoles attempt to articulate some set of values and shared interests that induce acquiescence or support from others, thereby legitimating their power and policies. In part this invocation of values may be strategic; acceptance by or overt support from others makes

<sup>9</sup>Ian Hurd, *After Anarchy: Legitimacy and Power at the United Nations* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007); and idem, "Legitimacy and Authority in International Politics," *International Organization* 53 (April 1999), 379–408.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid.; Reus-Smit (fn. 3, 1999); and Thomas M. Franck, *The Power of Legitimacy among Nations* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990).

exercise of power by the unipole cheaper and more effective. Smart leaders know how to “sell” their policies. Wrapping policies in shared values or interests smoothes the path to policy success by reassuring skeptics.<sup>11</sup> Rhetoric about shared interests in prosperity and economic growth accompanies efforts to push free trade deals on unwilling partners and publics. Rhetoric about shared love of human rights and democracy accompanies pushes for political reforms in other states.

In their examination of debates leading up to the 2003 Iraq war in this issue of *World Politics*, Jack Snyder, Robert Shapiro, and Yaeli Bloch-Elkon provide an example of unipolar attempts to create legitimacy through strategic use of rhetoric. They show how “evocative and evasive rhetoric” allowed proponents of the war to imply links between the 9/11 attacks, weapons of mass destruction, and Saddam Hussein’s regime. Potentially unpopular or controversial policies were rationalized by situating them in a larger strategic vision built on more widely held values, as when the authors of the 2002 National Security Strategy memorandum wove together the global war on terror, the promotion of American democratic values abroad, and the struggle against authoritarian regimes to create a justification for preventive war.<sup>12</sup> Indeed, as Ronald Krebs and Patrick Jackson argue, rhetorical “sales pitches” of this kind can be highly coercive. Examining the same case (the selling of the Iraq war), Krebs and Jennifer Lobasz show how the administration’s “war-on-terror” discourse, which cast the U.S. as a blameless victim (attacked for “who we are” rather than anything we did), was designed in such a way as to leave opponents with very few arguments they could use to rally effective opposition in Congress.<sup>13</sup>

Usually this articulation of values is not simply a strategic ploy. Decision makers and publics in the unipole actually hold these values and believe their own rhetoric to some significant degree. Unipole states, like all states, are social creatures. They are composed of domestic societies that cohere around some set of national beliefs. Their leaders are

<sup>11</sup> Ian Hurd, “The Strategic Use of Liberal Internationalism: Libya and the UN Sanctions, 1992–2003,” *International Organization* 59 (July 2005), 495–526; and Bruce W. Jentleson and Christopher A. Whytock, “Who ‘Won’ Libya?: The Force-Diplomacy Debate and its Implications for Theory and Policy,” *International Security* 30 (Winter 2005). For more on the intertwined relationship of legitimacy and effectiveness in power projection, see Erik Voeten, “The Political Origins of the Legitimacy of the United Nations Security Council,” *International Organization* 59 (July 2005) 527–57; and Martha Finnemore, “Fights about Rules: The Role of Efficacy and Power in Changing Multilateralism,” *Review of International Studies* 3, supplement S1 (December 2005), 187–206.

<sup>12</sup> Snyder, Shapiro, and Bloch-Elkon in this issue.

<sup>13</sup> Ronald Krebs and Patrick T. Jackson, “Twisting Arms/Twisting Tongues,” *European Journal of International Relations* 13 (March 2007), 35–66; and Krebs and Jennifer Lobasz, “Fixing the Meaning of 9/11: Hegemony, Coercion, and the Road to War in Iraq,” *Security Studies* 16 (July 2007), 409–51.

products of those societies and often share those beliefs. Even where leaders may be skeptical, they likely became leaders by virtue of their abilities to rally publics around shared goals and to construct foreign and domestic policies that reflect domestic values. Even authoritarian (and certainly totalitarian) regimes articulate shared goals and function only because of the web of social ties that knit people together. Certainly all recent and contemporary strong states that could be candidates for unipoles—the U.S., China, Russia, Germany, and Britain—do.<sup>14</sup>

Thus unipole states, like all states, find naked self-aggrandizement or even the prescriptions of Machiavellian *virtù* difficult to pursue.<sup>15</sup> Unipoles and the people who lead them pursue a variety of goals derived from many different values. Even “national interest” as most people and states conceive of it involves some broader vision of social good beyond mere self-aggrandizement. Americans like to see democracy spread around the world in part for instrumental reasons—they believe a world of democracies is a safer, more prosperous world for Americans—and also for normative ones—they believe in the virtues of democracy for all. Likewise, Americans like to see markets open in part for instrumental reasons—they believe a world of markets will make Americans richer—and also for normative ones—they believe that markets are the ticket out of poverty.

Much of unipolar politics is thus likely to revolve around the degree to which policies promoting the unipole’s goals are accepted or resisted by others. Other states and foreign publics may need to be persuaded, but often influential domestic constituencies must also be brought on board. Channels for such persuasion are many and varied, as is evident from past U.S. diplomatic efforts to sell its policies under bipolarity. The shift from *laissez-faire* to what John Ruggie terms the “embedded liberal compromise” as the basis for the U.S.-led economic order after WWII required extensive diplomatic effort to persuade other states and New York’s financial elite to go along. The tools of influence used to accomplish this were sometimes material but also intellectual and ideological. It was the “shared social purposes” of these economic arrangements that gave them legitimacy among both state and societal actors cross-nationally.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>14</sup>Note that, like rhetoric, social ties can be very coercive. Social (and nonmaterial) forms of coercion include shame, blame, fear, and ridicule as well as notions about duty and honor.

<sup>15</sup>Machiavelli understood very well how difficult his prescriptions were to follow. That is why a book of instruction was required for princes.

<sup>16</sup>John G. Ruggie, “International Regimes, Transactions, and Change: Embedded Liberalism in the Postwar Economic Order,” in Stephen D. Krasner, ed., *International Regimes* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1983), 195–231; and Harold James, *International Monetary Cooperation since Bretton Woods* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996).

A unipole's policies are thus circumscribed on two fronts. The policies must reflect values held at home, making them legitimate domestically. At the same time, in order to induce acquiescence or support from abroad, they must appeal to the leaders and publics of other states. Constructing policies across these two spheres—domestic and international—may be more or less difficult, depending on circumstances, but the range of choices satisfying both constituencies is unlikely to be large. Widespread disaffection on either front is likely to create significant legitimacy costs to leaders, either as electoral or stability threats domestically or as decreased cooperation and increased resistance internationally.

Creating legitimacy for its policies is thus essential for the unipole but it is also difficult, dangerous, and prone to unforeseen consequences. Domestically, the need to cement winning coalitions in place has polarized U.S. politics, creating incentives to exploit wedge issues and ideological narratives. As Snyder, Shapiro, and Bloch-Elkon describe, neoconservatives, particularly after 9/11, used these tools to great effect to generate support for the Bush administration's policies. Such ideologically-driven persuasion efforts entail risks, however. Constructing coherent ideological narratives often involves sidelining inconvenient facts, what Snyder and his coauthors call "fact bulldozing." This is more than just highlighting some facts at the expense of others. It may (or may not) begin with that aim, but it can also involve changing the facts people believe to be true, as when large numbers of people came to believe that weapons of mass destruction were indeed found in Iraq. Thus, to the degree that these persuasion efforts are successful, if their ideology does not allow them to entertain contrary facts, policymakers and publics may make decisions based on bad information. This kind of self-delusion would seem unlikely to result in smart policy. To the extent that ideological narratives become entrenched, these delusions may extend to future generations of policymakers and make them victims of blowback. Even if successors come to terms with the facts, they may be entrapped by the powerful legitimating rhetoric constructed by their predecessors.<sup>17</sup>

Internationally, this need to construct legitimate policies also creates important opportunities for opponents and potential challengers to a

<sup>17</sup> Snyder, Shapiro, and Bloch-Elkon in this issue. On blowback, see Jack Snyder, *Myths of Empire: Domestic Politics and International Ambition* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1991), 39–49. Terms in quotation marks are from Snyder 1991. Note that in making these arguments about the power of ideology and persuasion to create political effects, Snyder, Shapiro, and Bloch-Elkon, too, are departing from the materialist orientation of this project.



unipole. As Stephen Walt notes in this issue, opportunities for conventional material balancing are limited under our current unipolar situation and, by definition, one would expect this to be so in most, if not all, unipolar systems. What is a challenger to do? With material balancing options limited, one obvious opening for rival states is to undermine the legitimacy of unipolar power. A creative rival who cannot match or balance a unipole's military or economic strength can easily find strategies to undercut the credibility and integrity of the unipole and to concoct alternative values or political visions that other states may find more attractive. Thus, even as a unipole struggles to construct political programs that will attract both domestic and international support with an ideology or values that have wide appeal, others may be trying to paint those same programs as self-aggrandizing or selfish.

Attacks on legitimacy are important "weapons of the weak."<sup>18</sup> Even actors with limited or no material capability can mount damaging attacks on the credibility, reputation, and legitimacy of the powerful. The tools to mount such attacks are not hard to come by in contemporary politics. Information and the ability to disseminate it strategically are the most potent weapons for delegitimizing power in all kinds of situations, domestic and international. Even non-state actors like nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and activist networks whose material capabilities are negligible in the terms used in this article have been able to challenge the legitimacy of policies of powerful states and the legitimacy of the states themselves. The International Campaign to Ban Landmines (ICBL) is one prominent example. Civil society groups and like-minded states were able to attract signatures from more than 120 governments to ban these devices in 1997 despite opposition from the unipole (U.S.) government. The fact that the ICBL received the Nobel Peace Prize for its efforts is suggestive of its success at delegitimizing unipole policies on this issue. If legitimacy were irrelevant, the U.S. would have ignored this challenge; it did not. The Pentagon has begun phasing out these weapons and replacing them with newer, more expensive devices meant to conform to the treaty requirements. Indeed, that the U.S. began touting the *superiority* of its new mine policy (promulgated in February 2004) over the ICBL's Ottawa treaty requirements highlights the power of this transnational civil society network to set standards for legitimate behavior in this area.<sup>19</sup> Similar

<sup>18</sup> James C. Scott, *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985). See also the discussion of "delegitimation" in Stephen Walt, *Taming American Power: The Global Response to U.S. Primacy* (New York: Norton, 2005).

<sup>19</sup> The U.S. Department of Defense has spent hundreds of millions of dollars since 1998 and has requested hundreds of millions more for the development and procurement of landmine alternatives

cases of NGO pressure on environmental protection (including climate change), human rights, weapons taboos, and democratization amply suggest that this ability to change what is “legitimate” is a common and consequential way to challenge unipoles.<sup>20</sup> The fact that these challenges are mounted on two fronts—international pressure from foreign governments, international organizations, and NGO activists on the one hand, and domestic pressure from the unipole’s own citizens who support the activists’ views on the other—makes these challenges doubly difficult to manage.

State actors, too, can use these weapons to attack the unipole’s policies and do so regularly. Among states, attempts to delegitimize the policies of others are a staple of foreign policy-making and may be employed more often in states that have fewer material capabilities with which to achieve their goals against a unipole. France may be unable to balance effectively against U.S. material power in contemporary politics, but it can (and has) raised questions about U.S. leadership and the legitimacy of U.S. policies, especially U.S. inclinations toward unilateralism. Exploiting multilateralism’s legitimacy as a form of action, French attempts since the late 1990s to label the U.S. a “hyperpower” and to promote a more multilateral, even multipolar, vision of world politics are clearly designed to constrain the U.S. by undermining the legitimacy of any U.S. action that does not receive widespread international support and meet international standards for “multilateralism.”<sup>21</sup>

Countering such attacks on legitimacy is neither easy nor costless. It requires constant management of the transnational conversation sur-

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(including Spider and Intelligent Munitions Systems). See Department of the Army, *Descriptive Summaries of Statistics: Research, Development, Test, and Evaluation; Army Appropriations, Budget Activities 4 and 5* (Washington, D.C.: Department of the Army, 2008). On the 2004 landmines policy, see U.S. Department of State, “U.S. Landmine Policy,” at <http://www.state.gov/t/pm/wra/c11735.htm> (accessed March 1, 2008). On U.S. claims of its superiority to the Ottawa standards, see U.S. Department of State, “U.S. Bans Nondetectable Landmines,” January 3, 2005, [www.state.gov/t/pa/prs/ps/2005/40193.htm](http://www.state.gov/t/pa/prs/ps/2005/40193.htm) (accessed March 1, 2008).

<sup>20</sup> Margaret Keck and Kathryn Sikkink, *Activists Beyond Borders* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1998); Thomas Risse, Stephen Ropp and Kathryn Sikkink, eds., *The Power of Human Rights: International Norms and Domestic Change* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999); Thomas Risse-Kappen, ed., *Bringing Transnational Relations Back In: Non-State Actors, Domestic Structures and International Institutions* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995); Paul Wapner, “Politics Beyond the State: Environmental Activism and World Civic Politics,” *World Politics* 47 (April 1995), 311–40; Richard Price, “Reversing the Gunsights: Transnational Civil Society Targets Landmines,” *International Organization* 52 (Summer 1998), 613–44; Sanjeev Khagram, *Dams and Development: Transnational Struggles for Water and Power* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2004); and idem, James V. Riker, and Kathryn Sikkink, eds., *Restructuring World Politics: Transnational Social Movements, Networks, and Norms* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002).

<sup>21</sup> See, for example, statements by Foreign Minister Hubert Vedrine and President Jacques Chirac in Craig R. Whitney, “France Presses for a Power Independent of the U.S.,” *New York Times*, November 7, 1999, A9.

rounding the unipole's behavior and continuing demonstrations of the unipole's commitment to the values or vision that legitimate its power. To simply dismiss or ignore these attacks is dangerous; it smacks of contempt. It says to others, "You are not even worth my time and attention." A unipole need not cater to the wishes of the less powerful to avoid conveying contempt. It can argue, justify, and respectfully disagree—but all of these take time, attention, and diplomacy. Dismissal is very different than disagreement, however. Peers disagree and argue; subordinates and servants are dismissed. By treating the less powerful with contempt the unipole communicates that it does not care about their views and, ultimately, does not care about the legitimacy of its own power. To dismiss or ignore the views of the less capable is a form of self-delegitimation. Contempt is thus a self-defeating strategy for unipoles; by thumbing its metaphorical nose at others, the unipole undercuts the legitimacy needed to create a wide range of policy outcomes.<sup>22</sup>

Social control is never absolute and material power alone cannot create it. Effective and long-lasting social control requires some amount of recognition, deference, and, preferably, acceptance on the part of those over whom power is exercised. Other parties, not the unipole, thus hold important keys to the establishment of effective and stable order under unipolarity. Paradoxically, then, preponderant power can only be converted into social control if it is diffused. To exercise power to maximum effect, unipoles must give up some of that power to secure legitimacy for their policies.

#### INSTITUTIONALIZING POWER: RATIONAL-LEGAL AUTHORITY AND ITS EFFECTS ON UNIPOLAR POWER

In contemporary politics, the legitimation strategy of choice for most exercises of power is to institutionalize it—to vest power in rational-legal authorities such as organizations, rules, and law. A unipole can create these and shape them to its liking. Indeed, the U.S. expended a great deal of energy doing exactly this in the era after WWII. But as with legitimacy, institutionalization of power in rational-legal authorities diffuses it. Once in place, these laws, rules, and institutions have a power and internal logic of their own that unipoles find difficult to control.<sup>23</sup> This is true in several senses.

<sup>22</sup>I am indebted to Steve Walt for bringing this issue of contempt to my attention.

<sup>23</sup>Ikenberry (fn. 6); and Barnett and Finnemore (fn. 8), chap. 2. The causes and consequences of modernity's fascination with rational-legal authority have been central to a number of strands of sociology. See, for example, the work of Max Weber, Michael Mann, Immanuel Wallerstein, and John Meyer.

First, institutionalizing power as rational-legal authority changes it. Power and authority are not the same. Much like legitimacy, authority is both social and relational. Indeed, authority is the concept that joins legitimacy to power. Authority is, according to Max Weber, domination legitimated.<sup>24</sup> A more practical definition might be that authority is the ability of one actor to induce deference from another.<sup>25</sup> Unlike power, authority cannot be seized or taken. One cannot be an authority in a vacuum nor can one plausibly create or claim authority unilaterally. Authority must be conferred or recognized by others. Consequently, institutionalizing power in authority structures necessarily involves some diffusion of that power. If others cease to recognize or defer to the authorities a unipole constructs, crisis, and perhaps eventual collapse of authority, would ensue, leaving little but material coercion to the unipole.

Transformation of power into authority is not the only consequential change under institutionalization. The fact that authority has a rational-legal character also matters. Unlike traditional and what Weber called “charismatic” types of authority, which are vested in leaders, rational-legal authority is invested in legalities, procedures, rules, and bureaucracies and thus rendered impersonal. Part of what makes such authority attractive, ergo legitimate, in the modern world is that the impersonal nature of these rules creates an odd sense of equality. Even substantively unequal rules may take on an egalitarian cast when they are promulgated in impersonal form, since it suggests that the same rules apply to everyone. Laws of war and rules of trade are legitimated in part because everyone plays by the same rules, even the powerful, even the unipole. This is what makes such rules potentially attractive and legitimate to others. However, such rules also diminish the unipole’s discretion, and by implication, its power. Of course, there are a great many ways in which impersonal rules can create unequal outcomes, and often inequality occurs by the design of the unipole. Unipoles, after all, write many of the system’s impersonal rules. It is no accident that current systemic rules demand open markets and free trade; they are rules that benefit strong economies like the U.S. My point is that unequal outcomes created by impersonal rule are more legitimate in contemporary politics than inequality created by a particularized or ad hoc decree of the powerful. It is more legitimate to say, “Only countries that have stabilized their economies may borrow from

<sup>24</sup>Weber (fn. 7), esp. 212–15.

<sup>25</sup>Barnett and Finnemore (fn. 8), 5.

the International Monetary Fund (IMF),” than to say, “Only countries the U.S. likes may borrow from the IMF.”

Living according to general, impersonal rules circumscribes unipole behavior in several ways, however. Unipoles have difficulty claiming they are exempt from the rules they expect others to be bound by. The U.S. has difficulty demanding human rights protections and respect for due process from other states when it does not abide consistently by these same rules. Impersonal rules may require short-term sacrifices of interests. This might be worthwhile for long-term gains but institutionalization makes it harder for unipoles to have their cake and eat it; institutionalization decreases room for unipole opportunism. For example, by institutionalizing power in the World Trade Organization’s (WTO) Dispute Settlement Body, the U.S. implicitly agreed to lose sometimes (often this has occurred at inconvenient times, such as during the steel tariff flap that preceded the 2004 elections).<sup>26</sup> Not accepting decisions against itself would undermine the institution that the U.S. helped create. Locked-in rules and institutions also may not keep up with changes in unipole interests. Unipoles may construct one set of impersonal rules and institutions that serve long-term interests as calculated at time t1 but find these less useful at time t2 if interests have changed. Both of these effects of institutions have been extensively studied.<sup>27</sup>

Less well studied is another feature of rational-legal authority: the expansionary dynamic built into all bureaucracies and formal organizations. This, too, can dilute unipole control. Like other large public bureaucracies, international organizations are usually created with broad mandates derived from very general shared goals and principles. The UN is charged with securing world peace; the IMF is supposed to stabilize member economies and promote economic growth; and the World Bank pursues “a world free from poverty.” These institutions are legitimated by broad aspirations and principles. At the same time, such breadth sits uneasily with the much narrower actual mandates and capabilities of the organizations, which are given few resources and are hamstrung by restrictions. Over time, broad mandates tend to put pressure on the constrained structures. Efforts by staff, constituents, and

<sup>26</sup> See, for example, “Bush Ditches Steel Import Duties,” *BBC News*, December 4, 2003, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/business/3291537.stm>; and “Steel Tariffs Spark International Trade Battle,” *NewsHour*, November 17, 2003, [http://www.pbs.org/newshour/extra/features/july-dec03/steel\\_11-17.html](http://www.pbs.org/newshour/extra/features/july-dec03/steel_11-17.html) (accessed February 27, 2008).

<sup>27</sup> Krasner’s discussion of “institutional lag” in the *International Regimes* volume was an early and particularly clear statement of this problem. Stephen Krasner, “Regimes and the Limits of Realism: Regimes as Autonomous Variables” in Krasner (fn. 16).

interested states to ensure that these organizations actually do their job have, over time, expanded the size and scope of most international institutions far beyond the intention of their creators. The IMF and the World Bank now intrude into minute details of borrowers' societies and economies in ways explicitly rejected by states at the founding of these organizations.<sup>28</sup> The UN's peace-building apparatus now reconstitutes entire states—from their laws and constitution to their economy and security apparatus.<sup>29</sup> These sweeping powers were not envisioned when the UN was created. Unipoles can usually stop such expansion if they strongly object, but to the extent international organizations (IO) can persuade other states and publics of the value of their activities, objections by the unipole are costly. More fundamentally, IOs are often able to persuade unipoles of the utility and rightness of an expanded scope of action. International organizations can set agendas for unipoles and reshape goals and the sense of what is possible or desirable. They can appeal directly to publics in unipole states for support, creating domestic constituencies for their actions and domestic costs for opposing or damaging them. For example, Americans generally like the UN and would prefer to act with it in Iraq and elsewhere, as recent polling consistently showed.<sup>30</sup> NGOs have also mobilized around IO agendas such as the Millennium Development Goals or Jubilee 2000, and have proven powerful at creating costs and benefits that induce even powerful states to pursue them.<sup>31</sup>

Loss of control over the institutions it creates is thus not simply a problem of poor oversight on the part of the U.S. or any other modern unipole. It is not simply a principal-agent problem or a case of IOs run

<sup>28</sup> Sidney Dell, "On Being Grandmotherly: The Evolution of IMF Conditionality," *Essays in International Finance* 144 (Princeton: International Finance Section, Department of Economics, Princeton University, 1981); Harold James, "From Grandmotherliness to Governance: The Evolution of IMF Conditionality," *Finance and Development* 35 (December 1998), available online at <http://www.imf.org/external/pubs/ft/fandd/1998/12/james.htm> (accessed February 27, 2008); and idem (fn. 16), esp. 78–84 and 322–35.

<sup>29</sup> Chuck Call and Michael Barnett, "Looking for a Few Good Cops: Peacekeeping, Peacebuilding, and CIVPOL," *International Peacekeeping* 6 (Winter 1999), 43–68.

<sup>30</sup> See, for example, polls showing that in January 2003 Americans thought it was "necessary" to get UN approval for an invasion of Iraq by a margin of more than 2:1 (67 percent to 29 percent) and that in June/July 2003, seven in ten Americans said that the U.S. should be willing to put the entire Iraq operation under the UN, with joint decision making, if other countries were willing to contribute troops. Program on International Policy Attitudes (PIPA), "PIPA-Knowledge Networks Poll: Americans On Iraq and the UN Inspections," January 21–16, 2003, question 12, [http://www.pipa.org/OnlineReports/Iraq/IraqUNInsp1\\_Jan03/IraqUNInsp1%20Jan03%20quaire.pdf](http://www.pipa.org/OnlineReports/Iraq/IraqUNInsp1_Jan03/IraqUNInsp1%20Jan03%20quaire.pdf) (accessed February 28, 2008); and Program on International Policy Attitudes, "Public Favors Putting Iraq Operations Under UN if Other Countries Will Contribute Troops," July 11–20, 2003, [http://www.pipa.org/OnlineReports/Iraq/Iraq\\_Jul03/Iraq%20Jul03%20pr.pdf](http://www.pipa.org/OnlineReports/Iraq/Iraq_Jul03/Iraq%20Jul03%20pr.pdf) (accessed February 28, 2008).

<sup>31</sup> For an empirical exploration of the mechanisms by which IO expansion may be fueled by broad mandates and normative claims, see Barnett and Finnemore (fn. 8).

amok. Institutionalizing power in rational-legal authorities changes the social structure of the system in fundamental ways. It creates alternatives to the unipole and, indeed, to states as sources of authoritative rule-making and judgment. It creates non-state actors that not only make rules that bind the powerful, but that also become influential actors in their own right with some degree of autonomy from their creators. Sometimes IOs exercise this power in a purely regulative way, making rules to coordinate interstate cooperation, but often they do much more. To carry out their mandates, these international organizations must and do exercise power that is both generative and transformative of world politics. As authorities, IOs can construct new goals for actors, such as poverty alleviation, good governance, and human rights protection, which become accepted by publics and leaders even in strong states—including unipoles. They can constitute new actors, such as election monitors and weapons inspectors, which become consequential in politics even among powerful states. Understanding unipolar politics requires some understanding of the influence and internal logic of the institutions in which power has been vested and their often unforeseen transformative and generative potential in the international system.

#### IDEALS, INTERESTS, AND HYPOCRISY

Social structures of legitimation, including international organizations, law, and rules, do more than simply diffuse power away from the unipole. They can trap and punish as well. Unipoles often feel the constraints of the legitimation structures they, themselves, have created. One common behavioral manifestation of these constraints is hypocrisy. Actors inconvenienced by social rules often resort to hypocrisy: they proclaim adherence to rules or values while violating them in pursuit of other goals.

Why is hypocrisy a problem in the international realm? After all, hypocrisy is usually associated with public masking of private immorality while international politics is claimed by many to be a realm in which morality has little role.<sup>32</sup> If true, no one should care much about hypocrisy; but accusations of hypocrisy are not meaningless in international politics and actors do not treat them as inconsequential. Charges of hy-

<sup>32</sup> Variants on this position permeate realist thinking going back to Thucydides. For overviews see Steven Forde, "Classical Realism," and Jack Donnelly, "Twentieth Century Realism," both in Terry Nardin and David Mapel, eds., *Traditions of International Ethics* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 62–84 and 85–111.

pocrisy are often leveled at state leaders by both their own publics and by other states, and leaders respond to the accusations. Even a seemingly technical area like trade politics has been rife with such charges as continued protection and subsidy of U.S. farmers sits uneasily with the drumbeat of U.S. calls for other countries to liberalize.<sup>33</sup> So what is the problem, exactly?

Hypocrisy is a double-edge sword in politics. It is both dangerous and essential. On the one hand, unrestrained hypocrisy undermines the legitimacy of power; it undermines the willingness of others to accept or defer to the actions of the powerful. There are several ways to think about this. One might be to define hypocrisy simply as saying one thing while doing another. This minimizes the moral or normative component of hypocrisy in that it eschews judgments about the virtue of the various things we are saying or doing. What matters is not the virtue of what we say or the venality of what we do, but rather the fact that the two are inconsistent. This approach has the advantage of reducing morality to things international relations (IR) scholars know how to study—promise-keeping and trust—both of which are valued primarily because they serve self-interest. This would probably be the most common approach to hypocrisy in IR, drawing as it does from microeconomics and economic notions of interest.<sup>34</sup>

Seen as such, hypocrisy is a problem for at least two reasons. First, it interferes with credible commitments and entails reputation costs. Saying one thing and doing another shows that the state in question is not trustworthy. If a unipole proclaims X but does Y (or says that it is

<sup>33</sup> Mlada Bukovansky, "Yes, Minister: The Politics of Hypocrisy in the World Trade Organization" (Paper presented at the International Studies Association Annual Convention, San Diego, Calif., March 22–25, 2006).

<sup>34</sup> See, for example, Oliver Williamson, "Credible Commitments: Using Hostages to Support Exchange," *American Economic Review* 73 (September 1983); idem, *The Economic Institutions of Capitalism: Firms, Markets, and Relational Contracting* (New York: Free Press, 1985); Diego Gambetta, ed., *Trust: Making and Breaking Cooperative Relations* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1988); and Oliver Williamson, "Calculative, Trust, and Economic Organization," *Journal of Law and Economics* 36 (April 1993). The IR literature drawing on these economic notions is extensive. See, for example, Brett Ashley Leeds, "Domestic Political Institutions, Credible Commitments, and International Cooperation," *American Journal of Political Science* 43 (October 1999), 979–1002; James D. Fearon, "Rationalist Explanations for War," *International Organization* 49 (Summer 1995), 379–414; Lisa Martin, *Democratic Commitments: Legislatures and International Cooperation* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000); Beth A. Simmons, "International Law and State Behavior: Commitment and Compliance in International Monetary Affairs," *American Political Science Review* 94 (December 2000), 819–35; and Jon Pevehouse, "Democratization, Credible Commitments, and International Organizations," in Daniel Drezner, ed., *Locating the Proper Authorities* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2002), 25–48. Note that even this very thin notion of hypocrisy (as promise breaking) cannot be analyzed without attention to social structure. *Pacta sunt servanda* is a social norm that is obtained only in some social contexts and often must be painstakingly constructed among actors.



not bound by  $x$ ), others will not trust future proclamations or commitments. A second problem might be that hypocrisy is a symptom of difficulties in foregoing short-term gains for long-term interests. Over the long term a state wants outcome  $x$ , but in the short term opportunities for benefits from  $Y$  are tempting, so a state proclaims  $x$  but does  $Y$ . Political institutions sometimes structure incentives that encourage such myopia, as when electoral systems encourage leaders to heavily discount the future because those leaders will not have to deal with costs incurred after their terms are over. Both of these problems, credibility and myopia, are well understood in IR but both minimize the problem posed by hypocrisy. Hypocrisy produces bad (or at least suboptimal) outcomes that punish the hypocrite as much as anyone else. Hypocrisy is stupid from this perspective, but it is not immoral or evil.

Promise-breaking and short-sightedness are certainly common and consequential, but they by no means exhaust the damage hypocrisy can do. When foreign leaders and publics react to hypocrisy, they usually bring a much richer fund of moral condemnation. Hypocrisy is more than mere inconsistency of deeds with words. Hypocrisy involves deeds that are inconsistent with particular kinds of words—proclamations of moral value and virtue. States often make such proclamations as a means of legitimating their policies and power. Unipoles, which aspire to lead, perhaps do this more than other states because they need legitimacy more than most. Certainly the United States, with its notions of “American exceptionalism,” has a long history of moralistic justifications for its power and policies. International institutions, often created by unipoles and extensions of unipolar power, are also prone to such proclamations. The UN, the World Bank, and the IMF all work hard to legitimate themselves with claims for the moral virtue of what they do—pursuing peace, defending human rights, alleviating poverty. When their actions do not match their rhetoric, states and IOs may get off lightly and be seen only as incompetent. But when others doubt the intent and sincerity of these actors, accusations escalate from mere incompetence to deceit and hypocrisy.

Failure to conform to the values and norms that legitimate power and policies is not only counterproductive for particular policies: it is also perceived by others as providing information about character and identity. We despise and condemn hypocrites because they try to deceive us: they pretend to be better than they are. Hypocrisy leads others to question the authenticity of an actor’s (in this case, a unipole’s) moral commitments but also its moral constitution and character. Actors want reputations for more than just promise-keeping. They may seek reputa-

tions for virtue, generosity, piety, resolve, lawfulness, and a host of other values. A unipole might cultivate such a reputation simply because it is useful. Such a reputation enhances trust, increases deference, and makes the unipole's position more legitimate, more secure, and more powerful. However, if reputations are perceived to be cultivated only for utility, those reputations are weak and of limited value. Reputations must be perceived as heartfelt to convince others of their weight. Sincerity is the antidote to hypocrisy.<sup>35</sup>

Demonstrating the sincerity necessary to legitimate power often requires the powerful to sacrifice and pay for the promotion or protection of shared values. Power legitimated by its service to and love of democracy must be used to promote and protect democracy, even when democracy is inconvenient or costly. Installation of authoritarian or nonrepresentative governments that happen to be friendly or accommodating by an actor that proclaims its love of democracy, smacks of hypocrisy. Power legitimated by its love of human rights must be brought to bear on violators of those rights, even when those violators may be strategic allies. Failure to do so raises doubts about the sincerity of the powerful and spawns reluctance to defer to policies of that state.

Thus, hypocrisy has three elements. First, the actor's actions are at odds with its proclaimed values. Second, alternative actions are available. Third, the actor is likely trying to deceive others about the mismatch between its actions and values (obviously, to admit up front that one's values are empty rhetoric would be to forfeit any respect or legitimacy associated with invoking those values).<sup>36</sup> Observers will differ in their judgment about whether all of these elements apply in a given case. What looks like deceit or a break with values to one observer may not appear so to others. What constitutes a viable alternative may similarly be a matter of dispute. Like many things in social life, acts of hypocrisy vary in both degree and kind. The price paid by the accused hypocrite will thus vary as well. It could range from public criticism and difficult-to-measure reductions in respect and deference to more

<sup>35</sup> Sincerity is not a perfect antidote. In individuals sincerity does not completely solve problems of rationalization and self-deceit. Hypocrites know their action to be wrong, but often deal with this discomfort, not by changing behavior but shifting their beliefs. Judith Shklar, *Ordinary Vices* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1984), 58. In collectivities, like states, the practice of reformulating goals or values to fit behavior is at least as common. Nils Brunsson, *The Organization of Hypocrisy: Talk, Decisions, and Actions in Organizations*, trans. Nancy Adler, (New York: Wiley, 1989); and Catherine Weaver, *Hypocrisy Trap: The Rhetoric, Reality and Reform of the World Bank* (forthcoming) (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008).

<sup>36</sup> Suzanne Dovi offers a more detailed list of criteria for discerning what she calls "political hypocrisy" in "Making the World Safe for Hypocrisy?" *Polity* 34 (Autumn 2001), 16.

concrete withdrawal of support, such as refusal to endorse or contribute resources to an actor's proposed policy. To illustrate, it is worth considering three recent cases in which the contemporary unipole, the U.S., has been charged with hypocrisy and the ways in which such charges may (or may not) have hampered its leadership abilities.

#### IRAQ SANCTIONS AND THE "OIL FOR FOOD" PROGRAM

Marc Lynch's analysis of the Iraq sanctions regime illustrates several aspects of the dangers hypocrisy poses for unipoles. Following Iraq's invasion of Kuwait in 1990, the UN, at U.S. urging, imposed economic sanctions to pressure the Iraqi regime to withdraw and, following the 1991 U.S.-led military action, to disarm and comply with UN resolutions. Widespread publicity about the humanitarian costs of the sanctions quickly came to threaten their legitimacy, however. The UN's own inspection team reported in 1991 that the Iraqi people faced a humanitarian "catastrophe," including epidemic and famine.<sup>37</sup> The Oil for Food program, proposed by the U.S., was supposed to restore the sanctions' legitimacy. Authorized by UN resolution 986 in April 1995 and subsequently administered by the UN, the program allowed Iraq to sell limited amounts of oil (such sales having been banned under the sanctions) provided that the revenues were used to purchase humanitarian goods such as food and medicines.

The moral character of the critique of the sanctions (that they caused suffering of innocents) invited, perhaps required, a policy response billed as moral and humanitarian. The "Oil for Food" program was thus trumpeted as a moral action: it was designed to alleviate suffering caused by U.S. and UN policies. Once implemented, though, a policy justified on moral grounds is scrutinized by others for moral effects. The media, NGOs, and activists monitored implementation of the program and were not shy about publicizing its failures. Reports of widespread civilian suffering, rising infant mortality, and increasing civilian death rates sparked opposition to the policy in the publics of the lead sanctioning states. Denunciation of the program by its UN coordinator, Denis Halliday, followed by his resignation, fueled the criticism both outside the UN and within it.<sup>38</sup>

<sup>37</sup>United Nations, "Report on Humanitarian Needs in Iraq in the Immediate Post-crisis Environment by a Mission to the Area Led by the Under Secretary General for Administration and Management, 10–17 March 1991," also known as the Ahtisaari Report, March 20, 1991, <http://www.un.org/Depts/oip/background/reports/s22366.pdf> (accessed February 28, 2008).

<sup>38</sup>"Middle East UN Official Blasts Iraq Sanctions," *BBC News*, September 30, 1998, [http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/middle\\_east/183499.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/middle_east/183499.stm) (accessed February 28, 2008).

The failure of Oil for Food to deliver humanitarian outcomes, compounded by the rampant (and much publicized) corruption that riddled the program, destroyed the legitimacy of the policy. Violations of the sanctions regime for private enrichment were not understood as “promise breaking” or credible commitment problems; they were not mere inconsistencies between the words and deeds of sanctioning governments. Rather, humanitarian suffering compounded by widespread profiteering and corruption of the sanctions program by Western businesses, with varying degrees of complicity by their governments and UN officials, became a moral issue in part because the program had been sold in those terms. Returning to the three criteria, while failure of the program to reduce suffering might (or might not) have been excused as incompetence, the profiteering and corruption were clearly at odds with the sanctioners’ proclaimed virtuous values. Alternative actions (sanctions without corruption) were possible, and a variety of actors including governments were trying to cover up their self-serving actions. Exposure of this kind of hypocrisy made the motives of the sanctioners suspect and made it difficult for the U.S. in particular to create legitimacy for any policy on Iraq.<sup>39</sup>

#### INTERVENTION IN KOSOVO

Reactions to the U.S.-led intervention in Kosovo also illustrate the ways in which the three elements of hypocrisy (mismatched words and actions, available alternative actions, and attempts to dissemble or deceive) can corrode legitimacy of a unipole’s action. In 1999, at U.S. urging, NATO launched airstrikes against Serb targets in Kosovo. The goal was to stop violent repression of ethnic Albanians and force the Serbian government back to the negotiating table. Again, the intervention was justified as a humanitarian action: military force was needed to protect civilians from violence at the hands of the Milosevic regime (whose record of atrocities no one disputed). Accusations of hypocrisy came on two grounds. First, while sympathetic to its moral aims, most observers viewed the action as plainly contrary to international law. The UN Security Council did not authorize NATO’s use of force, as the charter requires. The U.S. could have simply stated that the charter and the law in this situation were flawed and moral concerns trumped law.

<sup>39</sup>Marc Lynch, “Lie to Me: Sanctions on Iraq, Moral Argument and the International Politics of Hypocrisy,” in Richard Price, ed., *Moral Limit and Possibility* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008); and Sarah Graham-Brown, *Sanctioning Saddam: The Politics of Intervention in Iraq* (London: IB Tauris, 1999).

Moral concerns, not legality, could have been called upon to legitimate the intervention policy in this case. Instead, the U.S. tried to have it both ways—to make the intervention both virtuous and legal. For example, Secretary of State Albright claimed that “NATO will, in all cases, act in accordance with the principles of the UN [c]harter.”<sup>40</sup> President Clinton, himself, framed the Kosovo action not only as consistent with the UN charter but also as an exemplar of UN effectiveness.<sup>41</sup> The charter’s explicit prohibition against unauthorized uses of force was swept under the rug. So one potential hypocrisy problem involved an attempt to misrepresent the legality of the intervention by minimizing the profound legal issues it raised. As a result, U.S. professions to value international law and the UN were questioned.<sup>42</sup>

A second potential hypocrisy problem (and a much-criticized aspect of the intervention) involved the execution of the intervention and whether it was actually designed with the well-being of Kosovar Albanians as its foremost goal. Most conspicuously, NATO’s use of high altitude bombing against Serb positions appeared to many observers as designed to minimize casualties to NATO pilots rather than Kosovar civilians. At such high altitudes, the accuracy of NATO bombs was diminished. Suspicions about humanitarian motives deepened when it was discovered that the U.S. and Britain had used cluster bombs in their attacks on the city of Nis. Cluster bombs, by their nature, are indiscriminate in their effects and so may violate laws of war when used in civilian areas.<sup>43</sup> Again, the problem here was that the intervention was justified as a humanitarian action. Consequently, the U.S. action invited judgment on those terms. Civilian casualties, by themselves, need

<sup>40</sup> Madeleine Albright, “NATO: Preparing for the Washington Summit,” *U.S. Department of State Dispatch* (December 1998), statement prepared for the North Atlantic Council, Brussels, Belgium, [http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi\\_m1584/is\\_11\\_9/ai\\_53706253](http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m1584/is_11_9/ai_53706253) (accessed February 28, 2008).

<sup>41</sup> “In the last year alone, we have seen abundant evidence of the ways in which the United Nations benefits America and the world. The United Nations is the primary multilateral forum to press for international human rights and lead governments to improve their relations with their neighbors and their own people. As we saw during the Kosovo conflict, and more recently with regard to East Timor, the perpetrators of ethnic cleansing and mass murder can find no refuge in the United Nations and no source of comfort in its charter.” See William J. Clinton, “United Nations Day, 1999: A Proclamation by the President of the United States,” October 24, 1999, available at <http://clinton6.nara.gov/1999/10/1999-10-24-proclamation-on-united-nations-day.html>. Similarly, National Security Advisor Sandy Berger stated within a single interview that UNSC Resolution 1199 gave the U.S. “all the international authority that we need here to act” but at the same time argued that “NATO cannot be a hostage to the United Nations” and had the authority to act in Kosovo without it. See his interview with Margaret Warner, *NewsHour*, October 2, 1998, [http://www.pbs.org/newshour/bb/europe/july-dec98/berger\\_10-2.html](http://www.pbs.org/newshour/bb/europe/july-dec98/berger_10-2.html) (accessed February 28, 2008).

<sup>42</sup> Dovi (fn. 36).

<sup>43</sup> Human Rights Watch, *Civilian Deaths in the NATO Air Campaign*, February 7, 2000, <http://www.hrw.org/reports/2000/nato/index.htm> (accessed February 28, 2008).

not have compromised the mission's legitimacy. It was the fact that alternative actions were available (more precise bombing from lower altitudes, different weapons) that raised questions about U.S. sincerity as a humanitarian actor.<sup>44</sup>

#### DEMOCRACY PROMOTION AND PALESTINIAN ELECTIONS

Democracy promotion provides another example of the dynamics of hypocrisy at work. Claims to spread democracy have figured prominently in the U.S.'s efforts to legitimate its power and win support for what might otherwise be viewed as illegitimate interference in the domestic affairs of other states. Spreading democracy can be risky though. If you let people vote, you might not like the results, and if you take action against the victors when you promoted freedom to choose, you look hypocritical. This has happened more than once in recent decades. U.S. action to topple elected governments in Iran (1953), Guatemala (1954), Chile (1973), and Nicaragua (1980s) come to mind.

Democracy promotion took on new force after the end of the Cold War, however, and has been a particular hallmark of the George W. Bush administration. Following 9/11, democracy promotion in the Middle East was central to the U.S.'s security strategy in that region. It provided one rationale for the Iraq war and was also a prominent (and not always welcome) demand by the U.S. in its dealings with nondemocratic states.<sup>45</sup> When Palestinians held their first presidential elections in January 2005, the United States applauded and held them up as exemplars to neighboring states.<sup>46</sup> But when Palestinians later held internationally monitored legislative elections (in 2006) and Hamas won 74 of the 132 seats (as compared to Fatah's 45), the U.S. faced a dilemma. Hamas is viewed as a terrorist organization by the administration (indeed, it is formally listed as such by the U.S. Department of State), yet it had been freely chosen by Palestinian voters despite U.S. efforts to bolster support for Fatah.<sup>47</sup> To reject the election outcome outright would undercut a centerpiece of the administration's policy in the region (democracy promotion). On the other hand, to accept Hamas jeopardized another of the administration's central values, fighting terrorism. The resulting policy tried to square this circle by

<sup>44</sup> Dovi (fn. 36).

<sup>45</sup> For democracy as a rationale for the Iraq war, see Bush's radio address of March 1, 2003, <http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2003/03/20030301.html> (accessed February 28, 2008).

<sup>46</sup> See, for example, Condoleezza Rice, "Remarks at the American University in Cairo," June 20, 2005, <http://www.state.gov/secretary/rm/2005/48328.htm> (accessed February 28, 2008).

<sup>47</sup> Steven Erlanger, "U.S. Spent \$1.9 Million to Aid Fatah in Palestinian Elections," *New York Times*, January 23, 2006, A11.

cutting off direct aid to the Palestinian Authority while leaving in tact funding for humanitarian projects run through NGOs and international organizations.<sup>48</sup>

Reactions to U.S. policy in this case varied among audiences, but focusing on the three elements of hypocrisy helps pinpoint the nature of disagreement. The second criterion, availability of an alternative policy, is perhaps the most interesting here because it reveals a central and common aspect of our judgments about hypocrisy. In this case, the U.S. had made two conflicting proclamations of values. On the one hand, it wanted to spread democracy and support elections. On the other hand, it abhorred terrorism and judged Hamas to be a terrorist organization. In this view, Hamas' electoral victory presented a "tragic choice" in which the U.S. was forced to choose between two deeply held values. From the administration's perspective there was no "nonhypocritical" alternative: whatever the U.S. did would betray a core value.

Variation in judgments about U.S. hypocrisy hinged on the degree to which observers shared the U.S.'s core values and recognized the conflict between them. Palestinians, not surprisingly, saw no value conflict, ergo, great hypocrisy.<sup>49</sup> They saw a clear alternative: support the legitimately elected Hamas government. Europeans were more sympathetic. They shared both U.S. values and were caught in a similar dilemma but were quicker to publicly recognize the irony (if not hypocrisy) of their position.<sup>50</sup> Some U.S. domestic actors also recognized the dilemma, but saw alternatives to the full cut off of aid, and were correspondingly critical of U.S. policy.<sup>51</sup>

<sup>48</sup> Paul Morro, "U.S. Foreign Aid to the Palestinians," *Congressional Research Service*, October 9, 2007, <http://italy.usembassy.gov/pdf/other/RS22370.pdf> (accessed February 28, 2008). See also "Overview of EU Relations with the Palestinians," on the European Commission Technical Assistance Office for the West Bank and the Gaza Strip's Web site at [http://www.delwbg.cec.eu.int/en/eu\\_and\\_palestine/overview.htm#1](http://www.delwbg.cec.eu.int/en/eu_and_palestine/overview.htm#1) (accessed February 28, 2008).

<sup>49</sup> "It would come as no surprise to us if this letter were to be met with dismissal, in keeping with this administration's policy of not dealing with 'terrorists,' despite the fact that we entered the democratic process and held a unilateral ceasefire of our own for over two years. But how do you think the Arab and Muslim worlds react to this American hypocrisy?" Open letter from Hamas Senior Political Advisor to Rice, December 2007, [http://www.prospectsforpeace.com/Resources/Ahmad\\_Yousef\\_Letter\\_to\\_Condoleezza\\_Rice.pdf](http://www.prospectsforpeace.com/Resources/Ahmad_Yousef_Letter_to_Condoleezza_Rice.pdf) (accessed February 28, 2008).

<sup>50</sup> See, for example, comments by Italy's foreign minister, Massimo D'Alema, recognizing the contradiction in EU policy, acknowledging that Mahmud Abbas had been correct in his fears about the election outcome, and expressing concern about "a certain 'democratic fundamentalism' that equates elections with democracy without regard to context. "Italian Foreign Minister Comments on Israel, U.S., Iraq, Iran," *BBC Monitoring Europe*, May 22, 2006.

<sup>51</sup> See, for example, the *New York Times* February 15, 2006, editorial in which it recognizes that the U.S. "cannot possibly give political recognition or financial aid to such a government" but condemns the administration's policy as "deliberate destabilization." "Set aside the hypocrisy such a course would

Judgments about hypocrisy thus can and should vary, and costs to the potential hypocrite will vary accordingly. Hypocrisy involves proclaiming some virtue then engaging in blameworthy behavior contrary to public proclamations. If the behavior is unmitigated vice—gratuitous torture (cruelty) or private enrichment at public expense (greed or venality)—then charges of hypocrisy are easy to make and appropriately damaging. But what about cases in which apparently blameworthy behavior is, in another light, justified by a different virtue? What happens when proclaimed virtues demand conflicting action? What about cases in which, for example, we torture prisoners and violate their human rights in an effort to secure the country against future terrorist attacks? If protecting the country and respecting individual rights come into conflict, we do not really want leaders to say, “We don’t care about rights” or “We don’t care about security.” We want them to continue to value both and proclaim those values publicly, even if they cannot or will not reconcile them.

Hypocrisy provides one means to do this. It allows actors to espouse, often loudly, some dearly held value but to carry out policies that are not entirely consistent with that value and may even undercut it. We often condemn such action as hypocrisy and it may well be so. Such action may be motivated by duplicitous impulses, but when it is prompted at least in part by value conflict, some sympathy may be in order. The alternatives to this type of hypocrisy are often much less attractive. Denying that value conflicts exist and imposing some kind of ideology of certitude that allows no room for doubt or debate is hardly a promising solution. Certainly this has been tried. Ideological purists tend not to produce happy politics, however. Maintaining such purity in practice requires a great deal of repression and violence. Such fervent ideological commitment also tends to breed its own forms of hypocrisy since purity is hard to maintain in lived lives. Another alternative to hypocrisy is constant exposure of hypocrisy to public scrutiny—anti-hypocrisy. This is more attractive and, indeed, can be a very useful device for keeping hypocrites on several sides of a public debate in check and somewhat honest. But exposing all policies as hypocrisies all the time breeds cynicism and antipathy to politics. It undermines public trust and social capital in a host of ways, delegitimizing the political

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represent on the part of the two countries that have shouted the loudest about the need for Arab democracy, and consider the probable impact of such an approach on the Palestinians.” *The Times* called for less provocative policies. See “The Right Way to Pressure Hamas,” *New York Times*, February 15, 2006, <http://www.nytimes.com/2006/02/15/opinion/15wed1.html> (accessed February 28, 2008).



system overall.<sup>52</sup> Hypocrisy, it seems, is something we cannot live with but cannot live without.

Effective leadership often requires hypocrisy of this kind, hypocrisy that balances conflicting values. Forging common goals and policies that will receive broad acquiescence or even allegiance is what leaders do, but that requires compromise and a delicate balancing of conflicting values. To the extent that unipoles seek to lead rather than dictate and coerce, this type of hypocrisy must be central to their policies. Indeed, in the case of unipoles, this type of hypocrisy is often expected and even appreciated by foreign leaders and publics as necessary for the maintenance of international order and stability. If the United States truly pursued its democracy-promotion agenda with single-minded commitment, many would perceive it as tyrannical or reckless and unfit to continue to lead the rest of the world.<sup>53</sup> Elections are means to peaceful, humane, self-determining policies; they are not ends in themselves. Elections that trigger wars, civil wars, and mass violence may be self-defeating. Promoting elections without regard to context or consequences would hardly be a moral or virtuous policy.

Double talk is the bread and butter of any politician or political leader. Saying one thing while doing another, at least sometimes, is essential in public life and no polity could survive without a great deal of such inconsistency. There are simply too many values conflicting in too many places to maintain consistency. Balancing inconsistent values need not be a vice at all. Indeed, it is an essential skill. Labels for inconsistency between values and policy are not always pejorative. Hypocrisy has a number of close relatives that most of us like. Compromise, an important virtue in politics (especially liberal politics), sits uneasily close to it. Diplomacy, an essential component of a peaceful system, all but demands hypocrisy—and in large doses. Leadership, too, demands a significant divorce of rhetoric and policy to succeed. Unipoles, and sovereign states more generally, are not unusual in being organized hypocrisies. Virtually all politics, from the local PTA to the international system, organizes hypocrisy in important ways to survive and function. Organizing hypocrisy is a central social task for all social organizations and a crucial one for political organizations.<sup>54</sup>

<sup>52</sup> Shklar (fn. 35) has a nice discussion of hypocrites and antihypocrites in chap. 2.

<sup>53</sup> I am grateful to Amir Stepak for bringing this point to my attention.

<sup>54</sup> Nils Brunsson (fn. 35); and Krasner (fn. 3). Note that hypocrisy in organizations is somewhat different from our common notions about hypocrisy in individuals. For a more extended discussion of Brunsson's original concept and Krasner's use of it, see Michael Lipson "Peacekeeping: Organized Hypocrisy?" *European Journal of International Relations* 13 (March 2007), 5–34.

Hypocrisy thus pervades international politics. It is a problem for any actor seeking to legitimate power domestically or internationally. Its effects are compounded, however, in the case of unipoles. Unipoles aspire to lead other states and, perhaps, establish an institutionalized international order. They therefore make more and more sweeping claims about the public-interest character of their policies. The assertiveness and intrusiveness of their policies into the lives of others makes their actions “public” and of public concern in unique ways. Consequently, they need legitimacy more than other states and are more vulnerable to charges of hypocrisy than others. This is probably a good thing. Great power deserves great scrutiny.

It suggests, however, that successful unipoles need strategies for managing inevitable hypocrisy—strategies that involve some combination of social strength (i.e., deep legitimacy) and sympathy among potential accusers with the values conflict that prompts unipole hypocrisy. If the unipole (or any actor) has great legitimacy and others believe deeply in the value claims that legitimate its power, they may simply overlook or excuse a certain amount of hypocrisy, even of a venal kind. Many countries for many years have accepted U.S. and European protectionism in agriculture because they valued deeply the larger free-trade system supported by them.<sup>55</sup> “Good,” or legitimate, unipoles get some slack. Others may tolerate hypocrisy if they can be persuaded that it flows from a trade-off among shared values, not just from convenience or opportunism of the unipole. Agreement to violate one value, sovereignty, to promote others, security and justice, by toppling a sitting government member of the UN was easy to come by in the case of Afghanistan after September 11, 2001. Other states were convinced that this was a necessary value trade-off. Conversely, side agreements protecting U.S. troops from International Criminal Court prosecution look self-serving since other troops receive no such protection.

#### CONCLUSION

The strength of a unipolar system depends heavily, not just on the unipole’s material capabilities, but also on the social system in which unipolarity is embedded. Unipoles can shape that system at least to some degree. They can portray themselves as champions of universal values that appeal to other states and other publics. They can invest in the building of norms or institutions in which they believe and from

<sup>55</sup>Bukovansky (fn. 33).

which they will benefit. The U.S. was remarkably effective at this in the years following WWII. Within its own sphere of influence under bipolarity, the U.S. was a vocal (if not always consistent) proponent of freedom, democracy, and human rights. It built an extended institutional architecture designed to shape global politics in ways that both served its interests and propagated its values. So successful was the U.S. at legitimating and institutionalizing its power, that by the time the Berlin Wall fell, other models of political and economic organization had largely disappeared. The U.S.-favored liberal model of free markets and democracy became the model of choice for states around the world not through overt U.S. coercion, but in significant part because states and publics had accepted it as the best (*ergo* most legitimate) way to run a country.

Constructing a social system that legitimates preferred values can grease the wheels of unipolar power by inducing cooperation or at least acquiescence from others, but legitimacy's assistance comes at a price. The process by which a unipole's power is legitimated fundamentally alters the social fabric of politics. Successful legitimation persuades people that the unipole will serve some set of values. Those persuaded may include publics in the unipolar state, foreign states and publics, and even decision makers in the unipole itself. Legitimacy can thus constrain unipoles, creating resistance to policies deemed illegitimate. Voters may punish leaders at the next election; allies may withhold support for favored policies. But legitimacy can also have a more profound effect—it can change what unipoles want. To the extent that unipole leaders and publics are sincere, they will conform to legitimacy standards because they believe in them. Institutionalizing power similarly changes the political playing field. It creates new authoritative actors (intergovernmental organizations) that make rules, create programs, and make decisions based on the values they embody—values given to them in no small part by the unipole.

Legitimacy is invaluable to unipoles. Creating a robust international order is all but impossible without it and unipoles will bend over backward to secure it since great power demands great legitimacy. At the same time, service to the values that legitimate its power and institutions may be inconvenient for unipoles; examples of hypocritical behavior are never hard to find among the powerful. Hypocrisy varies in degree and kind, however, and the price a unipole pays for it will vary accordingly. Simple opportunism will be appropriately condemned by those who judge a unipole's actions, but other kinds of hypocrisy may provoke more mixed reactions. Like any social system, the one con-

structured by a unipole is bound to contain contradictions. Tragic choices created by conflict among widely shared values will be unavoidable and may evoke some sympathy. Balancing these contradictions and maintaining the legitimacy of its power requires at least as much attention from a unipole as building armies or bank accounts.