Are there recurring historical dynamics and patterns that can help us understand today’s power transitions and struggles over international order? What can we learn from the past? Are the cycles of rise and decline of power and international order set to continue? Robert Gilpin’s classic work, *War and Change in World Politics*, offers a sweeping and influential account of the rise and decline of leading states and the international orders they create. Now, some thirty years on, this volume brings together an outstanding collection of scholars to reflect on Gilpin’s grand themes of power and change in world politics. The chapters engage with theoretical ideas that shape the way we think about great powers, with the latest literature on the changing US position in the global system, and with the challenges to the existing order that are being generated by China and other rising non-Western states.

**G. John Ikenberry** is the Albert G. Milbank Professor of Politics and International Affairs at Princeton University in the Department of Politics and the Woodrow Wilson School of Public and International Affairs. He is also Co-Director of Princeton’s Center for International Security Studies. Professor Ikenberry is also a Global Eminence Scholar at Kyung Hee University in Seoul, Korea, and in 2013–2014 he was the 72nd Eastman Visiting Professor at Balliol College, Oxford.

Professor Ikenberry has written and edited several books, including *After Victory: Institutions, Strategic Restraint, and the Rebuilding of Order after Major Wars* (2001), which won the 2002 Schroeder-Jervis Award presented by the American Political Science Association for the best book in international history and politics, and *International Relations Theory and the Consequences of Unipolarity* (Cambridge University Press, 2011).
Power, Order, and Change in World Politics

Edited by
G. John Ikenberry
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Contributors

BARRY BUZAN is Emeritus Professor of International Relations at the LSE (formerly Montague Burton Professor), honorary professor at Copenhagen and Jilin Universities, and a Senior Fellow at LSE IDEAS. In 1998 he was elected a fellow of the British Academy. He has written, co-authored, or edited over two dozen books, and written or co-authored more than 120 articles and chapters, mainly around themes of international security and international relations theory.

DANIEL DEUDNEY is Associate Professor and Director of Undergraduate Studies at Johns Hopkins University where he teaches political science, international relations, and political theory. He is the author of the prize-winning book, Bounding Power: Republican Security Theory from the Polis to the Global Village (2007).

JOHN A. HALL is the James McGill Professor of Comparative Historical Sociology at McGill University in Montreal. He is the author of many books, most recently Ernest Gellner: An Intellectual Biography (2010) and The Importance of Being Civil (2013). He is working on a book on the links between nations, states, and empires.

G. JOHN IKENBERRY is the Albert G. Milbank Professor of Politics and International Affairs in the Woodrow Wilson School and Department of Politics at Princeton University, and Co-Director of the Center for International Security Studies. He is also Global Eminence Scholar at Kyung Hee University in Seoul, Korea. His most recent books are Liberal Leviathan: The Origins, Crisis, and Transformation of the American World Order (2011) and The Rise of Korean Leadership: Emerging Powers and Liberal International Order (2013).

JONATHAN KIRSHNER is the Stephen and Barbara Friedman Professor of International Political Economy in the Department of Government and Director of the Reppy Institute for Peace and Conflict Studies at Cornell University. His most recent book is American Power After the Financial Crisis.
Contributors

CHARLES A. KUPCHAN is Professor of International Affairs at George-town University and Whitney H. Shepardson Senior Fellow at the Council on Foreign Relations. His most recent books are No One’s World: The West, the Rising Rest, and the Coming Global Turn (2012) and How Enemies Become Friends: The Sources of Stable Peace (2010).

DAVID A. LAKE is the Jerri-Ann and Gary E. Jacobs Professor of Social Sciences, Distinguished Professor of Political Science, Associate Dean of Social Sciences, and Director of Yankelovich Center for Social Science Research at the University of California, San Diego. He has written widely in the field of international relations. Lake is the former chair of the International Political Economy Society and past president of the International Studies Association. The recipient of UCSD Chancellor’s Associates Awards for Excellence in Graduate Education (2005) and Excellence in Research (2013), he was elected to the American Academy of Arts and Sciences in 2006.

MICHAEL MASTANDUNO received his PhD from Princeton University and is currently Nelson A. Rockefeller Professor of Government and Dean of the Faculty of Arts and Sciences at Dartmouth College. His recent work examines US–China economic and security relations and US foreign policy in the post-Cold War international system.

WILLIAM C. WOHLFORTH is the Daniel Webster Professor in the Department of Government at Dartmouth College. He is editor of Status and World Politics (Cambridge University Press, 2014) with T. V. Paul and Deborah Larson. He is currently writing a book with Stephen Brooks entitled America Abroad: The United States’ Global Role in the 21st Century.
The idea for this book started with a conversation in the hallways of Bendheim Hall at Princeton University. Wolfgang Danspeckgruber, Director of the Liechtenstein Institute on Self-Determination, remarked to me that the thirtieth anniversary of Robert Gilpin’s *War and Change in World Politics* was fast approaching. We agreed that this would be a perfect occasion to assemble a group of scholars to reflect on the book’s grand themes of power and change in world politics. The goal has not been to produce a Festschrift, but to invite scholars to grapple with the theory and vision that Gilpin advances. With Gilpin’s book as a starting point, how can we make sense of today’s great shifts in power and global order?

Work on this book began on the twenty-ninth anniversary of *War and Change in World Politics*, and it was completed on the thirty-third anniversary. So the book has been long in the making, but it has been a decidedly joyful undertaking for everyone involved. The authors in this volume have been driven by several motivations. One has been to honor Robert Gilpin and his groundbreaking book. Most of the scholars who have contributed essays, including myself, have pursued our work “in the shadow” of *War and Change*. It is a book that has inspired and provoked us. Gilpin’s book provides a framework in which many of us have either built on or pushed off against. So the book reflects our efforts to acknowledge a debt to Robert Gilpin. Another motivation has been to showcase the range of current research and debates that flow out of Gilpin’s book.

Building on realist theory, Gilpin constructed a framework for thinking about great shifts in the global system. It has provided a conceptual language and large-scale hypotheses for inquiry into the rise and fall of international order. The authors in this volume have taken up the challenge of thinking in new ways about the logic of order and change in world politics, doing so with a focus on contemporary power shifts and struggles over order.

When Gilpin wrote his book, the Cold War was not yet ended and Japan was on the rise. Today, the Soviet Union no longer exists and it is
China that is on the rise. The cast of leading states on the world stage has changed but the drama over power and order remains. The struggle over global order continues. For this reason, Gilpin’s last words in his book seem profoundly relevant today. “The supreme task for statesmen in the final decades of the twentieth century is to build on the positive forces of our age in the creation of a new and more stable international order.”

I would like to acknowledge the generous financial assistance of the Liechtenstein Institute on Self-Determination, the Center for International Security Studies, and the Program on the Future of Multilateralism, all at the Woodrow Wilson School of Public and International Affairs at Princeton University. Thanks also go to Wolfgang Danspeckgruber and Aaron Friedberg for their support. I also acknowledge the excellent assistance of Lindsay Woodrick, Cynthia Ernst, and Alexander Lanoszka.

G. John Ikenberry