

Chapter 2

The Struggle for Primacy in a Global Society



A COUNTRY'S MILITARY FORCE IS ONE COMPONENT OF ITS POWER IN THE WORLD. U.S. Navy ships in the Pacific are a show of dominance.



Learning Objectives

- 2.1** Evaluate leadership as one of the important constituents of power
- 2.2** Examine factors that influence the rise and fall of great powers
- 2.3** Analyze the case of the United States to highlight strategies adopted by leading powers to maintain their international position
- 2.4** Evaluate the political, economic, and military backdrop that engendered competitive relations between the US and China
- 2.5** Examine the internal, external, and nonstate threats to America's leadership

One of the most discussed global issues is the rise of China and the decline of the United States. Throughout history, great powers—such as Rome, Spain, and Britain—have experienced growth and decline through competition and internal weakness. **Power transition theory**, which is an offshoot of cycle theories, stresses that the distribution-of-power changes in countries will rise and fall. Dominant countries are often referred to as great powers, hegemonies, superpowers, or states that enjoy primacy in the international system. Often, these terms are used interchangeably. They generally refer to the ability of a country or a small group of countries to have extraordinary influence over the behavior of the other states.

When there are several **hegemons** (great powers) the international system is defined as being **multipolar**. An example is the international system that existed before World War II, when the United States, Britain, France, Germany, Japan, Italy, and the Soviet Union were considered great powers. Following World War II, there were clearly two dominant powers: the United States and the Soviet Union. The new structure was **bipolar**. The disintegration of the Soviet Union created a **unipolar** world that was dominated by the United States.

A dominant country exercises significant power, has few potential rivals, and leads an international system that benefits other powerful countries. Most countries are at the bottom of the pyramid of power. Power is viewed as resembling a three-dimensional chess game. On the top chessboard, military power is essentially unipolar. This is where the United States dominates. Power is multipolar in the middle, where leading players are the United States, China, Western Europe, and Japan. Non-state actors are on the bottom board.¹

This chapter examines the nature of power, factors that influence the rise and fall of nations, and the strategies countries use to maintain their dominant position. It focuses on the United States and China and concludes with a case study on challenges facing China.

2.1: Power and Leadership

2.1 Evaluate leadership as one of the important constituents of power

Central to the rise and fall of dominant nations is the concept of power. **Power** is generally understood as the ability to get others—individuals, groups, or nations—to behave in ways that they would ordinarily try to avoid. *Power capabilities* are usually determined by economic strength, military strength, and political effectiveness. *Elements of power* include a country's geographic area and location, its population, and its natural resources. Other elements of power are intelligence capabilities, the

quality of national leadership, the level of educational and technological achievement, the openness of the political system, the character of the people, transportation and communication capabilities, ideology, and the appeal of a country's culture (generally referred to as soft power).²

Economic power is often seen as the foundation of military and political power. It is measured in terms of the **gross national product (GNP)** or the **gross domestic product (GDP)**. The GNP measures the total market value of all goods and services produced by resources supplied by the residents and businesses of a particular country, regardless of where those residents and businesses are located. The GDP measures the total market value of all goods and services produced within a country. Military power is often the most visible and impressive manifestation of national power. As we will discuss, a major challenge for great powers is to maintain a balance between economic strength and military might. Too much emphasis on the military often weakens the economy, and ultimately the military itself.

A nation's strength goes beyond simply possessing the various resources that are sources of power. Countries, like individuals, must be skilled at converting these resources into effective influence. **Power conversion** is defined as the capacity to change potential power, as measured by available resources, into realized power, which is determined by the changed behavior of others. Knowing what resources to use, when, and how will also affect the exercise of power. Certain factors—such as globalization, domestic support for policies, and the willingness of citizens to support activities associated with international primacy—must also be considered.

An important component of power is leadership. Leadership is the ability to persuade others to behave in certain ways, to shape their interests, and to influence their thinking. Leadership implies a capability to get others to cooperate to achieve particular objectives. At the foundation of leadership is the ability to get others to follow. Leadership can be structural, institutional, or situational. **Structural leadership** is derived largely from the control of economic resources, military power, technology, and other sources of power that enable a small group of countries to shape the international system. Structural leadership is often augmented by **institutional leadership**; that is, the ability to determine the rules, principles, procedures, and practices that guide the behavior of members of the global community. Institutions provide order and predictability and allow the dominant power to exercise control. Finally, **situational leadership** is primarily the ability to seize opportunities to build or reorient the global system, apart from the distribution of power and the building of institutions. Often, this kind of leadership is associated with a specific individual.

2.2: The Rise and Fall of Great Powers

2.2 Examine factors that influence the rise and fall of great powers

States generally expand because of *threats* and *opportunities* in their international system. States fear power vacuums because rival states are likely to take advantage of their failure to act. Weaker states tend to gravitate toward a rising power and to move away from a declining power. Failure to demonstrate strength causes a bandwagoning effect, which benefits the rising power. **Population pressures** influence the rise of great powers. Population growth puts pressure on available domestic resources. To address this problem, countries will venture across oceans or land boundaries to obtain raw materials, markets for their products, and living space for their people. **Uneven economic growth** enables some countries to enhance their power while other countries decline.

Urbanization has usually been associated with freedom and innovation. Urban areas attract diverse groups of people with differing ideas. They also improve the wealth-generating, administrative, and political capabilities of a rising power. The efficient functioning of great cities depends on a commitment to tolerance, freedom, and trust. These characteristics, in turn, attract more talent, wealth, innovation, and technology to cities. Trust, for example, is essential for commercial transactions as well as for mundane, routine interactions. Cities such as London and Amsterdam attracted refugees from religious intolerance and persecution. During the seventeenth-century religious wars, Protestants and Jews migrated to Amsterdam and other Dutch cities that were more tolerant of religious diversity.³

Geography is another factor that influences the rise and fall of great powers. Britain and the United States have benefited from their geographic location and, in the case of the United States, its continent-size territory. They are not located in the middle of warring states, and usually refrain from getting involved in other nations' conflicts until it is to their advantage to do so. They can fight in other countries and avoid destroying their own. Their geography also enables them to concentrate resources on internal consolidation, which ultimately increases their power vis-à-vis other states.

War, which played a crucial role in the formation of nation-states, has been a major factor in the rise and fall of great powers. It usually increases the power of some nations at the detriment of others. Even when countries emerge victorious from war, some are so weakened that the countries that avoid major damage rise to the top. An example is Britain after World War II: It experienced declining power as America's global dominance grew. Historically, war has been instrumental in strengthening

patriotism and nationalism. Historically, Britain went to war against France and Spain to engender cohesion among England, Scotland, Wales, and Ireland.

Many great powers decline because of **hubris** (i.e., excessive pride) and imperial arrogance. They tend to overestimate their power and expand their military power so much that they ultimately erode their economic base. In other words, believing that their power is virtually limitless, they allow a gap to grow between their global ambitions and the resources they have to fulfill those ambitions. This disparity is referred to as the **Lippmann gap** because Walter Lippmann clearly articulated the problem as early as 1943; Paul Kennedy, writing in the late 1980s, referred to this problem as **imperial overstretch**.⁴ Taking resources away from domestic programs for military activities abroad often leads to the unraveling of domestic political cohesion.

2.3: Strategies for Maintaining Power

2.3 Analyze the case of the United States to highlight strategies adopted by leading powers to maintain their international position

Leading powers, facing challenges from rising countries, adopt several strategies to preserve their position in the international system. *Democratic enlargement* is a prominent strategy in this effort. Potential challengers are restrained when they internalize the values, beliefs, and norms articulated by the dominant power. The United States, for example, has emphasized spreading democracy. But the dissemination of values and beliefs by great powers does not guarantee indefinite control, a reality that Britain had to face as India and other colonies demanded for themselves the rights enjoyed by people in Britain, including the right to self-government. Great powers also *build institutions to legitimize their control*. They articulate concepts of an international normative order, concepts that involve principles of order and change within the international system as well as normative claims about the role of the leading power within that order.

Another strategy used to prevent rising powers from creating disorder in the international system is *off-shore balancing*. Following Napoleon's final defeat in 1815, European powers created the **Concert of Europe** to maintain stability by preserving a relatively equal distribution of power among them. The main goal was to prevent one country from gaining so much power that it would dominate the others. *Balancing*—which basically means opposing the stronger or more threatening side in a conflict—can be achieved through efforts by individual states to strengthen themselves and by building alliances to

preserve the balance of power. Closely related to balancing is the strategy of **containment**, which attempts to prevent ambitious powers from expanding and destroying order and balance in the international system. When the Soviet Union marched through Eastern Europe and subjugated the countries there, the United States and its European allies responded by implementing a policy of containment.

Binding and **engagement** are also important state responses to rising powers. The European Union (EU), as we have seen, has its origins in efforts by France and other countries after World War II to avoid the nightmare of another war in Europe by forming economic and political alliances with Germany, which had initiated the conflict. *Binding* aims at controlling the behavior of the rising or threatening country by embedding it into bilateral or multilateral alliances. By making the rising state a member of the alliance, dominant countries allow it to participate in decisions and to contribute to building the institutions that maintain the status quo. *Engagement* attempts to minimize conflict with a rising power and to strengthen those aspects of its behavior that are consistent with the status quo and the interests of the great powers. Eventually, the rising power will have too great a stake in preserving the international order to challenge it.

2.3.1: America's Rise to Dominance

The strength of the U.S. military is unprecedented in the history of great powers. America spends roughly \$700 billion annually on its military. That is about 40 percent of global military spending. It spends three times as much on military research and development as the next six powers combined. America's economic might is also undisputed. With 5 percent of the world's population, the United States produces about a quarter of the world's GDP. Its economy is worth approximately \$17.1 trillion. That is more than the economies of China, Japan, Germany, and France combined. The United States has a per capita income of around \$52,000, compared to \$6,000 for China. It has the best universities in the world, and its culture is dominant globally. Culturally, intellectually, scientifically, and politically, America dominates the global system.

America's emergence as the most powerful country in history was a complex and relatively gradual process. The United States, like previous civilizations, borrowed heavily from others and built on foundations created by others. America, in many ways, was a continuation of British society in the New World. The Pilgrims who arrived in 1620 on the *Mayflower* at Plymouth in Massachusetts were English people who brought English values and institutions with them. The United States utilized strategies very similar to those used by other great powers to achieve its dominant position. It also benefited

from the protection of the Pacific and Atlantic Oceans and unthreatening neighbors on its borders. The expansion of the United States occurred over land through the acquisition of Native American territories. Similar to other great powers, America relied heavily on military force to expand and consolidate its power. Believing in the concept of **manifest destiny**, it eventually expanded its territory from the Atlantic to the Pacific. The **Mexican-American War** (1846–1848) resulted in America's acquisition of two-fifths of Mexico's territory, including California and the present American Southwest, in the Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo, which ended the conflict. However, the issue of slavery divided the United States into two warring factions, leading to the bloodiest war in American history. Even so, the American Civil War removed a serious obstacle to the United States' rise as a great power. In essence, the Civil War forged a common American culture and internal unification.

Internal stability enabled the United States to concentrate on building its economy and broadening its interests. The Civil War produced advancements in American military organization and technologies. However, after the war, the United States demobilized the army, scrapped over half its warships, and allowed the rest to rot. The government declined to remain ahead of other countries in construction of iron-clad steamships.⁵ As a continental-size power, the United States remained largely preoccupied with domestic and regional affairs. Furthermore, America believed that it could be "a City on a Hill" and an example to other nations, albeit from a distance and without getting entangled in their problems. This proclivity toward isolationism has always been an essential component of American foreign policy. But isolationism also emanated from the reality that until the late 1880s, America was far behind great powers such as Britain, France, Germany, Austria-Hungary, Russia, and Italy. In fact, when the sultan of Turkey decided to reduce expenses in 1880, he closed Turkey's diplomatic missions in Sweden, Belgium, the Netherlands, and the United States.⁶ Yet America's vast territory, abundant natural resources, spirit of freedom and innovation, ability to attract immigrants and investments, institutional stability, and cultural values contributed to its phenomenal growth in the 1880s. The United States became a leading producer of agricultural products, coal, iron, and steel. Its banking and manufacturing sectors surpassed those of the major countries. By 1890, the United States had decided to strengthen its navy to be competitive with European navies. This development was fueled partly by America's imperial ambitions, evidenced by its conquest of the Philippines, Puerto Rico, and Guam and its increased influence in Cuba and Hawaii as a consequence of its victory in the **Spanish-American War** in 1898. By ending Spain's declining position in the Americas and the Pacific, the United States established itself as the hegemon of the Western Hemisphere, thereby achieving the

objective of the **Monroe Doctrine** of 1823, namely, diminishing European involvement in the Americas.

Reluctantly, America began abandoning its policy of isolationism during World War I in response to dangers of war in Europe and indiscriminate German submarine warfare. President Woodrow Wilson accelerated the construction of military weapons and warships, drafted young men, and trained them to fight. World War I stimulated a rapid growth in the foreign-policy establishment and brought out a strong American commitment to free trade, the promotion of democracy, support for national self-determination, and an emphasis on international cooperation to achieve world peace through organizations such as the **League of Nations**. American power was applied to protect its growing interests abroad. The United States' rise to global prominence meant that it could no longer avoid entanglement in European affairs, a reality made clearer by World War II. President Franklin D. Roosevelt, even before Japan bombed the American fleet at **Pearl Harbor** on December 7, 1941, expressed an urgent need to strengthen the military. He created the U.S. Air Force in 1947 and a two-ocean navy in 1940. The military draft was reinstated, military cooperation with Britain was enhanced, and military assistance was extended to Britain, the Soviet Union, and China. America's entry into World War II unleashed unprecedented military growth. By the end of the war, the United States was indisputably the dominant global power. But the Soviet Union, especially after it acquired intercontinental nuclear weapons, also gained superpower status. As Table 2.1 shows, the major European powers and Japan, destroyed by war, declined. Figure 2.1 demonstrates the global reach of America's military power.

America's hegemony or primacy rests not only on its dominant power but also on its ability to legitimize that power by making it acceptable to potential challengers in particular and members of the global community in general. Cooperation, integration, and multilateralism became cornerstones of the American-led postwar order. Certain institutions—such as the United Nations, the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, and the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade—benefited most countries and induced them to accept American leadership. Institutionalization and increasing globalization meant that the United States and other countries would be constrained to varying degrees and would embrace multilateralism and cooperation instead of unilateralism. As the global leader, America would play a major role in providing collective benefits or **public goods** (i.e., services such as security, stability, open markets, and economic opportunities). By doing so, the United States would minimize the possibility of envy and resentment that could escalate into the fear and loathing that spawn hostile alliances designed to balance power.⁷

Table 2.1 Great Powers from 1495 to Present

Period	Great Powers
1495–1521	France, England, Austrian Hapsburgs, Spain, Ottoman Empire, Portugal
1604–1618	France, England, Austria, Spain, Ottoman Empire, Holland, Sweden
1648–1702	France, England, Austrian Hapsburgs, Spain, Ottoman Empire, Holland, Sweden
1713–1792	France, Great Britain, Austrian Hapsburgs, Spain, Sweden, Russia, Prussia
1815–1914	France, Great Britain, Austria-Hungary, Russia, Prussia/Germany, Italy, United States, Japan
1919–1939	France, Great Britain, Soviet Union, Germany, Italy, United States, Japan
1945–1989	Soviet Union, United States
1989–present	United States

2.4: Challenging American Hegemony

2.4 Evaluate the political, economic, and military backdrop that engendered competitive relations between the US and China

Combined with what many countries viewed as unilateralism, U.S. military superiority deepened fissures between America and other countries such as France, Germany, Russia, and China. Instead of being perceived as promoting the global welfare, American foreign policy was increasingly seen as being preoccupied with narrowly defined American interests. Instead of consulting, Washington was perceived to be issuing demands and ultimatums. America's preference for a unipolar system and American global hegemony threatened other great powers, most of which favored a multipolar system. This section discusses the principal challenges to American power.

2.4.1: China

China has been one of the world's leading powers for at least four thousand years. China was once far superior to Western Europe in virtually every human endeavor. These historical achievements reinforce China's self-perception as a great power. China's many contributions to human civilization, its population of more than 1.3 billion, its rapid economic growth, and the spread of its culture across continents combine to strengthen its view that it is entitled to play a major role in world affairs. Just as an individual's identity helps influence his or her perception of his or her role in the world, a nation's identity is crucial in its determination of its global status. China's identity is that of a great power. China has traditionally emphasized

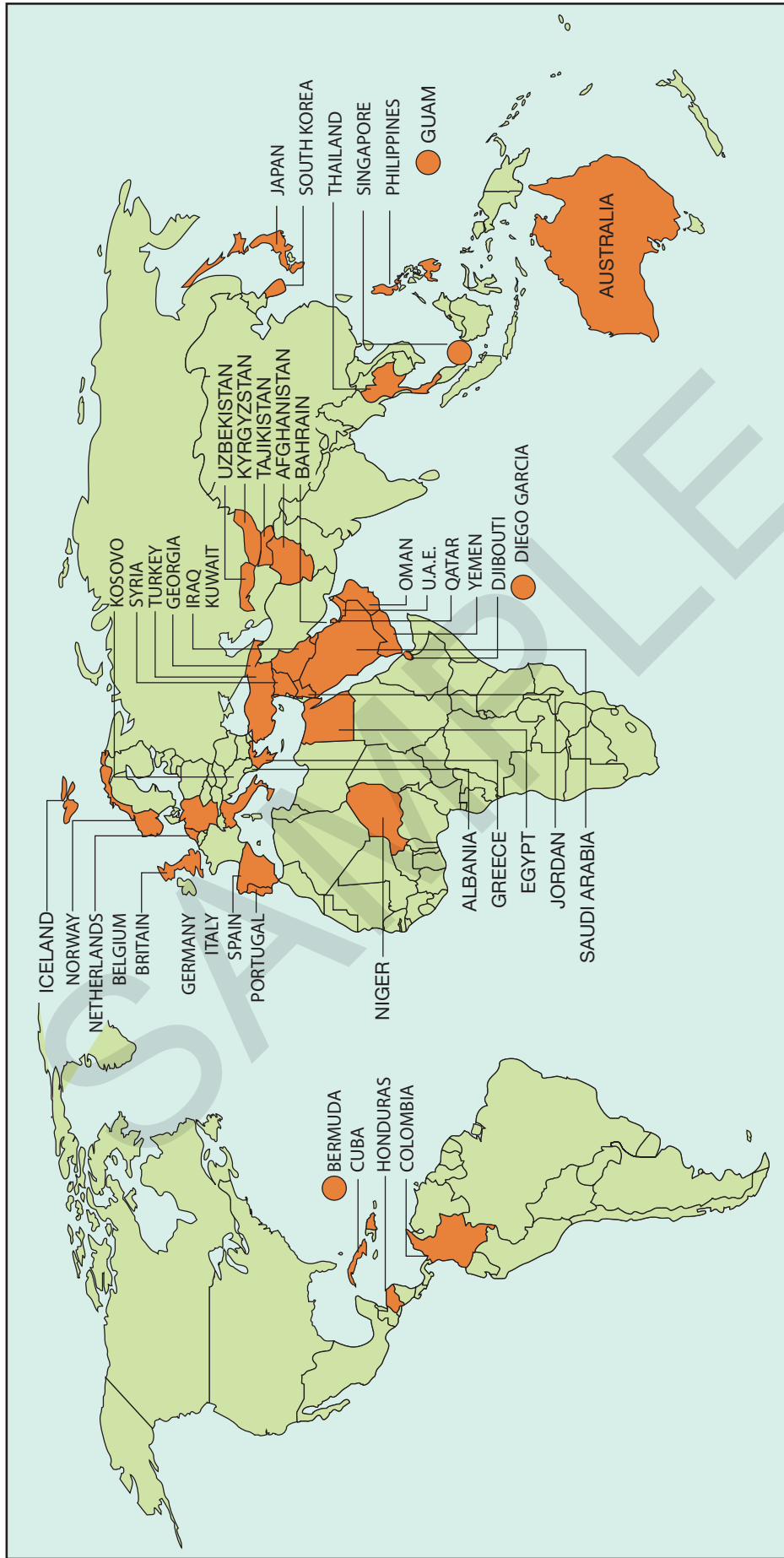


FIGURE 2.1 Location of U.S. Military Forces



THE BUILDING OF INFRASTRUCTURE IN AFRICA, LIKE THIS LIGHT RAIL NETWORK BEING BUILT IN ADDIS ABABA BY A CHINESE COMPANY, IS ESSENTIAL FOR PROMOTING TRADE AND DEVELOPMENT.

protecting its borders, fostering domestic integration and stability, and reducing regional threats.

But China is now widely viewed as a major challenger to America's dominance of the global system. It is using its financial power to acquire companies and gain access to much-needed natural resources. To obtain these resources, Chinese companies are forming partnerships and joint ventures in the United States, Canada, and Latin America. China has established strong economic ties with oil-producing countries in Latin America, the Middle East, and Africa. As the United States became preoccupied with wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, fighting global terrorism, and preventing nuclear proliferation in Iran and Korea, China strengthened its navy and increased its defense spending. Both China's perception of its growing global power and America's perception of the loss of its dominant position in the international system, heightened by the global financial and economic crisis, combine to engender antagonistic relations between the two countries. Each country perceives the other as a threat to its power and ambitions.

China's economic growth has been spectacular since it implemented far-reaching economic reforms and improved relations with the United States in the 1970s. The economy has consistently grown by around 10 percent a year, even during periods when the American economy experienced recession. Even when most of the industrialized world experienced a severe economic recession due to the financial crisis, China's economic growth was roughly 7.2 percent. China's economic growth was spurred by deliberate and often draconian policies to reduce population growth, by the adoption of the free market, by increased

privatization of the economy, by promotion of entrepreneurship, and by efforts to attract foreign investments through the creation of special enterprise zones. China has roughly \$2.6 trillion in foreign exchange reserves. It overtook Japan to become the world's second-largest economy. It has vast dollar reserves and holds 22 percent of America's treasury debt. In other words, America is indebted to China.

Companies from around the world established subsidiaries in China to take advantage of low production costs as well as the growing Chinese market. Despite strained relations with Taiwan, which China claims to be part of its territory, many Taiwanese engineers and high-technology companies have moved to China to take advantage of business opportunities. China's own engineering and technological schools and universities are producing experts in information technology. China's economic might also enables it to convince leading global companies to transfer advanced technologies to it. Such advantages in technology improve China's economic competitiveness as well as its military capabilities. Faced with declining exports due to the global recession, China focused on increasing domestic investing and consumer spending.

Although largely preoccupied with regional security, especially the significant U.S. military presence in the area, China developed nuclear weapons as a deterrent to threats from the Soviet Union and the United States. In addition to acquiring advanced Russian military technology, China is making a concerted effort to build a new generation of nuclear-powered submarines that can launch

intercontinental nuclear missiles. It is also modernizing its air force and reorganizing its army to enable it to be a mobile and technologically competent force able to fight limited wars under high-technology conditions. Growing perceptions of America's unilateralism and its willingness to use its military might reinforce China's determination to balance American power, especially in Asia. However, China is also careful not to jeopardize its strong economic links with the United States or its rapid economic development by allocating an overwhelming share of its resources to expanding its military.

China is building alliances with Russia, symbolized by the **Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation** of July 2001, to challenge the American framework for international security. It is also strengthening relations with India and resolved the border dispute between the two countries. In July 2006, they reopened the Nathu La Pass, which was closed for forty-four years, to facilitate trade. With a third of the world's population, the alliance between China and India has the potential to significantly impact global affairs. China is India's largest trading partner, and there are numerous economic and investment ties between the two countries. The United States is strengthening its ties with India to counteract China's rise.

As we have seen, financial and economic power is widely regarded as the foundation of global political power. Countries whose economies suffer severe declines often experience a diminution of power. America's wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, the rapid decline of its manufacturing sector, huge budget deficits, and its reliance on borrowing from China and other countries to fund its expenditures have contributed to the relative increase in China's power. The financial crisis exposed America's vulnerabilities and raised serious questions about America's capitalism. China clearly perceives itself as the leading rising global power. Although China is unlikely to directly confront the United States for global leadership, its financial and economic strength has influenced it to demand greater recognition and influence in global affairs. China's rise, in contrast to America's decline, is also fueling Chinese nationalism and changing America's relationship with China. U.S. perceptions of and responses to China play a crucial role in shaping relations between the two countries. If China is perceived as a military and economic threat rather than a competitor that also cooperates with the United States, a hostile relationship will be fostered. On the other hand, given the transformation of the international system in an information age that allows individuals to exert influence on international relations, cultural ties and increased understanding between the two countries could override threat perceptions. As the case study at the

end of this chapter demonstrates, China will be restrained by many of its own problems.

2.5: Threats to U.S. Power: Emerging Powers and Nonstate Actors

2.5 Examine the internal, external, and nonstate threats to America's leadership

Emerging market economy countries pose challenges to America's leadership and are diffusing power in the international system. Ian Bremmer and Nouriel Roubini argue that the global financial crisis and the economic recession sent a much larger shock wave through the international system than anything that followed the collapse of the Soviet bloc.⁸ Combined with other forces of globalization discussed in Chapter 1, these developments have further eroded the potency of military might and have enhanced economic power. Emerging market economies such as China, India, and Brazil are posing challenges to American dominance. Confident of their growing economic power, these countries are changing what they perceive to be an outmoded world order established by the United States and Western Europe. The diffusion of power is demonstrated by the transition of power from the G-7 (group of leading industrial countries) to the G-20, a group composed of the world's largest economies, including emerging market countries.

When faced with overwhelming power, represented by the giant Goliath, the Israelites employed a boy, David, with a slingshot to counteract that power. In Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels*, the Lilliputians are able to restrain the giant through cooperation. These stories illustrate the paradox of being a superpower. Instead of using conventional weapons to engage a country that possesses overwhelming power, the weak usually confront the strong in unorthodox ways. Suicide bombings by terrorist organizations challenge America's military and economic power. The United States is fighting its longest war against terrorist groups. This strategy of counteracting the dominant power of a hegemon is called **asymmetrical warfare**. It enables the weaker side to gain military advantages and level the playing field to some extent by using comparatively unsophisticated weapons and strategies. Joseph Nye argues that for all the fashionable predictions of China surpassing the United States, the greatest threat may come from nonstate actors. In an information-based world, power diffusion may pose a bigger danger than power transition.⁹

2.5.1: Domestic Threats to American Hegemony

Empires decline not only because of challenges from rising powers but also because of decisions made by their leaders and the general attitudes and beliefs of ordinary citizens. In other words, empires are usually their own worst enemy. More important than what others do to them, often what they do to themselves is what ultimately hastens their fall.

The collapse of the financial system created by the United States and the accompanying global economic recession eroded global confidence in America's leadership. America's access to easy credit and its failure to effectively regulate the financial system covered up many fundamental weaknesses. The manufacturing sector declined, and many of its high school graduates were unprepared to compete effectively in a global economy. In many ways, America's policies contributed to its relative decline. America became the world's biggest borrower, and its budget deficits continue to escalate. America seemed to lack the fiscal and political discipline necessary to rein in its debt. For the first time in its history, America's triple-A credit rating was downgraded to a double-A-plus rating by Standard and Poor's. This development reinforced global perceptions of America's relative decline and influenced China, which holds more than \$1.3 trillion of U.S. debt, to advocate replacing the U.S. dollar with a new reserve currency. Niall Ferguson argues that most dominant countries fall due to fiscal crises.¹⁰ The inability of the legislative and executive branches of government to work together pushed America dangerously close to defaulting. This further shattered global confidence in America's leadership.¹¹ Extreme economic, political, and social inequality, and growing barriers to upward mobility and achievement of the American Dream, discussed in Chapter 9, seriously challenge America's global leadership.

Most Americans support a volunteer army, one composed of people who generally come from less-privileged economic backgrounds. The country as a whole has demonstrated a low tolerance for combat fatalities and long-term military involvement in dangerous regions. Americans remain primarily concerned with economic issues and the implications of economic globalization. They have constantly viewed economic rather than military power as the more important determinant of global dominance. However, their own financial problems, political stalemate and extreme partisanship, and failure to reduce the budget deficit are undermining America's economic power and strengthening calls for U.S. retrenchment and a sharper focus on narrower national security interests.

2.5.2: Will the United States Remain the Dominant Power?

As American troops marched across Iraq and U.S. planes and ships bombed Baghdad to effectuate what the Pentagon called "shock and awe," the rest of the world watched the most awesome military force it has ever known unilaterally impose its will on another country. America clearly demonstrated that it is a hegemon with a preponderance of power. On the other hand, some scholars, such as Paul Kennedy, caution that overwhelming power often leads a country to engage in imperial overstretch or to expand its interests and obligations to such a great degree that it overburdens its resource base and is unable to defend all of its interests simultaneously.¹² America's difficulties in Iraq made this obvious. Another concern was America's emphasis on unilateralism. Stanley Hoffmann, a leading scholar of international relations, argued that there is nothing more dangerous for a hyperpower than the temptation of unilateralism. It may well believe that the constraints of international agreements and organizations are not necessary. But those constraints provide for better opportunities for leadership than does the arrogant demonstration of contempt for the behavior of other states.¹³ The danger for the United States, it is argued, is that its unprecedented power is likely to influence it to become insensitive to other nations' fear and interests. Great powers often succumb to hubris. This hubris often leads the dominant nation to believe that it is a benevolent hegemon and that it is immunized from a backlash against its preponderance by the attractiveness of its ideology and culture. But because states are competitive and worry about the predominant country's capabilities, they are likely to coalesce against what they perceive to be a threat. On the other hand, rising powers now accept the realities of globalization. They strive to increase their power within the existing global framework.

Many scholars argue that discussions of America's decline are routine and wrong and that the country is likely to remain the dominant power for the foreseeable future. Samuel P. Huntington, for example, identified *five waves of declinism* that turned out to be wrong. The *first wave* occurred with the launch of *Sputnik* by the Soviets in 1957. The *second wave* was at the end of the 1960s, when the United States and the Soviet Union were perceived to be losing to rising economic powers such as Japan and Western Europe. The *third wave* came with the oil embargo by the **Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC)** in 1973. The *fourth wave* was marked by America's defeat in Vietnam, the Watergate crisis that undermined public confidence in U.S. government and institutions, and the upsurge in Soviet-Cuban expansion



POLITICAL PARTICIPATION AND FREEDOM ARE INCREASING AS A RESULT OF GROWTH IN CHINA. A dispute over censorship at a Chinese newspaper in Guangdong province resulted in protestors gathering. This woman's mask has words referring to free speech.

in Angola, Afghanistan, Nicaragua, Ethiopia, and Mozambique. Finally, the *fifth wave* came in the late 1980s as a result of growing U.S. trade and budget deficits and Japan's economic might.¹⁴ All of these waves subsided, leaving the United States as a dominant power.

Huntington and Joseph S. Nye contend that the United States will remain the dominant power. Huntington states that the ultimate test of a great power is its ability to renew itself and that the United States meets this test to a far greater extent than past or present great powers. The *forces of renewal* are competition, mobility, and immigration. Furthermore, America's strength is multi-dimensional, meaning that it is based on military might, economic power, technological capabilities, cultural appeal, political leadership and influence in international institutions, an abundance of natural resources, and social cohesion and political stability at home. Nye argues that the American problem is different from that of Britain, which faced challenges from a rising Germany and the United States itself. Instead, the United States will remain the dominant power but will have to cope with unprecedented problems of globalization that cannot be solved unilaterally. In Nye's view, the problem of American power in the twenty-first century is not one of decline, but what to do in light of the realization that even the largest country cannot achieve the outcomes it wants without the help of others.¹⁵

Case Study

Challenges Facing China

Discussions of China's rapid economic growth and its challenge to the United States for global leadership generally ignore not only the uncertainty of the future but also real and predictable problems confronting China. For example, natural disasters, as we will see in the case of Japan, can derail economic plans and have severe social and political consequences. China routinely suffers from earthquakes, destructive floods, and other natural disasters. Generational change and the forces of globalization are undermining authoritarian governments. China has managed to retain Communist control during a period of unprecedented economic growth. Growth also engenders conditions that empower individuals to seek more autonomy, freedom, and political participation. The challenge facing China is how to manage a transition to a more democratic society without creating domestic instability.

China's power is largely one-dimensional. Its economic power is not combined with military and political power, especially when compared with the United States. China's overall power is not a potent force globally. In general, China has a deficit of soft power, a key ingredient in the rise of great powers. Soft power is the ability to attract and to be admired by others. Unlike the United States, China is not a universal or global

nation that is composed of immigrants from every corner of the earth. How does a Scandinavian, a Nigerian, or an Indian become Chinese? Excessive pollution discourages the migration of highly talented individuals from around the world. Many talented Chinese are leaving due to China's dangerously unhealthy environment. They believe that they would be better off elsewhere. Nor does China's political and social system provide the freedom that is essential for cultivating sustained creativity and innovation. China's failure to attract large numbers of immigrants is compounded by its demographic deterioration, caused partly by its one-child policy. China has a subreplacement fertility rate and will experience an explosive growth of older people. Addressing the needs of an elderly population will exert great pressure on the country's resources and impede both economic growth and military power.

Conflicts with China's neighbors, especially India and Japan, complicate China's rise to global leadership. Neighboring countries are likely to form alliances or to coordinate actions to counteract Chinese power if they perceive China as a threat. China will therefore have to allocate significant resources to resolving various conflicts and managing regional affairs. India, with its own global ambitions, will balance China's power. Numerous conflicts exist between the two countries. There are

also longstanding border disputes, disagreements about Tibet and Kashmir, and conflicts over China's construction of huge dams in Tibet that could divert water from rivers flowing into India. Disputes between China and Japan over islands in the East China Sea known as the Diaoyu in China and the Senkakus in Japan have influenced Japan to increase defense spending. Furthermore, the United States, as a Pacific power, has strengthened military, economic, and political ties with countries in the region. China also faces economic competition from other low-cost manufacturing countries such as Indonesia and Vietnam. Rising standards of living and demands for higher wages will diminish China's competitive advantage. China can resolve many

of these challenges by accepting its global political responsibilities and working largely within the framework of established global institutions even as it seeks to modify them to reflect its growing power and that of emerging economic powers. By developing strong economic and political ties with its neighbors and maintaining a strong but not threatening military, China can reduce tensions and decrease chances of other countries forming alliances to balance against it. Power tends to breed hubris, and hubris often leads to unnecessary conflicts, as we will see in the case of the United States. If China can avoid the arrogance of power, its rise will be perceived as less of a threat.

Summary

This chapter examined the rise and fall of great powers and the essential role of politics, economics, and culture in that process. Countries with strong economies and well-managed political systems are able to spread their culture globally and to exercise power over other states. A state, or in some cases a small group of states, that has extraordinary influence over the behavior of other states is said to have international primacy. States that enjoy international primacy are generally said to have diverse interests. When several great powers are in the international system, it is defined as being multipolar. During the Cold War, when the United States and the Soviet Union were superpowers, the system was bipolar. Today, the United States remains the dominant country in an increasingly multipolar world that is characterized by the diffusion of power.

States and groups of states become powerful and lose their power for many reasons. War is one major factor. Although investing in military power can help turn a state into a great power, it can also lead to its fall as a great nation. Many great powers decline because of hubris, or excessive pride, and imperial arrogance. These nations tend to overestimate their power and expand their military power so much that they ultimately erode their economic base. We discussed some challenges to the United States. Some of these challenges come from nations that are quickly advancing economically, such as China, India, and Brazil. We discussed the challenge to American power from nonstate actors, such as terrorist organizations, that try to undermine the strength of great nations. Finally, we examined how America's domestic problems, especially its growing budget deficits, threaten American power.

Discussion Questions

1. Economic power and military power are often discussed as the two most important factors that make up a great power. What are some other elements of power? How might they contribute to a nation's rise to superpower status?
2. What are the three types of leadership? Provide some examples of how the United States and past world powers have exercised these types of leadership.
3. What are some strategies for maintaining power and preventing rising powers from creating disorder in the international system? Provide some examples of countries that have used some of these strategies.
4. What are some current examples of challenges to American hegemony? What are the strongest challenges the United States faces to maintain its status as a great power? Explain.
5. Does China pose a major threat to the United States? How can U.S.-China relations be managed in light of increased competition?