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The unipolar world: Theory, images, and Canada's foreign policy priorities

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The unipolar world: Theory, images, and Canada's foreign policy priorities

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Traditionally, balance-of-power issues have occupied a central part in the literature dealing with inter-state relations. The concept of polarity, which is frequently identified with the question of dominant actors or centers of power, has been important since the end of World War II. At times controversial, the concept of polarity has been closely linked with the notion of power, usually between rival states, and has remained fairly important in modern international theory despite its many interpretations and definitions. Variations in the international system have been theoretically connected with the rise and fall of great powers, the re-distribution of power among and between these powers, the relationship among them, and, most importantly, the stability of the system itself. "Poles" are normally identified with great or dominant powers in the system – a fairly non-controversial theoretical assumption as such. However, it carries many theoretical implications in terms of the distribution of power capabilities among the actors.

It is difficult, if not impossible, to precisely measure the influence of various academic theories and opinions on the mindset of decision-makers and policy groups. There is no direct evidence to suggest that the discourse around unipolarity that emerged in the United States in the beginning of the 1990s, and spread around the world, either shaped or affected worldviews of Canada's political leaders. When it comes to debates among American scholars, the details remain largely obscure for most policy-makers in the United States and abroad. However, it would be improbable to believe that policy-makers were unaware of these debates, as they made their way to the bestsellers lists and to the popular press. Regardless of their academic merit, it is likely that Francis Fukuyama's "end of history", Samuel Huntington's "clash of civilizations", and Joseph Nye's "soft power" theses were, indeed, considered by political leaders. Undoubtedly, we could add Charles Krauthammer's work to this list.

I would argue that the discourse that emerged in the early 1990s around the issue of a United States-led unipolar system is one of the latest examples of such a phenomenon. Curiously, at least in the United States, the discourse on unipolarity has probably influenced decision-makers in

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more ways by creating an exaggerated picture of United States capabilities and a false sense of America's place and role in the post-Soviet world. Events in the first decade of the twenty-first century provide a good example of missteps taken by American decision-makers and some of their allies. John Ikenberry noted that President Bush's vision of American unipolarity was "to float like a butterfly and sting like a bee" (*Bergedorf Round Table* 2004, p. 62).

Based on a cursory review of Canada's policy-making during that decade, one could argue that Ottawa often went along with United States policy choices. The classic example here is Afghanistan. However, Ottawa can be seen as unwilling to follow the United States' lead, as was the case with Iraq. At the same time, Canada maintained its independent, but rather questionable and inconsistent, stance on missile defence, but signed on to a rather costly United States-led effort at building a multi-purpose fighter jet. If such major policy decisions by Ottawa are of any indication, one could argue that during the last two decades Canada's policies, especially those closely linked with power polarity considerations, have been guided by practical calculations rather than theoretical insights even though they might have been erroneous at times. Nevertheless, the debates on United States unipolarity, its imperial reach, ambitions or policies, perceptions of America's sole superpower status continue, and as such they are likely to influence future policy-making in the United States, Canada and elsewhere in the world.

Enter unipolarity

William Wohlforth, probably the most distinguished promoter of the unipolar hypothesis, has long insisted that the international "system is unambiguously unipolar". The United States "enjoys a much larger margin of superiority over the next most powerful state or indeed, all other great powers combined that any leading state in the last two centuries". Not only that but "the current unipolarity is prone to peace" and it "is not only peaceful but durable" (Wohlforth 2000, pp. 274–276). Wohlforth has been the most consistent defender of the unipolarity thesis. It was, however, Charles Krauthammer who first championed the idea of a unipolar world. According to his article published in *Foreign Affairs*, Krauthammer pointed out that the United States mistakenly believed that the world was multipolar whereas in fact it was unipolar, with the United States as the sole superpower (1991). Krauthammer also coined "the unipolar moment" phrase, insisting that the world entered "the new strategic environment" with "the centre of world power" being "the unchallenged superpower, the United States, attended by its Western allies" (1991). In this new strategic environment, he perceived the United States to be challenged not by centers of traditional of power, but by "Weapon States" – "small aggressive states armed with weapons of mass destruction and possessing the means to deliver them" (Krauthammer 1991, p. 23). The idea of unipolarity with the United States as its only centre was too attractive not to stick around for years. In 1998, Michael Mastanduno and Ethan Kapstein asserted that "the structure of the contemporary international system" was unipolar (Mastanduno and Kapstein 1998, p. 14). Besides a wide margin in overall military capabilities the United States enjoyed over its "competitors", alongside with its abilities to projects such capabilities globally, these authors cited the United States defence budget as evidence of unipolarity (1998, p. 14). *The unipolar world* by Thomas Mowle and David Sacko opens with the following passage: "In 1991, international politics entered a new era. For the first time in modern history, the world was unipolar: it had only one center of economic, military, and political power: the United States" (Mowle and Sacko 2007, p. 1).

It was the disintegration of the Soviet Union in 1991, and not the end of the Cold War rivalry, that has most frequently been cited as the starting point of this new phase (or "moment") in international politics (Krauthammer 1991; Ikenberry et al. 2009). The United States has been regarded to hold an unprecedented position in international relations. Wolhforth notes that in 2003,

"pundits considered the term 'unipolar' to be too modest; only 'empire' could capture the extraordinary position of power that the United States appeared to occupy" (Wohlforth 2007). Ikenberry, Mastanduno, and Wohlforth see United States primacy in "the global distribution of capabilities" as one of "the most salient features of the international system" (2009). These authors collectively agree that "we currently live in a one superpower world, a circumstance unprecedented in the modern era" and that "the end of the cold war did not return the world to multipolarity" (2009).

As early as 1990, Krauthammer predicted that "multipolarity would come in time... in perhaps another generation or so". That would happen some decades into the future, but in the unipolar moment "American preeminence is based on the fact that it is the only country with the military, diplomatic, political and economic assets to be a decisive player in any conflict in whatever part of the world it chooses to involve itself" (1991, p. 24). He prophesied that the United States could "succeed" in running its economy into the ground, in which case it would not "retain its unipolar role for long"; however, such a "collapse to second-rank status will be not for foreign but domestic reasons" (1991, p. 26). Krauthammer later added that "the essence of that larger interest" of the United States in the world was "maintaining a stable, open and functioning unipolar system" (2002/2003, p. 15). Joseph Nye saw "the new unilateralists", Krauthammer among them, as striving to transform "the unipolar moment" into "the unipolar era" (2004, p. 63). By 2007, Wohlforth remarked that Krauthammer himself had announced the end of unipolarity; he disagreed, and instead proposed few unique rules for better analysis of such concepts as power, balance of power, and such (2007, p. 45). Therefore, the unipolar moment/era "continued" in another theoretical context: Wohlforth with Ikenberry and Mastanduno argued in 2009 that the United States "became a 'unipolar' state" (sic!) as it "emerged from the 1990s as an unrivaled global power" (Ikenberry et al. 2009).

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Polarity in the theory of international politics

Remarkably, Cold War era analyses and public debates were largely free of the idea of unipolarity. No credible scholar, either in the United States or the USSR, posed the question whether the end of bipolarity would lead to unipolarity. However, there were considerable efforts to understand the nature of polarity itself, and bipolarity in particular. In their essay addressing relationship between polarity of the international system and its stability, Deutsch and Singer analyzed "dyads or bilateral interaction opportunities" in the system (1964). They used the ordinary formula for possible interactions between the poles of power: $(N(N-1)) \div 2$. Accordingly, in a bipolar system only one pair of dyad is possible. In a tripolar system we would have three dyads, four poles produce six pairs, five would have ten dyads and so forth the number of dyads rising with the increment of $N-1$ (Deutsch and Singer 1964). This is a purely theoretical scheme, it only addresses the form and not the content of relations (vital interests, competition for resources, strategic calculations, etc.). However, one should be able to describe the logic of theory mathematically no matter how abstract the description may be. Deutsch and Singer's analysis accurately communicates the logic of any system that is based on interactions among its constituent units: in order to be relevant, such systems have to have at least one pair of interacting units, and as the number of units rise in the system so does the number of potential dyads. As "interaction" is a key for theoretical description of the international system – according to most theories, states interact with other states one way or another – a system without any state interaction makes no logical sense. Unipolarity implies the existence in a system of a single predominant pole of power, which enjoys a power status that is much higher than those of other units in the system. Obviously, this lone predominant power must interact with other units of the system, but "unipolarity" implies that such interactions cannot be described at the

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same systemic level as the ones known to exist among great powers (or superpowers). It must be that, in bipolar and multipolar contexts, either great powers engage in two sets of distinct interactions, one with other great powers, while the other set of interactions is reserved for the rest, or a unipolar system simply displays the sort of interactions between the dominant power and the rest of the units of the system that are no different from the interactions found in the systems with different polarity arrangements. The former circumstances imply that if superpowers or great powers drop off the interactions matrix for whatever reason, the system would continue as usual with at least one superpower or great power and the other matrix of interactions remaining intact. Yet, such a thing has never been observed or theoretically proven, and even if this hypothesis were to be proven, it would be immensely difficult to support them with empirical evidence. The latter scenario, with *n*-polar systems having a single matrix of state interactions, appears to be more likely, but such arrangements logically boil down to multipolarity, as other great or important actors of the system will immediately stand out from the "rest of the units", and depending on their attitudes toward the "lone great power", they may eventually engage in the sort of interactions that may exhibit rivalry and even hostility. Therefore, unless it is a purely imaginary moment in history, a unipolar system cannot exist or if such a thing exists it cannot be theoretically described at the systems level of analysis underlined by Deutsch and Singer. Of the lasting studies of the international system and balance of power, the notion of polarity normally implied large degrees of interaction and dynamics among states when defined and analyzed within bipolarity. According to Raymond Aron, bipolar is "the configuration of the relation of forces in which the majority of political units are grouped around those two among them whose strength outclasses that of the others" (1966, p. 136). Balance of power is affected not only by centers of power, but also by the behavior of others: "the balance between the two camps is affected by the behavior of many small units" of the bipolar system (Aron 1966, p. 139). Further, such analysis is not confined with eminent twentieth century scholars, but predates them by more than a century.

It was Carl von Clausewitz, the founding father of strategic analysis and a key influence on the realist school of thought, who introduced the idea of polarity in social analysis. Concerned primarily with actors' interactions during wars, Clausewitz introduced the concept of polarity to address the nature of diametrically opposed interests of two parties, in his case the commanders of the two opposing armies on the battlefield, engaged in military hostilities. According to him:

> The principle of polarity is only valid when it can be conceived in one and the same thing, where the positive and its opposite the negative, completely destroy each other. In a battle both sides strive to conquer; that is true polarity, for the victory of one side destroys the other. But when we speak of two different things, which have a common relation external to themselves, then it is not the things but their relations which have the polarity. (Clausewitz 1989)

In other words, Clausewitz described a simple system of only two units ("sides") engaged in a bilateral interaction within a system ("conceived in one and the same thing") of war, which could be characterized as the structure of this two-unit system, if we were to borrow the neorealist scheme and vocabulary. Further, according to Clausewitz, the structure ("a common relationship") is external to the units ("things") – a theoretical postulate to which neorealists would also agree. What is most remarkable, however, is Clausewitz's argument that it is not the units that carry this characteristic of polarity, but it is "their relations which have the polarity". According to this model, interaction between the units is the key, as without it there is no relational aspect in the system, and there is no polarity. As with Deutsch and Singer's analysis more than a century later, Clausewitz was not looking at the unit level attributes to identify the features of polarity; instead, he focused on relationship or interaction between the units. Theoretical analysis aside, such an assertion would be amply supported by empirical evidence, at least

from military history – not many have witnessed a single army engaged in action on the battlefield. Clausewitz's remarkable argument on polarity was generations ahead of its time, as he proposed that polarity is a characteristic of not an actor, but the system – it is a systemic element external to the actor that becomes valid whenever antagonistic interests arise between them. It is not a simply accumulation of material capabilities that defines polarity between the actors, but the actors' intent or application of these capabilities against the other. For Clausewitz, offensive and defensive capabilities at the unit level mediate this feature – give it a rise or make it "ineffectual" (1989) – clearly a dyadic phenomena that does not rest at the unit level, but echoes Kenneth Waltz's dictum: "everybody's strategy depends on everybody else's" (2001).

Clausewitz evidently borrowed some of his now famous concepts, such as "friction", "center of gravity", "polarity" from the rising scientific fields of his time – notably physics and chemistry. In physics, aside from the current speculation and research in highly hypothetical magnetic monopoles, polarity normally involves a binary characteristic: one phenomenon with two values, for example, an electric charge with either positive or negative value, permanent magnets with two "opposing" ends (the fact that electric currents could influence magnets, leading to development of scientific study of electromagnetism, was a big scientific story in the 1820s, when Clausewitz was working on his book). It is not difficult to see from physics experiments that polarity is a binary phenomenon: polarity is not an attribute of either of the poles, plus or minus, but rather it is an attribute of their unity or the system as such. European thinkers of the nineteenth century, Clausewitz, Karl Marx and others among them, brought into the realm of social sciences the idea that *relations* between empirical entities being more important than the material characteristics of these entities themselves. In fact, *relations* or *interaction* among the units is the essence of any system analysis. This idea was not entirely lost in the twentieth century, although the field of international relations, and the practice of diplomacy and foreign policy-making, were occasionally overwhelmed with beliefs and approaches that practically tried to wish away very likely devastating outcomes emanating from relations among rival states. One of the most notable such periods was the interwar years of 1919–1939, when the League of Nations, British policies of appeasement, and other similar exercises put the burden of the preservation of peace on proclamations and assurances by various state leaders (Rock 2000). The British appeasement policy, for instance, entirely overlooked the fact that interstate relations could not possibly come to a conclusion once and for all after a set of concessions were made to the Nazi Germany – other countries were observing both Germany's aggressive moves and concessions made to it by other great powers of Europe, namely by Britain and France, and subsequently were adjusting their defence policies toward a potential war, thus collectively aggravating systemic level rivalries and eventually bringing the matters to a massive violent showdown.

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Post-bipolar images of the world

The end of the Cold War and the demise of the Soviet regime signaled the beginning of another period underscored by highly distinguished analysis of the "end of history", and the "clash of civilizations". The premise for the end of history thesis lies not only within an inherently and permanently polar-less world, but also within a world that lacks balance of power considerations – the world permanently devoid of antagonistic rivalries at the system level of interactions. Fukuyama's logic for "the end" could be located between those of Hegel and Marx. For the former, an end in the evolution in the world of ideas, including those responsible for the political organization of society signals the end of history – the primary focus here revolves around the form, not the content of society's particular place in history – the ideal and the final form for such an evolution could have been achieved in Europe in early nineteenth century, but to "fill" this form with adequately

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ideal and perfect content of social relations may take decades or centuries in the same Europe, and perhaps longer elsewhere around the world. Marx's rejection of such an abstract vision of history resulted in an overemphasized promotion of the content, that is social relations, which according to him has been historically determined by the clashes between two antagonistic forces or classes – those who own the means of economic production and those who do not. Marx envisioned these two as the permanent formal "poles" of history with struggle and antagonism serving as the chief moving force for progress within the content of social relations or the social system – the classless communist society through its perfect content or arrangements in social relations overcomes the old historical form of class antagonism and signals the end of history.

Fukuyama finds a rather ingenious middle ground which is neither purely ideal nor purely material, but a mixture of the two; namely, political ideologies that verifiably contain both material (as in political forces, parties or institutions, symbols, documents, etc.) and ideal (ideas, ideals, norms, goals, etc.). According to Fukuyama's reasoning, liberal democracy has emerged as victorious among all political ideologies, by overcoming challenges and defeating the rival ideologies, most importantly communism. Locating the main source of historical or international struggles within ideological rivalries was definitely a stroke of brilliance; however, unlike Hegel's and Marx's designs, Fukuyama's scenario turned out to be fully and completely verifiable – unfortunately, contemporary events quickly proved Fukuyama's "end" as somewhat premature and not at all permanent. In his defence, Fukuyama never explicitly insisted that the world became free of poles of power after the end of the Cold War, but his end of history scenario implied this rather vigorously – in his world there was no place left for antagonistic powers at the systemic level ready to destroy or be destroyed. It does not appear to be impossible or illogical to postulate a polar-less international system, but to insist on its permanent nature is an entirely different matter.

Samuel Huntington did not explicitly claim that great powers were irrelevant following the demise of the Soviet Union. However, his theoretical construct led to this conclusion, as he focused on the notion of civilizational power, which suggested that United States power was a function of predestined civilizational affiliations and not practical realities. Here Huntington's view of "the new world" strongly parallels Krauthammer's sentiment of "the unchallenged superpower, the United States, attended by its Western allies" (1991, p. 23). In this image of the world, civilizations still clash despite their very distinct origins and unique nature. Western civilization is defined by its politico-geographic origins (the West), the Muslim world is defined by its religion, the Orthodox world by orthodoxy within a religion (Christianity), the Latin American world by ethnic origins, and so forth (Huntington 1996).

Huntington never convincingly explains what makes such distinct entities clash. Actors with distinct origins, and differing realities and affiliations do not normally clash and, it would seem, they are not "destined to clash". As a very practical matter, one would not expect soccer players and librarians to clash as one might expect hockey players to clash with other hockey players. Notwithstanding its dubious academic merit and its lack of rigor, many took Huntington's thesis very seriously... and not only in the United States. In Russia, for instance, in the late 1990s, hardly any high level discussion on the current international situation and Russia's place in the world was conducted without seriously considering Huntington's ideas as a theoretical framework for future American policies (*Rossiya i Myr* 1998, pp. 23–24; Tikhonravov 2000, pp. 156–164; Dugin 1999, pp. 116–120).

Noam Chomsky agreed with his ideological opponents on the issue of the unipolar world. In his book, *Making the future: Occupations, interventions, empire and Resistance*, Chomsky explores familiar themes of dangerous and primarily malevolent American hegemony and its perils (Chomsky 2012). In his understanding of "unipolarity", Chomsky relies on respected international relations scholars, such as John Ikenberry, and, like Ikenberry, he takes analysis

further by attaching "empire" to the mix (Chomsky and Ikenberry are not alone among those who regard the United States to be an "empire" or its policies as "imperial" – there is no shortage of such unsubstantiated claims either on the left or the right (Chomsky 2008, p. 376). Chomsky, mixes the normative and the didactical, and points out that "the unipolar moment" is likely to make the United States enforce its own policies as "new norms of international law" (2008, p. 377). This may look like a strange claim, contradicting history and current events, but an argument of this sort is no different from Huntington's "clash of civilizations" or Fukuyama's "end of history" claims – none of these scenarios have anything more in common with reality or history than does Hesiod's account of Cyclops, but it should also be noted that they are as persuasive, well communicated, and convincing as Hesiod was with his narrative to his contemporaries.

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Acceptance of the unipolar thesis

These contemporary luminaries of American political thought who assert unipolarity have acquired some following internationally, including some in Canada (Kochler 1993). Interestingly, the unipolar thesis was taken the most seriously in Russia in the late 1990s, where the extremist and revanchist thinkers embraced the idea of a unipolar world and fervently challenged it (Dugin 1999). In most other cases, the interest in unipolarity has remained largely academic. Bruce Gilley poses several questions in his *International Journal* article, among them: "what happens to middle powers that are tethered to a declining unipolar power?" (2011, p. 245). Donald Cuccioletta analyzes Canada–United States relations in the context of "Globalization and a Unipolar World" (2003). Neither Cuccioletta nor Gilley specifically theorize on unipolarity or explain it, but their essays do assume its existence. Noting that "our international system is unipolar, with the United States as sole superpower", Gerald Chan invokes the balance of power theory, which "postulates that the checks and balances of a multipolar system would serve international security better than unipolarity" (*Bergedorf Round Table* 2004, p. 34). Within the context implied by such notions as "unipolar system" and "world's only superpower", France's Minister of Foreign Affairs (1997–2002), Hubert Védrine, floated yet another concept, "hyperpower" – noting that the concept of "superpower" was no longer enough to describe the United States. Vedrine argued that "superpower" implied mainly military rivalry, while "hyperpower" signified United States supremacy in such areas as the economy, the finances, technology, mass culture, and media (1999). In his study of the "contemporary world", Pascale Boniface, a frequent French commentator on America's place in the world, discusses the issue of unipolarity and American supremacy, and points out that despite its unparalleled capabilities, the reach of American power, unsurprisingly, has its limitations (2003).

Those who noticed the beginning of the unipolar moment in early 1990s cited the material accumulation of power capabilities in the United States, its great military budget, its ability to project military force around the world, and of course, its economic wealth. Some subsequently conceded the end of the "unipolar moment" after less than two decades, but remarkably, none of the parameters they initially cited previously changed much by that time: in 2007–2008, the United States was still the largest economy in the world, with unprecedented military power and its projection, and its military budget was even larger – in fact, surpassing combined defence spending of not only great powers, but that of the rest of the world combined. Other great powers, most notably China, Russia, and India, did manage to increase their economic wealth and military might by 2007, but still significantly trailed the United States. Besides, none of them indicated any desire to challenge the United States globally – China and America even experienced a sort of honeymoon during the George W. Bush (affectionately referred to as "the little Bush" in China) decade. What changed from 1990 to 2007 was Washington's bruising encounters with countries resembling those Krauthammer's "Weapon States" (Iraq, Afghanistan, North Korea, Iran), organizations such

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as Hamas and Hezbollah, and international highwaymen guided by bin Laden and Co. These, however, were not supposed to upset America's unipolar world, as they neither figured in the global balance of power calculations nor they fully fit the clash of civilizations model. According to the end of history scenario, there were not even supposed to exist. Further, it looks like that the United States is gradually driving its economy into the ground by undermining its financial strength and position, but even if it manages to hit the rock bottom sometime soon, it will likely remain one of the largest and wealthiest economies of the world, if not the largest.

Scholarship on unipolarity has not been without its share of critics. According to Nye, "some pundits and many scholars argue that US pre-eminence is simply the result of the collapse of the Soviet Union and that this "unipolar moment" will be brief" (2002/2003, pp. 545–546). Nye does not necessarily believe in supremacy of hard power, but he does believe that the world is unipolar:

> In today's world, the distribution of power varies with the context. It is distributed in a pattern that resembles a three-dimensional chess game. On the top chessboard, military power is largely unipolar, and the US is likely to remain the only superpower for some time. (2011)

Very early on, Christopher Lane called the "unipolar" trend in academic and public discourse an "illusion" arguing that another great power would appear soon on the world stage (1993). David Calleo noted that following the troubles in Iraq, fewer people in the United States were willing to speak of the "unipolar era". According to him, unipolarity was never supposed to be taken seriously, and for that matter, "bipolarity" was not credible either (2007). He identified the theoretical principles behind the unipolar world model as "a hybrid theory of international relations – half liberal and half Hobbesian, aspiring to democratic liberalism at home while practicing Hobbesian imperialism abroad" (2007). Calleo criticizes the unipolarity thesis; however, not on theoretical or analytical grounds, but because the United States running the world is a bad policy idea, the United States lacks capabilities to do so, and that the idea is morally wrong to start with (2009).

Appearances and reality in international politics

While he did not try to refute unipolarity theoretically, Kenneth Waltz was a steadfast dissenter. His key contributions to realist and neorealist theory are based on the idea of balance of power (distribution of capabilities), in which interaction among actors plays a key role. Waltz designed a theoretical construct for the system of states, which could not be reduced to any other system or its components. Waltz specifically rejected "reductionism" or theoretical efforts by those who assume state systems to be dependent or being determined by other systems, economic or social or certain features of system's units. According to him, the international system is "composed of a structure and of interacting units" (Waltz 1979, p. 79). The international structure is abstracted from the characteristics of individual units, and instead defined in terms of how the units "stand in relation to one another (how they are arranged or positioned)", the arrangement of units being "a property of the system" (Waltz 1979, p. 80). Therefore, the structure "is defined by the arrangement of its parts" (Waltz 1979, p. 80). Although their places (the parts or the states) in this theoretical construct is mediated by structure, the system and the states are subject to dynamics of a closed system: the international system "is composed of" an international structure and "of interacting" states; at the same time, the system affects state behavior – evidently, the whole point of systems theories is to explain unit behavior through a system. Waltz argues that political structures are defined "first by the principle according to which they are organized or ordered, second by the differentiation of units and the specification of their functions, and third by distribution of capabilities across units" (1979, p. 88). Of these three, only the third represents an ontologically essential element for the international structure: "we abstract from every

attribute of states except their capabilities" (Waltz 1979, p. 99). This distinction in capabilities is crucial for neorealist theories; however, "capabilities" are inextricably linked with such operational concepts as "interaction", "organization", "ordering", "arrangement", "distribution". These operational concepts help explain dynamics and differences between bipolar and multipolar systems, among other things. It is not clear to what "distribution of capabilities" or "interacting units" may refer to in a unipolar system, a system with one centre of power. Waltz has maintained his position that "the unipolar moment" was just that, a moment, which would end very quickly, as such things historically do not last very long. Unlike Wohlforth (2003), Waltz sees unipolar systems as inherently unstable (2003).

Distribution of capabilities among the world's great powers should have a non-essential status within a unipolar system, but interestingly, the question of distribution has not left the scholarly agenda: "what is the character of domination in a unipolar distribution?" has been one of the theoretical questions posed by the authors of a special issue of *World Politics* devoted to the idea of unipolarity. The authors of this inquiry pose the following "straightforward" question: "to what extent – and how – does this distribution of capabilities [in the unipolar system] matter for patterns of international politics?" (Ikenberry et al. 2009). A contradiction should be apparent in this statement that assumes there could be a distribution of capabilities in a unipolar system: distribution between the only centre of power and what? If the other side of this equation is the rest of the world (or the "civilizations"), then the system must be bipolar, not unipolar, which is definitely not the case, if only in Huntington's semi-fictional "clash of the civilizations" model. If "distribution" assumes the existence of some other powers, then the system must be multipolar, not unipolar. Remarkably, it was Huntington that proposed the new concept of "uni-multipolarity" (1999). This was a synthesis of Snyder's view that after the Cold War, the international system appeared "to be unipolar, though incipiently multipolar" (1997, p. 18). Canadian foreign policy in the post-bipolar world exhibited symptoms deriving from this discrepancy between appearances and the reality of the international system. In any case, there is no theoretical model in existence that demonstrates that unipolarity is possible as such, and if it is possible in what ways, whether it could be conceived as a dynamic system or not. The existing literature simply assumes that unipolar systems could exist alongside the parameters established for the bipolar and multipolar systems, which is a faulty assumption, given the fact that the one-actor system model makes the notions of change, distribution, balance of power, dynamics, and interaction rather questionable and irrelevant in ways that were not evident with the bipolar and multipolar models. The chief theoreticians of unipolarity note that polarity is "the adjective [that] describes something that has a single pole" (Ikenberry et al. 2009). "Pole" in the international system is defined as something not characteristic to state interaction, but as a characteristic of state capabilities (Ikenberry et al. 2008). In other words, in this model, the structure of a system is defined by features of its one or many actors – an argument, which was identified as "reductionist" and convincingly rejected by Waltz, implying that the nature of a complex system cannot be accurately described by characteristics of its individual units (Waltz 1979). The unipolar hypothesis parallels Huntington's argument, which defines civilizations based on one or two arbitrary features of its few units. In the case of unipolarity; however, reductionism is pushed to the extremes as a "unipolar system is one whose structure is defined by the fact of only one state meeting these [capabilities] criteria" (Ikenberry et al. 2009). Interestingly, Waltz's theory is cited as the main source of such theorization (Ikenberry et al. 2009).

In 1993, Waltz rejected unipolarity and maintained that bipolarity was an enduring feature of the international system. Russia, or the Russian Federation, had lost almost none if its nuclear capabilities vs. the United States. The Soviet Union was, and the Russian Federation remains, marginal to the United States in terms of economic capabilities... but this was always the case. Moscow has abandoned its Soviet-style revolutionary and class warfare rhetoric and ideological desire to spread

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communism; however, ideological fervor has seldom been cited as evidence for bipolarity. What has disappeared since the conclusion of the Cold War is mutual preparation for the "final war" by the United States and USSR and their respective allies. Within the Clausewitzian context of polarity, this factor is decisive in terms of determining whether true polarity exists or not. However, within the same context, the removal of threat of attack does not at all result in "unipolarity", but rather in something in which no polar relations could be observed. The absence of polar relations ("true polarity") does not make the balance of power argument irrelevant: for all practical reasons the United States and the Russian Federation maintain balance of nuclear arms. The United States does enjoy superiority in conventional arms, but appears to be most reluctant to deploy them in a context that could be interpreted as a direct military challenge to Moscow. Aron observed that "whatever the [polar] configuration, the most general law of equilibrium applies: the role of the chief actors is to avoid finding themselves at the mercy of a rival" (1966, p. 136). The bipolar system of the twentieth century did end with the Soviet Union "losing" the competition, and the USSR falling apart, but to argue that the Russian Federation has been at America's mercy since, would be a wild exaggeration. In the end, the claims of abundant wealth and conventional military capabilities mean nothing, if a country is not willing to use them against a potential rival that may have less such capabilities, but is quite willing to deploy them in combat.

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Canada in the post-bipolar world: Some preliminary observations

Judging by policy initiatives by the Canadian government since the end of the Cold War, it would appear that Canada did not invest heavily in the belief that the world had become unipolar. Canada's Department of Foreign Affairs and international Trade (DFAIT) under Lloyd Axworthy championed and promoted the idea of human security, which conceptually responded to Barry Buzan's argument of security – a contested concept with multiple definitions that compete for political relevance (1991). In the 1990s, Ottawa clearly did not see the world divided among rival centers of power or poles either, as opposed to a world populated by great states carrying immense military and economic power potentials. During that time, Canada pushed for the Ottawa Convention banning anti-personnel landmines – the process the United States, Russia and China refused to join. In 1997, Axworthy argued for an independent foreign policy line for Canada giving preference to "soft" human security rather than "hard" defence issues evolving around the new centers of power (1997). Axworthy's ideas did not go far and never really materialized, as his critics immediately pointed out they would not (Nossal 1998); however, it would be a stretch to argue that they actually damaged Canada's international reputation (Stairs 1999). Axworthy never argued that the issues related to national security were no longer relevant, but if Canadian government's defence policies in the 1990s are of any indication, we could argue that Canada's dramatic cuts in defence spending and reductions in its armed forces suggest a political reaction to the changed international landscape: the demise of the Soviet union was obvious, and that informed the deep cuts in Canada's defence budget. It is difficult to argue with certainty whether Prime Minister Chrétien and his foreign and defence policy people believed that the world had become polar-less (there was no need for robust armed forces) or, indeed, unipolar (America's defence umbrella had become even more convincing). Canada continued pursuing human security agenda in its foreign policy, and it sponsored and led an International Commission on Intervention and States Sovereignty, which in 2001 produced the *Responsibility to Protect* report, very much in the spirit of human security framework. In 2005, when DFAIT, now under Prime Minister Martin's leadership, put out a new foreign policy document for the country, *The International policy statement*, it listed human security as one of the policy priorities. Meanwhile, Canada did not shy away from using "human security" to justify its military interventions overseas: in 1999, Axworthy argued that NATO's war with Serbia over Kosovo was justified on the

humanitarian grounds. In 2001, *Responsibility to Protect* was cited as a policy justification for Canada's involvement in Afghanistan.

Further, Canada's refusal to join "the coalition of the willing", assembled by the United States in 2003, suggests that Ottawa did not really believe in the relevance of the unipolar moment/era thesis to Canadian foreign policy priorities. Canadian officers, those who were on the exchange or visiting programs in the United States, did end up serving in Iraq, Canada already had naval elements in the area of the conflict supporting United States military efforts, and Canadian civilian organizations played an important role in post-Saddam Iraq. In fact, one could argue that Canada provided more support to the United States in Iraq than most of the members of "the coalition of the willing". Why, then, publicly and loudly disagree with "the world's only superpower" or "hyper-power" overseeing the "unipolar" international system? It is quite possible, but highly unlikely, that the Canadian leadership was just clueless of America's newly acquired "unipolar" status, but given Canada's close geographic, political, and cultural affiliation with the United States, it is more likely that the Canadian government simply did not believe in the real-world relevance of such a thing. Similarly, in 2005, Prime Minister Martin publicly refused to join the United States-initiated missile defence initiatives, and did this rather awkwardly and bluntly. It remains unknown as to how Canada intends to stay out of the missile shield as the United States plans would encompass the whole of North America – no convincing explanation from government or elsewhere followed this demarche – but the point here is that Ottawa once again, for whatever utilitarian reasons, decided to greatly annoy the "unipolar superpower/hyperpower". Interestingly, Canadian foreign policy demonstrated more divergence from Washington's policies under the Liberals – this was Krauthammer's "unipolar moment" period when the United States' position in the international system appeared to be both unparalleled and unchallenged; while under the Tories Canadian foreign policies became less dissenting from those of the United States – in the period when America's prestige and global standing took significant battering due to a variety of events, from the embarrassments in Iraq and later in Afghanistan to the ongoing monumental financial troubles.

The unipolarity thesis has never acquired as much currency in Canada as it has in the United States. There is no conclusive evidence that the Canadian foreign policy community has ever tried to prove or disprove this theoretical construct or used it in determining foreign policy priorities. Instead, during the last two decades, Ottawa has spent an inordinate amount of time and effort in searching for its own foreign policy identity. From promoting "Canadian values" to the human security agenda and the *Responsibility to Protect*, efforts were not spared to invent or reinvent something distinctly Canadian, that is, not a copy of American policies and ideals. As critics of such efforts have pointed out on numerous occasions, all these efforts came to naught or were simply overlooked when they encountered hard policies of national defence and security. A real danger arose when decision-makers tried to justify war measures with lofty sounding things like "human security" and a responsibility to protect civilians – these were nothing but face-saving arguments that undermined the credibility of "new policies" and "Canadian values" to justify traditional defence and national security actions.

Even if Canadian decision-makers were to believe that the United States is in charge of the world through some kind of unique historical circumstances, endorsing such an extreme point of view would likely not benefit them in the long run. After all, as Søren Kierkegaard once remarked: "life can only be understood backwards, but it must be lived forwards" (Strawser 1997, p. 17).

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