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Stability and Polarity: New Paths for Inquiry*

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One of the most intractable debates in the field of world politics concerns the linkage of systemic polarity to international stability. Despite many theoretical expositions and limited testing, disagreement persists over which type of structure and distribution of power is most stable. The dialogue on polarity and stability has focused on the relative merits of bipolar and multipolar structures; in other words, which configuration of power centers is more stable, two or more than that number? Advocates of each system have their adherents and, for some time now, have agreed to disagree. Most of the debate on polarity and stability thus far has been cast in terms that do not facilitate its resolution. The objective of this paper is to reformulate the debate, in order to facilitate a more compelling empirical judgment of the competing claims. More specifically, this involves revision of the central concepts. Polarity, it will be asserted, cannot be assessed only in terms of distribution of power. The concept also should incorporate the notion of autonomous decision centers. With respect to instability, war is held to be a less comprehensive measurement than international crisis. It is recommended that renewed testing should focus on the linkage of polarity to stability as so defined.

1. Introduction
One of the most intractable debates in the field of world politics concerns the linkage of systemic polarity to international stability. Despite many theoretical expositions and limited testing, disagreement persists over which type of structure and distribution of power is most stable. The dialogue on polarity and stability has focused on the relative merits of bipolar and multipolar structures; in other words, which configuration of power centers is more stable, two or more than that number? Advocates of each system have their adherents and, for some time now, have agreed to disagree.

As will become apparent from an overview of the literature, most of the debate on polarity and stability thus far has been cast in terms that do not facilitate its resolution. More specifically, a lack of falsifiable, deductively-derived propositions has impeded understanding of the presumed connection between systemic polarity and international stability. The objective of this study is to reformulate the debate, in order to facilitate a more compelling empirical judgment of the competing claims. Moreover, revival of this controversy may turn out to be constructive and innovative in ways that have not been anticipated.

While interesting theories about international stability undoubtedly remain unknown, a better understanding of the past record can only enhance prospects for their discovery. Thus the call for a reassessment of what is known does not imply a retreat. According to one recent evaluation of the literature on international conflict, it may mean exactly the opposite:

theoretical articulation [is] a task that is too rarely attended to in the field of quantitative international relations. Theoretical articulation is the clarification and extension of the theoretical structure of an existing paradigm. Clarification... creates a stronger structure to expand; extension... demonstrates the ability (or inability) of a paradigm to predict, and thus explain, previously inexplicable phenomena (Morrow 1985, p. 474).

This exposition implies that a more creative understanding of polarity and stability depends upon a reevaluation of theoretical axioms and, where possible, extension of their explanatory power.2

2. The Debate
The first phase of the debate over polarity...
and stability took place in the sixties. Waltz (1964) argued that bipolarity is inherently more stable than multipolarity for several reasons: first, the two blocs have a shared interest in a global balance of power, and the bloc patron-leaders have the capability of achieving this goal; secondly, there is less danger of miscalculation, of both capability and intent; thirdly, while crises would recur, their escalation to war could be more effectively prevented than in a multipolar structure; and finally, other states on the periphery would be less able to destabilize the international system. Deutsch & Singer (1964) asserted the contrary and pointed to several processes in support of conventional wisdom on this issue. First, the outcome of conflict and war in a system of several major powers is more uncertain, leading to greater caution among them; secondly, the greater likelihood of cross-cutting cleavages among the participants reduces the rigidity of their conflicts; thirdly, alignments are more flexible; and finally, arms races escalate more slowly because of the reality of changing alliances.

The two competing hypotheses were criticized by Rosecrance (1966), who contended that an intermediate international system, which he termed ‘bi-multipolarity’, is likely to be the most stable. The two preeminent states, he argued, would engage in both cooperative and competitive relations, restraining conflict but preventing hegemony by their adversary. Zero-sum games would be avoided. Conflicts would be limited in stakes. The possibility of war would be less, and the consequences of war would be more tolerable. Most writers on the concept of polarity have defined it as the distribution of power/resources, or the number of poles/clusters, or the number of autonomous power centers, in an international system (Haas 1970, pp. 99, 100; Bueno de Mesquita 1975, 1978; Rapkin, Thompson with Christopherson 1979; Wayman 1984; Hart 1985, p. 31; Sabrosky 1985). Others have referred to economic power (Russett 1965, pp. 2–4) or ideology (Rosecrance 1963, pp. 79–101, 169–191, 193–215) as the basis of polarity.

The debate over the threshold for polar status has troubled each of these approaches (Nogee 1974, pp. 1205–1211). Instead of looking forward in time to what the system
might become, those who participated in the debate over polarity and stability invariably argued over what existed in the near past and present, resulting in a one-dimensional assessment of polarity. Casting a wider historical net will facilitate understanding of, among other things, the global transition that occurred a quarter of a century ago and its implications for stability.

More specifically, systemic transformations have not always entailed changes in the distribution of power. The emergence of new centers of decision, too, can lead to significant changes in an international system or subsystem without dramatically altering the hierarchy or distribution of military capability. This is a crucial distinction which permits a more complete conceptual articulation of polarity and stability.

Polarity, as used in this discussion, refers to power and decisional stratification, in other words, the structure of a system. Theoretically, the power dispersion of a system may be unipolar, bipolar, or multipolar, the rough counterparts to monopolistic, duopolistic or oligopolistic, in the structure of market systems (Keohane & Nye 1977, p. 20).

Each of the above-noted distributions of power has different implications for political processes at the international level. A unipolar structure is characterized by an overwhelming concentration of military capability in one entity which thereby shapes the rules of the system, dominates relations among lesser actors and asserts its hegemony at will from an acknowledged position at the apex of the power pyramid. Bipolarity indicates a concentration of power in two relatively equal actors. The two polar centers determine the essential rules of the system, the conditions of stability and the outcomes of its major wars. Multipolarity signifies a diffusion of military power among several relatively equal units within an international system, at least three (tripolar), usually more.

Decisional and power stratification are identical in the three systems just described. However, it is also possible that the number of decisional and power centers will be unequal. Polycentrism is an example of one such hybrid structure, with two preeminent centers of military power and multiple centers of political decision. It therefore has elements of both bipolarity and multipolarity.

As a more systematic exposition of power and decision, consider the matrix which appears as Fig. 1. It displays empirical referents for the logically possible combinations of decisional and power distribution. With respect to power, the structure is one of monopoly (or, more accurately preponderance), duopoly or oligopoly. These designations correspond respectively to one, two and more than two, centers of power. At the same time, centers of decision may be distributed differently, across one, two, or more than two nodes. Examples are included for both the dominant system and various subsystems.

Illustrations of conjuncture between the two centers (power and decision) appear on the diagonal. Rome at its height provides an example of unipolarity; for centuries it possessed overwhelming military might and had no other independent centers of decision with which to deal. Similarly, an unchallenged Sweden presided over the subsystem of northern Europe through the better part of the 18th century.

With respect to bipolarity, the US and the USSR led two highly discrete blocs of actors after World War II and also possessed preponderant capability. A subsystemic example of bipolarity would be the pairing of India and Pakistan in the South Asian subcontinent since 1947.

Finally, the inter-World War period of the twentieth century featured a multipolar structure. Along with the US and Japan, the principal European states constituted independent centers of decision and relatively equal power bases at the dominant system level. A subsystem counterpart is Central (or East) Africa in the post-colonial era; the states in these regions are many, and power is not highly concentrated among them.

Other cells in the matrix reveal a disjuncture between the number of centers of decision and power. In all cases the number of decision centers is greater; other combinations are excluded. It would be incon-
Fig. 1. Centers of Power and Decision: Distributions at the Dominant and Subsystemic Levels

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Centers of Power</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3+</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Roman Empire</strong></td>
<td><strong>Northern Europe, Sweden, 18th Century</strong></td>
<td><strong>Caribbean/Central America, 1959-1979</strong></td>
<td><strong>Eastern Europe, 1947-</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>US-Soviet Cold War, 1946-1962</strong></td>
<td><strong>South Asian Subcontinent, India-Pakistan, 1947</strong></td>
<td><strong>Greek City States, eve of Peloponnesian War</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Interwar Period, 1919-1939</strong></td>
<td><strong>Sub-Saharan Africa, 1960-</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* The top of each cell contains the example for the dominant system, while the bottom shows the subsystem example.
** Examples of dominant system monopoly coupled with two or more decisional nodes have not been detected.

It is conceivable that a state with a noteworthy endowment of power would fail to function independently in terms of decision; even the choice of isolationism would constitute an individual selection of policy. In sum, every center of power is, ipso facto, a center of decision, but the reverse does not obtain.

Consider first an instance of power monopoly (preponderance) with more than one center of decision. In the case of the Caribbean/Central America from 1959 onward, the US continued to have preponderant military capability, but the regime in Cuba existed outside of the US-led, military-security coalition within the region, hence two centers of decision.

When a duopoly of power exists along with three or more centers of decision, that is polycentrism. An excellent illustration is the French Revolution/Napoleonic epoch, with France and the coalition of traditionalist European powers—England, Austria, Prussia and Russia—exhibiting power bipolarity but with each state an independent decisional unit (Rosecrance 1963). It is also tenable to argue that the current (post-1962) global system is polycentric. The US and USSR stand far above all actors in terms of the concentration of military power. However, that does not preclude the existence of other important centers of decision, ranging from London and Paris to Beijing and Tokyo. At the subsystem level, the Greek city-states on the eve of the Peloponnesian War provide an excellent example of polycentrism: Sparta and Athens were the preeminent powers, yet other states functioned independently in decision making (Thucydides 1930).

4. The Axiomatic Basis of Polarity and Stability

Having specified various configurations of polarity based on centers of decision and power, it is appropriate to explore their implications for international stability. The
fundamental question is this: Is there an optimal, that is, most stable, combination of power and decisional concentration? This leads to a discussion of the theoretical meaning of stability.

One approach is to relate instability to the notion of cost. Instability, somehow measured through the frequency and intensity of disruptive interaction, may be regarded as costly to most, if not all, members of the international system. It reflects a lack of agreement over the allocation of existing political, economic and military resources. In other words, instability is a form of preference revelation; conflict will be more pervasive when there is dissatisfaction with regimes. In this perspective the question of polarity and stability becomes one of determining which system is least costly to its members.9

Prior to the analysis of systemic costs, one further point should be made; it concerns the axiomatic basis of polarity and stability. The separation of power and decisional centers will permit a more thorough analysis of costs, especially when compared to theoretical discussions which have focused exclusively on the distribution of power.

Fig. 2 displays the hypothetical cost functions based upon a varying number of independent decision nodes.8 There are two kinds of decisional cost to consider: decision time and externalities.

Expected costs from decision time (i.e., formulation) increase with the number of independent decision centers. When there are more decisional nodes, all other things being equal, the time required to reach an agreement is greater. More interests must be represented, making negotiations more

Fig. 2. Costs of Decision Making

C = costs of decision time.
D = costs of externalities.
complicated and time-consuming. This might also be referred to as the opportunity cost arising from decision making; as more time and energy are devoted to bargaining, less becomes available for other activities.

Costs also arise during formulation because of the creation of externalities. When very few independent decision centers exist, other states in the system may disapprove of some (or all) aspects of an agreement. These costs, which affect third parties, become less severe with a larger number of independent decision centers, because the interests represented are more diverse.

Thus, as Fig. 2 suggests, there is a tradeoff involving costs of decision time (C) and externalities (D). In any system (or subsystem), the number of independent decision centers to be consulted ranges from 1 to N, with N representing all system members. The costs of decision time increase with the number of centers, while the reverse obtains for externalities. When curves C and D are summed, the minimal level is reached at an unspecified point K between 1 and N.

Once a decision has been reached, costs of implementation must be considered. These costs could include setting up an organization to monitor compliance with an agreement and to enforce rules. The costs might be shared informally, with the power centers somehow coordinating implementation. In either instance, concentration of power will lead to greater efficiency in implementation, all other things being equal. As a problem of collective action, implementation of a decision is facilitated by a smaller number of power centers, with a power monopoly being ideal in the context of this specific problem.

With respect to the structure of international systems, these cost factors can be used to argue that bipolarity will be more stable than multipolarity or polycentrism. Of course, as Fig. 1 illustrates, other systems are possible, but these, especially the first two, are the configurations which have been central to the debate.

Consider first the impact of decision costs. Bipolarity, that is, two independent decision centers, promises lower costs of decision time while multipolarity (or polycentrism), that is, many decision centers, should produce fewer externalities. Is one system more stable (meaning less costly than the other), given this tradeoff? It is postulated that costs of decision time (C) will rise sharply once there are more than two decisional nodes, outweighing any advantages from reduced externalities. With only two centers, coalitional dynamics cannot take place. By contrast, three (or more) decision centers may result in time-consuming shifts in alignment and related bargaining positions. As for externalities, the inclusion of two interests obviously is less attractive than three or more, but the extent depends upon the total number of states in the system. At present, for example, there are about 160 members of the United Nations. The difference between two or three centers — or even the historically prominent five — is negligible compared to the proportion of states which, in each instance, is excluded from the apex of decision making. In sum, a system with two decisional nodes is hypothesized to be less costly. Thus ‘K’ in Fig. 2 is regarded as equal to two, the minimal number beyond dictatorship.

An analysis of decision centers results in an expectation of greater stability from bipolarity. What, then, are the implications of variable power distribution for the three systems?

With regard to implementation, there are two types of costs to consider: fixed and variable. Fixed costs are those of establishing some venture; in economic terms, that would refer to the cost of the physical plant, purchase of equipment and the like. In the present context, the fixed costs of implementation refer to the obstacles to collective action, which always increase as the number of essential participants becomes greater. In terms of these fixed costs, therefore, bipolarity is equal to polycentrism and preferable to multipolarity.

Variable costs are those which fluctuate over time. Labor is the most obvious example in the economic realm. The amount of labor required for production will vary over time. With respect to international relations, periodic disruption (and therefore the need for stabilization) is expected to be a function of the degree of status incon-
sistency in the system. In other words, if a state functions as an independent center of decision, but does not have military status, that produces dissonance.

Such states usually are found in the developing world. These system members desire change, especially in economic relations, yet lack the power to enforce it on the existing international order. Instability therefore should become greater as the number of decision centers increases over and above the number of power centers. As a result, polycentrism is expected to have higher variable costs, because neither bipolarity nor multipolarity has such ‘dissonant’ system members.

Taken together, costs of decision and those associated with implementation favor bipolarity. It therefore emerges as less costly than either polycentrism or multipolarity.

When comparing the latter two systems, the combined variable and fixed costs of implementation seem to favor multipolarity. Regulating a polycentric system will be more costly because of status inconsistency resulting from decolonization. It is very likely that the greater variable costs of polycentrism will outweigh the somewhat higher fixed costs of multipolarity. Although polycentrism has fewer power centers, and therefore should be more able to achieve the initial implementation of an agreement, over the long-term its costs of maintenance will be more substantial.

Having compared the three systems in theoretical terms, bipolarity has emerged as most stable, followed by multipolarity and polycentrism. The eventual task will be to test the underlying logic with a hitherto unused body of twentieth century data, in order to resolve the ‘great debate’ over structure and conflict. However, it is useful first to examine the empirical findings thus far and then specify a measurement strategy to facilitate testing of the postulated rank order.

5. Indicators and Measurement Strategy

The debate on polarity and stability has taken place primarily at the level of theorizing about logically-expected relationships. Thus it is appropriate to devote some attention to the relatively neglected subject of measurement. Polarity, the independent variable, will be considered first, followed by the dependent variable, stability.

Most empirical studies have been conducted by COW researchers. They utilized the COW national capabilities index to assess power concentration and thereby measure polarity. Each major power is assigned a composite power score based on six indicators: standing armies, military expenditures, fuel consumption, iron/steel production, population and urban population. Concentration of capabilities then is represented by the standard deviation of the mean score among the major powers. The minimum would be zero, with absolute equality among the states, and the maximum would be 1, with one state controlling all of the capabilities. Hence polarity is treated as a continuous variable.

The preceding operationalization of polarity makes it somewhat difficult to apply the findings of COW research specifically to the debate over bipolarity and multipolarity. Since discrete poles are not identified, direct comparison of systems with two or more poles is not facilitated. The COW-oriented studies explored the linkage of stability to polarity, with each being treated as a continuous (as opposed to categorical) variable. Furthermore, the distribution of decision centers is not incorporated in the measurement of polarity.

Changes from one type of polarity (system structure) to another can be measured, qualitatively, on the basis of transformations in power distribution or the concentration/diffusion of decisions in international politics—or both. Thus, in the period since World War I, the polarity phases are designated as multipolarity (1929–39), bipolarity (1945–62), and polycentrism (1963– ).

The entire inter-World War era was a multipolar system, with several relatively equal great powers recognized as sharing the apex of the power pyramid. Unlike unipolarity, bipolarity or polycentrism, the structure of the inter-World War system was characterized by flexibility in alliance pattern, multiple centers of power and decision, and uncertainty about behavior by the other great powers in the system. That
system can be differentiated from the bipolarity which preceded World War I (1890–1914), with the Dual Alliance confronting the Triple Entente, and which followed World War II (1945–62), a period dominated by the US- and USSR-led blocs. In both cases, basic structural change resulted from a long war of very high intensity. Thus the onset of the Second World War in September 1939 marks the effective end of multipolarity and the beginning of a six-year transition to a new system structure, bipolarity, with two hostile agglomerations — and centers — of power and decision which, inter alia, set the limits of independent behavior by both bloc members and unaffiliated state actors. All lasting decisions of consequence in world politics emanated from the superpowers.

The emergence of a distinctive polycentric structure in the early 1960s is associated with the Cuban Missile Crisis and the Sino-Indian border war, both in October–November 1962. Together they indicated that power bipolarity and decision bipolarity in world politics are not synonymous and that other centers of decision in the global system could no longer be controlled by the US and the USSR. Polycentrism so defined has continued through the 1980s.

It should be noted that the polarity phases outlined above are based upon non-quantitative, historical evidence (Brecher & Wilkenfeld 1987). Further research is intended to reveal whether these time periods vary with respect to instability levels. If they are different, that would provide a valuable linkage between theory, which has not included references to the quantitative measurement of polarity, and the practice of testing, which invariably has followed a quantitative path.13

With respect to the dependent variable, stability/instability, the absence or presence of war has been the conventional measurement from the outset (Singer & Small 1968; Singer, Bremer & Stuckey 1972; Wallace 1973; Bueno de Mesquita 1975, 1978; Cannizzo 1978; Wayman 1984). War has been the litmus test of stability/instability both in and outside of the COW research program. Thus Haas (1970, p. 121) concluded about the polarity/stability link in 21 international subsystems from 1649 to 1965: ‘Multipolarity entails more violence, more countries at war, and more casualties; biopolarity brings fewer but longer wars.’ Cannizzo (1978, p. 957) observed that in the 20th century wars involving major powers tended to follow ‘periods of parity and rapid change toward parity. . . .’ And Levy (1985, p. 54), who discovered a different relationship between polarity and stability in the European great power system from 1495 to 1975, also used war as the sole indicator: ‘Bipolar systems have been historically more stable than multipolar systems. . . . The intensity and concentration of war have generally been lower in bipolar periods, and general wars have never occurred during bipolarity.’

These studies are valuable but inadequate in terms of illuminating the polarity/stability link. First, they exclude all sources of systemic instability other than war, even less violent interactions among states such as serious or minor clashes. Moreover, their focus on the ‘central [European] subsystem’ ignores the myriad of local wars in the peripheries which undermine the stability of international subsystems comprising the vast majority of states in twentieth-century world politics. Most important, their underlying view is conceptually limited and operationally narrow. Although war is the gravest type of disturbance to system tranquility, it is not synonymous with instability.

A more comprehensive conceptual indicator of stability/instability than war proneness is disruptive interaction among states, which encompasses the widest possible range of system disturbances. The corresponding operational indicator is crisis, a much broader phenomenon than war. War is, in reality, a subset of crisis; that is, all wars result from crises, but not all crises lead to war. While some crises lead to war (e.g. 1939), others do not (e.g. Berlin Wall 1961). Moreover, some crises are accompanied by violence — minor or serious clashes, or full-scale war — while others are not. Yet all crises cause disruption within an international system: that is, they are sources of instability. It is precisely because crises cause system disruptions that crisis is an excellent indicator of instability.

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An international crisis is a situational change characterized by an increase in the intensity of disruptive interactions between two or more adversaries, with a high probability of military hostilities. Higher-than-normal conflictual interactions destabilize the ongoing relationship of the adversaries and pose a challenge to the existing structure of an international system—global, dominant or subsystem(s). A large-scale inquiry into military-security crises, across continents, cultures, and political and economic systems, uncovered 278 international crises from 1929 to 1979, that is, situations which met the conditions specified above. The cases extend in time from the first Chaco War to the US Hostages in Iran. (They are summarized and extensively analyzed in Brecher & Wilkenfeld 1987.)

The 278 cases from the International Crisis Behavior (ICB) data set, which can serve as the empirical domain for a new look at the polarity/stability link, include high profile crises, such as Entry into World War II (1939), and little-known crises in Africa, Asia, Europe, Latin America and the Middle East, such as the Amur River incident (1938) and Tel Mutillah (1951). The data set also includes all of the major inter-state wars of the half-century, from Ethiopia in 1935-36 to the October-Yom Kippur War of 1973. Quantitative data on each of the 278 cases have been collected for 50 variables which focus on seven crisis dimensions: Setting; Breakpoint-Exitpoint; Crisis Management Technique; Great Power/Superpower Activity; International Organization Involvement; Outcome, and Severity. 14

The data, along with the conviction that multiple strands of evidence should be tapped in testing competing hypotheses, have stimulated the creation of a multivariate measurement of instability with precise empirical referents. This index is derived from the core concept of severity—or intensity—of a crisis, with Overall Severity serving as the composite dependent variable, based upon six indicators: (1) number of crisis actors, ranging from one state (with its adversary, usually the state which triggers its crisis) to ‘N’ actors, the largest in the ICB data set being 21 crisis actors in the Entry into World War II Crisis of 1939; (2) involvement by the Powers, ranging from none to direct military activity by all great powers (1929-39) or both superpowers (after 1945); (3) geostrategic salience, that is, the location of an international crisis in terms of its natural resources, distance from major power centers, etc.; (4) heterogeneity, measuring the number of attribute differences between adversaries relating to military capability, economic development, political regime, and culture; (5) the number and type of issues in a crisis relating to four issue-areas—military-security, political-diplomatic, economic-developmental, and cultural-status; and (6) the extent of violence.

Overall Severity is calculated for each crisis as an index, ranging from 1–10 in value, as follows:

\[
S = 0.134(4s_1 + 4s_2 + 2s_3 + 2s_4 + 2s_5 + s_6) - 1
\]

where

- \(S\) = Overall Severity.
- \(s_1\) = number of actors.
- \(s_2\) = level of superpower involvement.
- \(s_3\) = geostrategic salience of location.
- \(s_4\) = heterogeneity of the actors.
- \(s_5\) = range of issues.
- \(s_6\) = level of violence. 15

For any given time period, the Overall Severity of crises in progress can be used to assess the aggregate level of instability. Although it is beyond the scope of this study to implement Overall Severity as a measurement of instability, one salient aspect should be mentioned. In prior research, each war involving a major power has been treated as an equal source of disruption. This is inappropriate because all wars do not have identical implications for international structures and processes. By contrast, Overall Severity incorporates the varying levels of intensity across international crises into the measurement of instability.

6. Conclusion

Several areas of difficulty have been identified in this review of polarity and stability. The concept of polarity has more than one dimension to consider; changes in inter-
national structure may reflect either evolving decisional autonomy or redistribution of power. Stability should be assessed more comprehensively than in the past, with crisis providing a more inclusive measurement than war of the level of instability. Furthermore, development of the concept of Overall Severity of an international crisis allows for ‘weighting’ among disruptive events. Research that incorporates the renewed concepts of polarity and stability thus should contribute positively to the seemingly insoluble debate over structure and conflict. 16

On a final note, it had been suggested at the outset of this inquiry that a revival of the debate over stability and polarity might have unanticipated implications for other subjects of interest. In that regard, apart from providing a new approach to the controversy over structure and conflict, the preceding analysis suggests a new perspective on the current debate over hegemony. 17 In terms of the preceding analysis, ‘hegemony’ is the conceptual counterpart of unipolarity, more precisely, power unipolarity and decisional multipolarity, as specified in Fig. 1 above. The fundamental difference between the two debates is the focus on economic hegemony versus military concentration (polarity). Although it would be beyond the scope of this inquiry to explore further the issue of hegemony, it provides at least one example of the ongoing relevance of the unresolved controversy over structure and conflict.

NOTES
1. This argument is applied more generally by Bueno de Mesquita (1985) to scholarship on international conflict.
2. The analysis to follow will focus on the presumed impact of systemic polarity on international stability. It is recognized, of course, that cause and effect also could operate in the opposite direction. For example, the extraordinary disruption represented by World War II had a devastating impact on polarity, with Japan and Germany being removed from the inner circle of great powers. It would be beyond the scope of this investigation to deal with the effects of stability levels on polarity in further detail.
3. The greater stability of a bipolar structure also was argued by Riker (1962).
4. Wright (1942), Morgenthau (1948), Gulick (1955), Kaplan (1957), and Hoffmann (1968) also contended that multipolarity was more stable.
5. Other mixed system structures include: Hanrieder’s (1965) hetero-symmetrical bipolarity, essentially a synthesis of Kaplan’s (1957) loose bipolar and Masters’ (1961) multi-bloc structures; and Hoffmann’s (1968) multi-hierarchical system, a very similar construct to Rosecrance’s bi-multipolarity, combining bipolarity, multipolarity and a polycentric level. Young (1966), too, criticized the bipolar/multipolar dichotomy as too narrow and proposed a ‘discontinuities’ model which acknowledged both dominant system and subsystem actors and their relationships.
6. In this context monopoly is not identical to control over all capability. Rather, it refers to a preponderance of capability as compared to any other actor or combination of actors.
7. The concept of power is multi-dimensional: it can be subdivided into military, political, economic and cultural components, and perhaps others as well. The present focus is, of necessity, on military capability because the research question guiding this inquiry is the relationship between structure and conflict. The latter is operationalized by others as war or violence; but in the forthcoming analysis it will be represented by overt, disruptive interaction. It is military power which determines the direct capacity to generate such disruptive interaction among members of an international system.
8. For example, Russett & Starr (1985, p. 112) reported the following figures for military expenditures in 1980–81 for the leading powers, in millions of $U.S.: USA 144.0; USSR 130.0; China 28.0; United Kingdom 26.8; W. Germany 26.7; France 26.5; Japan 10.0

The preeminent position of the US and the USSR as military powers is quite evident from these rankings.
9. This treatment of stability is not intended as an endorsement of the status quo in world politics; it is acknowledged that change in some areas is more desirable than continuity. However, in a system with multiple nuclear powers, extreme forms of instability — possibly leading to global disequilibrium — are regarded as costly to the international community as a whole.
10. Some of the analysis of this diagram is based on Buchanan & Tullock (1962, pp. 63–91).
11. The discussion will be restricted to the dominant system in order to facilitate a linkage with the previous debate.
12. In a strictly historical context, multipolarity would enjoy an advantage over polycentrism with regard to expected costs from decision making. The larger number of autonomous decisional centers in polycentrism increases the theoretically-possible number of adversarial actor pairs and coalitions which tend to generate more disruption (James & Wilkenfeld 1984). However, the number of decisional centers under polycentrism still falls far short of 100% of the system, so externalities would not be that much less than in a multipolar world. Since
multipolarity and polycentrism may have various numbers of decision centers in the abstract, the lower decisional costs of the former are relevant only in historical terms.

13. There are four possibilities to consider if the time periods do not show differences in instability: (1) the presumed connection simply does not exist; (2) the measurement of polarity is invalid; (3) the measurement of instability is invalid; and (4) both measurements are invalid.

14. The data set also includes six control variables: Geography; Polarity; System Level; Conflict; Power Discrepancy; Involvement by the Powers (Brecher & Wilkenfeld 1987).

15. The Index of Overall Severity and the underlying concept of severity derive from a long-standing interest in tapping the intensity of an international crisis and thereby in differentiating any crisis from all others. More specifically, the index and concept constitute a response to a cluster of interrelated questions: What are the (varying) effects of a large (or small) number of crisis actors on the extent of disruptive interaction from the outbreak of an international crisis to its termination? What is the extent of heterogeneity among the adversaries; that is, do they vary in military capability or are they all major (or minor) powers? Are they states with advanced or premodern economies or do they exhibit various levels of development? What is the extent of superpower involvement? Is it primarily political or economic or military support for one or more of the adversaries, or did the US/USSR engage in direct military intervention? Is the location of the crisis high or low in geostrategic salience? What are the issues at stake; are they military, political, economic or cultural, or several of these combined? Is there interstate violence in the crisis; if so, how extensive is it?

These questions have played a central role in the deductive formulation of the Index of Overall Severity. The derivation of the latter, including the weights allotted to its six indicators, is explained in detail by Brecher & James (1986, part 2).

16. The results of some preliminary testing appear in Michael Brecher and Patrick James, 'Polarity, Stability, Crisis: A New Look at an Unresolved Controversy', in preparation. Suffice it to note here that, for 7 of 10 bivariate crisis indicators, polycentrism is clearly the most unstable among the three types of structure (e.g., number of crises per year, the proportion of violent triggers, violence as the primary crisis management technique).


REFERENCES


