politics. The third assumption establishes the primacy of security. It also establishes that states are not willing to trade away their security for other benefits. Other possible goals are pursued only after security has been assured. This assumption should lend considerable predictability to states' behavior. Because all states have the same goal, we need not worry about idiosyncratic factors such as the personalities of individual leaders or the domestic political institutions that govern state behavior. Every state is a role player, with the role dictated by its security needs.

The final assumption tells us that states are always interested in increasing their influence over other states. No state is content to be weak, but states accept being weaker than they might otherwise be if pursuit of greater power would place their security at risk. This assumption places restrictions on the pursuit of power. If a state becomes sufficiently powerful that other states foresee the possibility that their security will be threatened by it in the future, then they will join together to deprive the growing state of the power to threaten them. Thus, an increase in a state's power can actually make the state weaker in the long run. This happens if the increase in power alarms rivals and mobilizes them to form an opposition alliance. A coalition or alliance of states will come together to beat back a growing state if that state's power threatens to become large enough that others face a possible loss of sovereignty. This phenomenon is sometimes known as the security dilemma.

These four assumptions provide a parsimonious and potentially powerful view of international politics. Several important hypotheses are said to follow from them. In Chapter 15, we looked at hypotheses that have to do with alliances. In this chapter, we will examine those hypotheses that directly concern the risk of war. The most important structural neorealist hypotheses about the threat of war or instability are as follows:

1. Bipolar systems are more stable than multipolar systems.
2. States engage in balancing behavior so that power becomes more or less equally divided among states over time.
3. States mimic, or echo, each other's behavior.

How Well Does Neorealism Do in Explaining War and Instability?

Our examination of neorealist theory and the risk of war will proceed in stages. First, we investigate whether the three primary neorealist hypotheses are logically implied by the four assumptions of neorealist theory. Then we examine how well those hypotheses describe historical circumstances. In this way we can assess the logical and historical significance of the neorealist view of war and international politics.

If the neorealist hypotheses are not accurate descriptions of international affairs, then their logical status is unimportant. Hypotheses that are logically implied by the

assumptions of a theory but that are inconsistent with observed behavior serve to falsify that theory's predictions. If the neorealist hypotheses are consistent with observed behavior but do not follow from the assumptions, then we will need to alter the assumptions to account for the observed facts. In this case, a different set of implications will likely follow from these new assumptions. We will want to know whether those new implications are also consistent with the facts. It is through this process of evaluation and alteration that theories grow and we achieve a better understanding of how the world works. Finally, if the hypotheses follow logically from the assumptions, and if the hypotheses accurately account for observed behavior, then neorealist theory is a powerful tool for understanding international politics.

BIPOLARITY AND STABILITY

A **bipolar** international system is dominated by two very powerful states, with weaker nations clustered around each of the two power poles. A **multipolar** system consists of more than two very powerful states. The great powers in a multipolar environment may also attract the support of other, lesser states. In a multipolar system, there must be more than two such concentrations of power.

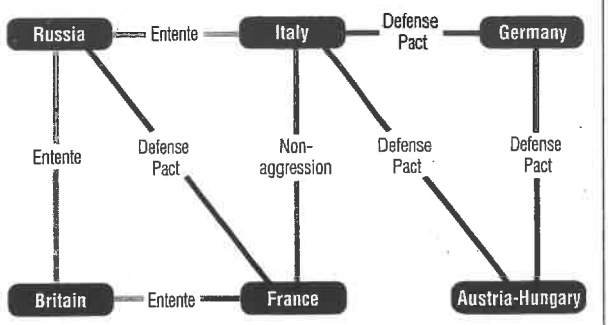
The argument that bipolar structures are more stable than multipolar structures is built on the claim that there is more uncertainty in a multipolar system than there is in a bipolar system. In a multipolar world it is difficult to anticipate how nations will organize themselves in the event of a threat by one nation against another. There are so many possible linkages between different blocs of nations that the commitments of third parties not directly involved in a confrontation become difficult to predict. So, bipolarity is thought to alleviate two of the conditions we have discussed that are thought to increase the risk of war: uncertainty and commitment problems.

Suppose the international system consists of five powerful nations, A, B, C, D, and E, each of which is the leader of a bloc. If A and B get into a squabble, each will be relatively uncertain about what C, D, and E will do. In contrast, if the international system consists of only two big powers, A and B, then there must be less uncertainty. Each is the adversary of the other, and neither needs to worry about anyone else. Neorealists conclude that because there is less uncertainty in a bipolar world, fewer errors are made by the leaders of states in bipolar international politics. Therefore, they claim, bipolar systems are more stable than multipolar systems.

We can see how this argument about polarity and uncertainty works by considering the configuration of international military commitments shown in Figures 16-2 and 16-3. Figure 16-2 displays the military commitments of the major powers on the eve of World War I. Six major powers were actively engaged in European diplomacy in 1914. They were Austria-Hungary, Britain, France, Germany, Italy, and Russia. The United States and Japan were also great powers at that time, but their foreign policies, although actively promoting trade, generally reflected a desire to stay out of European security questions.

It is evident from Figure 16-2 that there was considerable uncertainty about how the great powers would respond to hostilities between Austria-Hungary and Russia over the future of Serbia. The future of Serbia was the immediate issue that led to World War I. It is notable that the combinations of states that eventually formed the two sides in World War I did not make up obviously distinct sets of interests before the war. England, France, and Russia stuck together in fighting against Austria-Hungary and Germany, but that they would do so was neither inevitable nor obvious before the war. Italy, with ties to both camps, held back, waiting to see how the war was going. It finally came in on the side of the Triple Entente in April 1915. Figure 16-2 reminds us that explanations of World War I that say that the alliances worked like trip wires, making a massive war inevitable, rely more on hindsight than on the actual prewar facts.

FIGURE 16-2
European Great Power Alliance Commitments, 1914



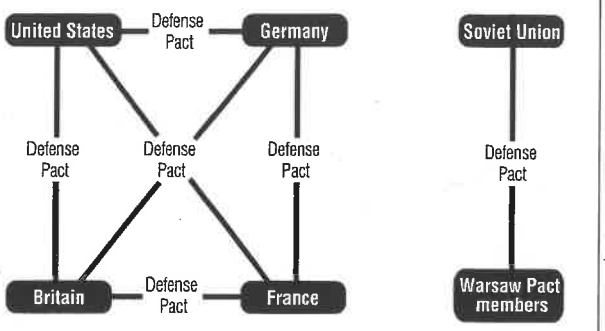
After World War I was over, many experts maintained that rigid alliance commitments created a trip wire that allowed the 1914 crisis between Austria-Hungary and Serbia to escalate into a global conflict. However, a look at the great power alliance ties in June 1914, just before World War I erupted, suggests that in fact the boundaries demarcating commitments were far from clear.

England had revealed itself to have weak ties to France and Russia, promising only to consult with them and no more. One might have readily imagined that Britain would stay out of the war altogether. In fact, that's just what the Germans thought the British would do. France, for its part, was closely aligned with Russia but also had a neutrality pact with Italy. Italy, in turn, was strongly associated with Austria-Hungary and Germany through an alliance that promised mutual defense. The sides that appeared to be polar opposites after the war began seemed to be intricately intertwined beforehand. Certainly, the war would have been much more limited had Britain stayed out of it and had France participated only half-heartedly.

The ambiguous alliance commitments of 1914 stand in sharp contrast to the structure of major power commitments in European affairs during the cold war. As shown in Figure 16-3, European security affairs were dominated by five major powers: Britain, France, Germany, the Soviet Union, and the United States. China had emerged as a great Asian power, but it was little involved in European security questions. Likewise, Japan was a great economic power but not a major player on the European or world security stage.[a]

[a] Germany's primary strategic importance during the cold war lay in the fact that both the United States and the Soviet Union had stationed large numbers of troops on German soil. Germany was the point at which a war between the United States and the Soviet Union was most likely to begin.

FIGURE 16-3
European Great Power Alliance Commitments, 1989



The bipolar structure of major power alliances during the cold war contained little ambiguity.

The major power system during the cold war years was unambiguous. The United States led the NATO alliance, which included all of the European great powers other than the Soviet Union, and the Soviets led the Warsaw Pact countries. No alliance commitments ran from one bloc to the other to create ambiguities about who was committed to whom. The cold war bipolar structure contained very little uncertainty indeed.

We can see that a system in which two states are dominant is unlikely to contain much uncertainty. Likewise, a multipolar system with more than two important centers of power can easily contain uncertainty. It appears that neorealists are correct in their contention that in multipolar systems decisions are made under greater uncertainty than in bipolar systems. But there is a considerable logical leap from the association of uncertainty with multipolarity to the association of multipolarity with instability and bipolarity with stability. Indeed, some have argued that multipolar systems are more stable than bipolar systems precisely because multipolarity produces uncertainty.[5] Others have argued that there may be no relationship at all between polarity and stability.[6]

NEOREALISM'S BIPOLARITY HYPOTHESIS DOES NOT FOLLOW FROM THE THEORY'S ASSUMPTIONS

There are several problems with the argument that because bipolar systems encompass less uncertainty than multipolar systems they yield greater stability. To start with, this argument is not implied logically by the four key assumptions of neorealism. In fact, those assumptions say nothing at all about uncertainty or how uncertainty affects stability. To conclude that there is a relationship between uncertainty and the stability of the international system, we would need to make additional assumptions.

In particular, we would need to make some assumption about how states (or decision makers) respond to uncertainty. Here we run into disagreement about what uncertainty implies about decision making and stability. For example, uncertainty may prompt states (or their leaders) to behave cautiously. At the same time, powerful nations may attempt to eliminate or diminish a rival precisely because greater certainty makes evident the opportunity to do so. If uncertainty promotes caution and certainty encourages opportunism, then bipolarity in fact encourages instability. This is essentially the argument that led Karl Deutsch and J. David Singer to conclude that multipolar systems are more stable than bipolar systems.[7]

The evidence fails to support the neorealist hypothesis that it is necessary (but not sufficient) that each side in a dispute thinks its chance of victory is greater than 50 percent before war will occur. If the neorealist hypothesis were correct, then the entry in the cell that corresponds with the row labeled "Yes" and the column labeled "Initiator's Probability of Victory < 50 percent" would be zero because that cell violates the hypothesized necessary condition for war. Not only is it not zero, but it is not meaningfully closer to zero than the cell that corresponds to the row labeled "Yes" and the column labeled "Initiator's Probability of Victory [greater than] 50 percent." The data in Table 16-2 take into account all disputes within Europe between 1816 and 1974. As such, the table presents a broad-based test of this neorealist claim.

TABLE 16-2

Is a Greater than 50–50 Chance of Victory a Necessary Condition for War?

Did War Occur?	Initiator's Probability of Victory > 50 percent	Initiator's Probability of Victory < 50 percent
Yes	52 (13.1%)	37 (11.9%)
No	345 (86.9%)	273 (88.1%)

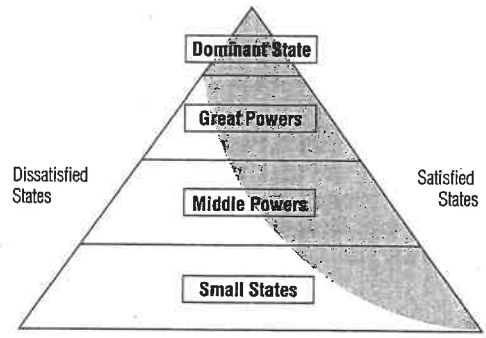
Source: Bruce Bueno de Mesquita and David Lalman, *War and Reason* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), 70.

After applying the very standards for evaluating theories that leading neorealists suggest,[19] we must conclude that neorealism's central empirical claims are false. As directed in Chapter 4, we have subjected these claims to numerous distinct and demanding tests and found that the central hypotheses do not follow from the stated assumptions. In an effort to save the theory, we have modified it and then retested our refined proposition while still faithfully applying the definitions of terms used in stating the theory. However, these modifications either contradicted core assumptions or failed to meet the test of the empirical record. In light of this, it is difficult to see how we can avoid the conclusion that the neorealist and realist views are falsified. Still, there is the first rule of wing-walking. We should not abandon neorealist theory unless we can offer a demonstrably better alternative. In the section that follows, we will examine a structural alternative that does in fact do better. And in Chapter 17, we will examine a strategic approach that does better still.

THE POWER TRANSITION: A STRUCTURAL ALTERNATIVE TO NEOREALISM

Building on the work of Edward Carr, A. F. K. Organski constructed what was perhaps the first challenge to realism that was neither idealistic nor normative.[20] Organski's power transition theory shares with realism a focus on the importance of power in international affairs. However, it breaks with the balance-of-power realism of Morgenthau and Waltz, most notably by maintaining that the international system is not anarchic. Instead, foreshadowing the later development of neoliberal theory and the study of international political economy, Organski suggested that the international system is hierarchically organized. Figure 16-6 depicts the power triangle that Organski suggested cap-

FIGURE 16-6
The Power Hierarchy in Power Transition Theory



Power transition theory divides the world into two coalitions: satisfied states and dissatisfied states. The stronger a state is, the more likely that it is satisfied with the organization of the international system and the status quo that reflects that system's rules. Weaker states are more likely to be dissatisfied.

tures fundamental elements of international affairs. The triangular shape reflects the observation that the more powerful and influential a category of states is, the fewer the states in that category. Many nations are small, with few resources with which to influence international relations. Some examples of such states include Chad, Haiti, Laos, and Liechtenstein. Middle powers are less numerous, as reflected by the smaller area of the power triangle given over to them, but they are generally more influential than the small states. Examples of middle powers include Mexico, the Netherlands, Nigeria, and Pakistan. The great powers, such as Britain, China, France, and Russia, exert substantial influence over international affairs. The dominant state throughout the post–World War II years has been the United States. Its position at the pinnacle of the power triangle is ensured by a combination of great national wealth, great per capita wealth, and overwhelming military prowess. According to Organski's power transition viewpoint, there is only one dominant state at any given time. That state establishes the fundamental rules and **norms** of behavior in the international arena.

Figure 16-6 also hints at another assumption of Organski's power transition theory and of Robert Gilpin's similar theory of hegemonic stability (1981). The shaded area in the power triangle indicates that there is a set of satisfied states, content with the international order. However, the larger, unshaded area indicates that most states are dissatisfied with the international order. In this view of the world, rather than wishing to maximize security or power, nations are interested in maximizing their control over the rules and customs that govern international interactions so that they can define the status quo according to their interests. Dissatisfaction, then, is most prevalent among those least content with the existing status quo. However, it is the more powerful dissatisfied states that represent the biggest threat to international peace and stability. If they have the wherewithal, they will, according to power transition theory, try to alter the hierarchy to put themselves at the top.

Returning for a moment to a topic from Chapter 15, we can now see that James Morrow's theory of alliances combines aspects of neorealism and power transition theory (1991a). Neorealism contends that states are always seeking security; power tran-

sition theory contends that states are always seeking control over the status quo (autonomy, in Morrow's terms). In Morrow's view, states are seeking a mix of security and autonomy that will allow them to alter the status quo in their favor.

The rules of the international system are selected by the dominant state and enforced by that state and other members of the satisfied coalition. System-transforming conflicts occur when a dissatisfied state gains sufficient power to challenge the existing order. Thus, we can see that the focus of hierarchical theories like the power transition theory is very much on the rules and norms that govern behavior, rather than on the distribution of power or state security per se.

The supposition that the dominant state determines rules and norms of action is an important departure from realist or neorealist thinking. This feature of power transition theory places it somewhat closer to liberal or neoliberal theory. Although power transition theorists share the realists' view of the state as the central actor in international affairs, they disagree with the realist assumption that all nations are trying to maximize power and security.[21] Rather, power transition theorists argue that states have policy objectives that they wish to impose on other states. These goals or objectives can best be imposed by establishing rules and norms that govern international interactions. Control over the rules and norms, then, is tantamount to control over the course of international politics.

The very fact that a dominant state can impose rules suggests that it has the means at its disposal to enforce those rules. Enforcement depends on power. As such, power transition and hegemonic stability theorists consider power to be the essential instrument of international affairs. In this way they differ markedly from the so-called idealists, who dominated thinking about international relations before World War II. For idealists, ethics, morality, and maximizing collective welfare rather than individual national well-being were the normative guideposts for international intercourse. Their views are currently enjoying a renaissance in more sophisticated constructivist theories of the role that ideas play in international affairs.[22] For power transition theorists, however, normative concerns or social constructions are not central to understanding international relations.

EXAMPLES OF INTERNATIONAL RULES AND NORMS

What are the rules and norms governing international politics? Examples abound both in the domain of international economic exchange and in that of security. After World War II, the United States promoted a currency regime known as the **Bretton Woods Agreement**. At Bretton Woods, the United States dollar became the currency against which the value of all other currencies was pegged. Before Bretton Woods, much of the world was on the gold standard, meaning that the price of an ounce of gold was fixed, but the amount of a given currency that was needed to purchase that ounce of gold fluctuated. The gold standard began to crumble during the interwar years with international financial interests looking for a substitute.[23]

Under the Bretton Woods Agreement, the U.S. dollar took over the role of gold, becoming the fixed standard against which other money was valued. This meant that the dollar became the most desired means of exchange in international markets, and hence that the United States would be at center stage in economic dealings. The abandonment of the Bretton Woods Agreement by President Richard Nixon led some observers to speak of a decline in American hegemony.[24] Whether there was a decline in American hegemony or not,[25] what is important to recognize here is that the Bretton Woods Agreement represented a new set of rules imposed on the international community after World War II by the hegemonic United States.

Over the past several decades the United States has been the world leader in pressing for the establishment of a free trade regime, first through the GATT (the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade) from 1947 to 1995 and then through the World Trade Organization (WTO). Although, as we saw in Chapter 13, the United States has not always practiced free trade itself, it has steadfastly promoted its practice among other nations. The free trade regime enforced by the GATT and now the WTO and other trade arrangements such as NAFTA establishes rules for judging whether or not specific trade practices are protectionist. Even though their enforcement powers are limited, these agreements still maintain a rule-based and normative influence on the trading practices of their members. For example, tariff levels are today less than one-tenth of what they were in 1947, when the GATT first began to operate, and they appear to continue to be dropping under the supervision of the WTO.

Perhaps the most visible norm engendered by U.S. international leadership has been the promotion of democratic institutions and the protection of human rights. These ideas are clearly imbedded in the American perception of what constitutes an appropriate basis on which people should be governed. Long before the United States emerged as a hegemonic power, it was touting the benefits of democratic practices. Most visible among its early efforts was the inclusion of self-determination as one of Woodrow Wilson's famous fourteen points articulated at the end of World War I.

Although the United States has from time to time collaborated with nondemocratic and even antidemocratic states, its closest ties have always been reserved for like-minded governments. It is unlikely that NATO, for example, would have remained as cohesive as it did throughout the cold war if the members shared only a common fear of the Soviet Union. Surely, if that were the only glue holding NATO together, some members would have defected and made separate arrangements with the Soviets. All of the members of NATO, however, shared a common commitment to democracy and human rights. Indeed, some West European states, like Spain and Portugal, were prohibited from joining NATO or the European Community until their dictatorships (under Gen. Francisco Franco in Spain and Antonio de Oliveira Salazar in Portugal) were replaced by democratic systems. Likewise, NATO expansion to include Eastern European states formerly in

the Warsaw Pact has depended in part on the ability of those states to demonstrate a commitment to democratic norms of conduct.

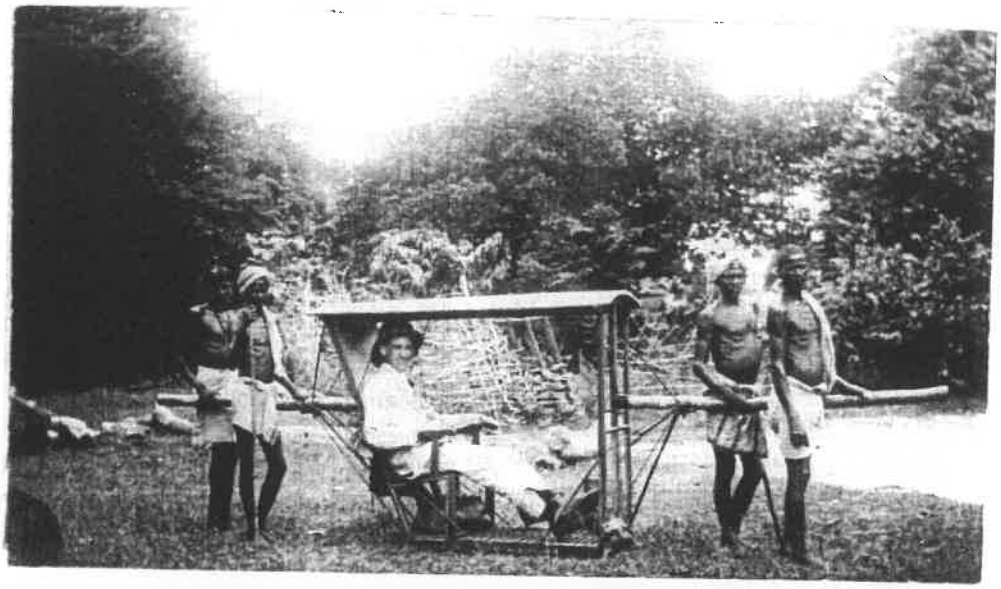
On the security front, the United States was a prime mover behind the establishment of the United Nations as an institution designed to promote peace throughout the world. Although the UN General Assembly has frequently voted in support of points of view opposed by the United States, the United States remains an active UN participant. The United States, especially during the presidencies of George H. W. Bush and Bill Clinton, steadfastly looked to the United Nations to provide legal, political, and moral support for major international military interventions. It has relied on UN coalitions to justify war against Iraq and Afghanistan and military actions against Somalia, Haiti, and others. To be sure, U.S. political and financial support of the United Nations has waxed and waned, as during the build-up to the 2003 war against Iraq, but the United States today remains a promoter of a peacekeeping, security-providing role for the United Nations.

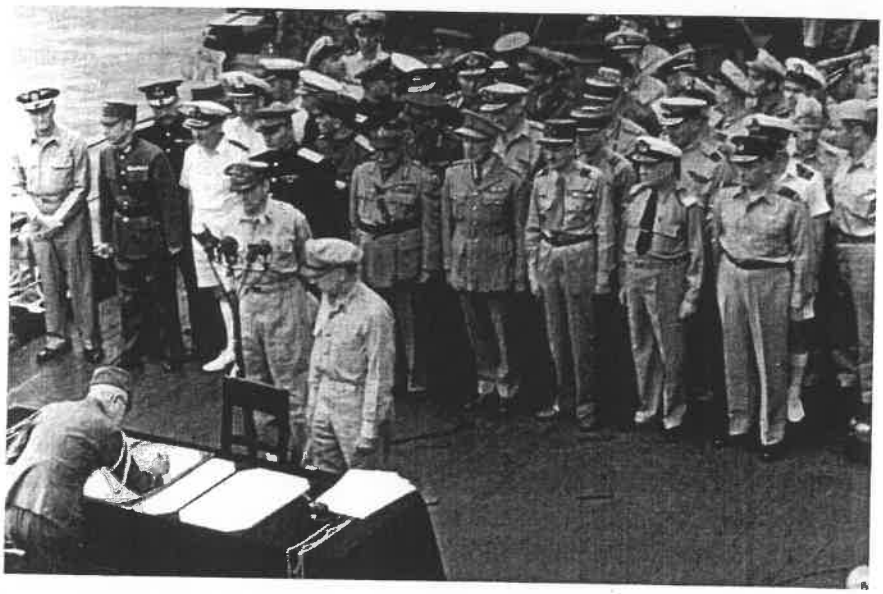
What rules or norms of international conduct did Britain try to enforce around the world during its time as the hegemonic power of the nineteenth century? Provide examples of changes in conduct imposed by the French under Napoleon on their far-flung empire. Had Germany won World War II, what might it have introduced as the norms and rules of international relations? In less recent times, did the Catholic Church impose rules of behavior on other states when it was Europe's hegemonic power? How was the Church's hegemony challenged and ultimately defeated? Look back still further to ancient Rome or Greece. What rules did they impose? Examine Edward Creasy's *Fifteen Decisive Battles of the World* (1960). He chose his "decisive" battles precisely because they represented turning points in international norms and rules.

It is not difficult to imagine that many of the rules and norms promoted by the United States would have been discarded had the Soviet Union won in the competition to become world hegemon. Certainly the Soviets were interested in promoting socialist economic systems rather than the free trade, market-oriented regime espoused by the United States. The Soviets would have promoted authoritarian governments, as they did throughout their sphere of influence, to protect and enhance the control of Communist parties around the world. They probably would not have supported the United Nations politically if it routinely opposed their point of view.

DISSATISFACTION, THE STATUS QUO, AND WAR

When their perspectives on the rules governing international interactions differ markedly, dominant states and those in the groupings below them in the power triangle may clash. **Dissatisfaction** with the status quo becomes the principal source of international tension. Conflict arises when a powerful, dissatisfied state grows strong enough to challenge the authority of the hegemon. Because such a challenge concerns the very way in which international affairs are conducted, the ensuing conflict is fierce and costly. Wars over changes in the rules have the potential for transforming the international system.





Britain was content to develop democratic practices at home, without showing much enthusiasm for promoting them abroad. In contrast, the United States aggressively pursued the installation of a democratic system in Japan following World War II. Here we see a British gentleman (top), attended by Indian servants at the beginning of the twentieth century. The British, except when under pressure from the Indians, were oblivious to developing India's political institutions. By contrast, General Douglas MacArthur (below right), shown here witnessing the Japanese signing of the surrender agreement at the end of World War II, surprised the conquered Japanese by the respect he accorded them and by his and America's commitment to helping Japan rebuild itself as a prosperous, democratic society after the war.

But when do such wars occur? The dominant state will not sit by and permit the challenger to pass it by in power. It will not peacefully concede control to the upstart. At the same time, the challenger is reluctant to start a fight before it has enough power to give it a credible chance of defeating the hegemon. The conjunction of these conditions arises, according to power transition theorists, when the two rivals are just about equal in power. This time period—the period during which the challenger roughly comes to equal and then surpass the dominant state in power—is the period known as the power transition. It is the time when the threat of a major war is hypothesized to be at its peak.

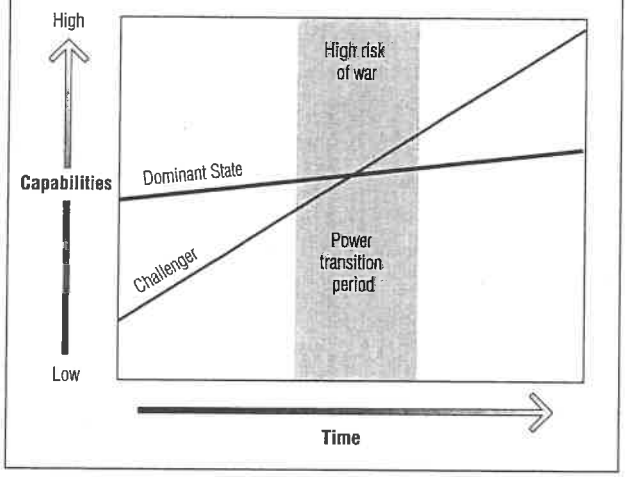
Contrary to the balance-of-power perspective, power transition and hegemonic stability theorists believe that major wars are most likely to occur when the power of the opposed states is about equal. According to these theorists, a balance of power *promotes* war. They maintain that system-transforming wars—that is, wars that lead to a new power hierarchy and to new rules and norms—will occur only when the power of a challenger and the dominant state are about equal and the power of the challenger is increasing faster than that of the dominant state. These claims have been extended and shown to have empirical bite at the regional as well as the global level, so that regional hegemons apparently face the same pressures and the same sources of war as their global counterparts.[26]

How does a threatening balance of power develop in the first place? It should be evident from the power triangle that it is virtually impossible for transition-inducing conflict to emerge as a result of alliances. After all, satisfied states are concentrated at the upper reaches of the power triangle; they are not likely to join forces with a powerful, dissatisfied state intent on challenging the hegemon because satisfied states, by their very definition, prefer the rules and norms of the existing status quo to those of a potential hegemonic rival. Thus, we must look elsewhere for the source of the shifts in power that create a transition-inducing balance of power.

For power transition and hegemonic stability theorists, a threatening balance of power emerges as a result of differing rates of internal growth between a dominant state and a challenger state. These theories still give little attention to domestic politics per se, but they do recognize that internal factors shape rates of growth. In fact, power transition theory defines domestic affairs as those issues pertaining to economic matters such as the skills of the population, the quality of infrastructure, and the value of national resources such as labor, capital, and natural assets. Domestic politics affects these matters only in that each polity varies in its ability to mobilize its society's wealth for foreign (or domestic) policy purposes. Growth rates themselves are not viewed as a product of strategic decision making or internal politics, in contrast to the selectorate theory discussed in Chapter 12. Quite the contrary, the leading power transition theorists maintain that the long-term rate of economic growth is inevitable and cannot be altered, even by such massive shocks as national defeat in war, even if such a defeat results in altered domestic political institutions.[27]

The likelihood of war, as predicted by the power transition and hegemonic stability theories, is summarized in Figure 16-7. When a dissatisfied state lags far behind the dom-

FIGURE 16-7
Power Transition and the Risk of War



Power transition theory leads to the hypothesis that system-transforming, high-cost wars are especially likely when a dissatisfied challenger state achieves approximate power parity with the dominant, status quo–defending state.

inant state in power, war is not expected to occur. Likewise, if the rising challenger state overtakes the dominant state by a substantial margin of power, then war again is unlikely. In this case, a peaceful transition takes place. But when the challenger's power rises quickly, first to equal and then to overtake the dominant state, a wrenching, system-transforming power transition war is likely to occur.

The power transition theory's core war hypothesis has been tested.[28] The initial tests note that there are three different types of power distributions that can arise between states. The challenger can be significantly weaker than the dominant state; the challenger can be about equal in power to the dominant state but not growing so fast as to appear to be overtaking the hegemon; or the challenger can be about equal in power to the dominant state and be growing so fast that it appears to equal and then overtake the dominant power. Organski and Kugler hypothesize that major wars can occur only in this last circumstance. Table 16-3 shows the results of their examination of interactions between major powers from 1815 to 1980. The table indicates that there is a statistically significant probability that the power transition theory's main war hypothesis is accurate, although some critics have raised questions about the method of case selection.[29]

The power transition argument has been formalized to tease out its precise logical implications. Woosang Kim and James Morrow, for example, show that although some of the core hypotheses stated by Organski and Kugler are in fact borne out by formal logic, other important hypotheses are not and must be modified.[30] Kim and Morrow show that there is a critical time during which the risk of war is at a maximum. This occurs when the challenger feels that the costs of deferring an effort to defeat the existing status quo are equal to the benefits that would be obtained from proceeding with such an effort and when the dominant state believes that the costs of fighting are less than the costs of granting concessions to the challenger. However, the emergence of that critical interval during which both states are prepared to fight does not depend on an equal distribution of power[31] in contradiction to the main power transition claim.

The distribution of power at which the foes will fight depends on their willingness to take the risks of waiting. The longer the challenger waits to attack, the higher is its prob-

TABLE 16-3

Empirical Evidence for the Power Transition Theory, 1815–1980

Does War Occur?	Power Is Unequal	Power Is Equal and Challenger Is Not Overtaking Hegemon	Power Is Equal and Challenger Is Overtaking Hegemon
No	4	6	5
Yes	0	0	5

Source: Adapted from A.F.K. Organski and Jacek Kugler, *The War Ledger* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980), 52, Table 1.7.

Note: The table shows a τ_c statistical test, which is a test of correlation for ordinal data that evaluates the magnitude of deviations in an asymmetric matrix for the data from the diagonal running from the upper left cell to the lower right cell. Here, $\tau_c = 0.5$ and probability < .05.

ability of victory. This is true because the challenger's power is growing faster than the dominant state's power. Thus, the longer the challenger puts off a war, the greater will be the odds in its favor. However, the longer it waits, the longer it must endure the rules of international intercourse with which it is dissatisfied. The challenger's decision about whether or not to attack the dominant state, then, depends on its inclination to take risks, on how quickly it is growing in power, on how costly the war is expected to be, and on how unhappy it is with the status quo. Kim and Morrow have shown that the interval during which the challenger is willing to fight expands as the expected costs of the war increase, as the challenger's dissatisfaction with the status quo increases, as the challenger's relative growth rate declines, and as the challenger becomes more risk acceptant.

Conversely, the longer the dominant state waits, the worse its political and military prospects will be. The difference in their respective growth rates places the dominant state increasingly at a disadvantage relative to the challenger. For the hegemon, then, waiting is risky business. But it does forestall the day when the hegemon loses control over the rules of the game, making it impossible for the hegemon to credibly commit to alter the international rules and norms by peaceful means before it absolutely has to. The dominant state's willingness to fight is postponed as the expected costs of war decrease and as the growth rate of the challenger increases.

Table 16-3 shows a statistical test, called tau-c, that assesses the correlation between the conditions of the power transition theory and the likelihood of war. It is statistically significant and so lends consequential support to the power transition theory's most important hypothesis. What is the PRE (proportionate reduction in error) gained from the power transition theory, as indicated by the evidence in Table 16-3? Recall that the PRE equals the sum of the maximum cell value in each column of the table minus the maximum row total divided by the number of observations minus the maximum row total. What should we infer when different statistical tests legitimately lead to different conclusions about a theory's explanatory and predictive potential?

Under these circumstances, the hegemon becomes increasingly risk averse. How long the challenger and the dominant state will wait, then, depends on their respective responses to risk, their relative rates of growth, the expected costs of the war, and their respective degrees of satisfaction with the status quo.

The empirical evidence supports some claims of power transition theory, but other important power transition hypotheses have failed the empirical test. For example, differences in growth rates turn out not to be crucial empirically. Power transitions need not occur at the time of equality in power. Indeed, power transitions per se cannot explain especially costly wars. As Paul Huth has observed, "no state initiates war if it expects the war to be long and bloody" (1988, 74). In fact, although there is a critical time during which wars are more likely to occur, that period of time is not a function of the distribution of power and can fluctuate widely to either side of a power balance, depending on the specific, risk-taking proclivities of the relevant leaders, the magnitude of dissatisfaction with the status quo, the anticipated costs of war, and the precise growth rate differential between the challenger and the hegemon.

Unlike neorealism, power transition theory and hegemonic stability theory are not falsified by the evidence. Their core argument concerning dissatisfaction with the status quo (which is a measure of preferences or interests) is logically consistent, and their central hypotheses, with significant modification, are supported by the evidence. These modifications do not contradict other core assumptions. Thus, the deficiencies in these theories can be fixed, precluding the need to discard them. These arguments can be held up as contenders for effective explanations of a specific class of wars. As we now know, the same cannot be said of neorealist theory. In the spirit of the first principle of wing-walking, the power transition theory provides a viable, superior alternative to neorealism's account of how international politics operates, at least with regard to the most wrenching sources of instability: system-transforming wars.

SUMMARY

In this chapter we saw that war is ex post inefficient and can—but need not—arise because of uncertainty, commitment problems, or a dispute over an indivisible objective. We also examined the central hypotheses of two major structural theories of the causes of war. Neorealism's claims that bipolarity promotes stability, that uncertainty provokes instability, that states routinely mimic each other, and that a balance of power fosters stability are logically flawed and unsupported by the historical record. In contrast, an alternative structural explanation, the power transition theory, is consistent with the historical facts at least with regard to some of its core predictions.

As the balance-of-power explanation of war is a venerated and widely believed explanation of war and peace, we cannot take these findings too lightly. However, so little evidence exists with which to sustain confidence in neorealist and balance-of-