The Continuation of History: Power Transition Theory and the End of the Cold War*

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This article offers an interpretation of the current international situation from the perspective of power transition theory. Previous efforts to understand what the end of the Cold War means for international relations have provided only part of the picture. Optimistic views tend to deny the possibility of the emergence of new threats, while pessimistic arguments generally fail to recognize that the prospects for major war have been significantly reduced by the dramatic events of the last half decade. The interpretation offered here is potentially advantageous because it draws insights from a theory with a long record of empirical support. Power transition theory is consistent with the existence of a ‘Long Peace’ since World War II, with the Cold War’s peaceful end, and thus provides confidence to those who would use it to interpret the prospects for the future. The conclusion offered here is that while the end of the Cold War offers reason for celebration, there is also cause for concern.

1. Introduction

For most of the years since World War II the international system had been characterized by ideological rivalry, bipolarity, and a peace among major powers supposedly imposed by the tremendous destructive power of nuclear weapons. With the events of 1991 the ideological rivalry officially ended, bipolarity was weakened (if not replaced), and efforts were extended toward a less nuclear future. Analysts have offered contradictory explanations of these changes, as well as a range of expectations about the future. Some suggest that the current course of international relations is strongly conducive to peace and tranquillity, while others claim that an increasing frequency and severity of war is to be expected. These two viewpoints may be labelled ‘optimists’ and ‘pessimists’. Neither is more than half-right; rather, the end of the Cold War has created reasons for celebration as well as concern. As the title of this article suggests, it is incorrect to suggest, as Fukuyama (1989) does, that history is at an end. The end of the Cold War likely does not represent the peaceful acceptance of a capitalist-liberal international order. Nor is it impossible for new challenges to the international order to emerge. Similarly, it is also incorrect to suggest that we have entered into a period similar to that of Europe between the World Wars (Mearsheimer, 1990), or that we face a situation unprecedented in international relations (Singer & Wildavsky, 1993).

In this article I offer reasons for this ‘mixed’ view of current international reality, suggesting that we should apply established theories of international relations in order to provide a context that will allow us to understand why the momentous changes have occurred, as well as what they mean. The theory used here to provide an interpretation of the current international situation is power transition theory (Kugler & Lemke, 1996; Kugler & Organski, 1989; Organski, 1958; Organski & Kugler, 1980). I compare the arguments and explanations offered by power transition theory with those offered by the optimists and pessimists, focusing specifically on the ‘Long Peace’ that has characterized postwar Great Power international relations, the Cold War’s peaceful end, and the emerging post-Cold War world. I close with expectations of what the future might hold.

2. Power Transition Theory

Power transition theory focuses on the strongest states, and draws implications from their interactions for war, and for the maintenance of and changes to the structure of the international system. It is similar to other ‘systemic’ theories of

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international relations, such as long cycle or balance of power theory (Modelski & Thompson, 1989; Niou et al., 1989). However, unlike most other systemic theories it is not a purely realist theory, because it is not exclusively concerned with power (although power considerations do play a prominent role in it). In addition to power, power transition theory considers each country's satisfaction with the workings of the international system, or status quo. The status quo is a useful abbreviation for the general pattern of diplomatic, economic, and military interactions of members of the international system.

In introducing power transition theory, Organski (1958, pp. 315–316) describes the international status quo as a stable international order. Specifically:

A powerful nation tends to set up a system of relations with lesser states which can be called an 'order' because the relations are stabilized. In time, everyone comes to know what kind of behavior to expect from the others, habits and patterns are established, and certain rules as to how these relations ought to be carried on grow to be accepted by all parties . . . Certain nations are recognized as leaders . . . Trade is conducted along recognized channels . . . Diplomatic relations also fall into recognized patterns. Certain nations are expected to support other nations . . . There are rules of diplomacy; there are even rules of war.

The dominant country establishes an international order with rules that direct political, economic, diplomatic and military interactions. The dominant country establishes this order because it derives benefits in the form of wealth, security, and prestige from doing so. Later, Organski & Kugler (1980, p. 23) write that states fight when they do not 'like the way benefits are divided . . .'. Recently, Kugler & Organski (1989, p. 173) summarized power transition theory and described the status quo as rules that determine 'the way goods are distributed in the international order'. The status quo codifies how the dominant country would like the other states in the world to behave. The rules it creates toward this end provide it (and some other states) with benefits, and are thus defended.

A description of the international status quo since World War II would focus on the United Nations and its democratic underpinnings,2 the market-economy orientation of international financial institutions, and the generally defensive objectives of international military organizations such as NATO. As a democratic, market-oriented country, the United States (as the dominant state) established these patterns of interaction in accord with its preferences.

Additionally, power transition theory holds that the internal growth of a country determines its power. Since growth rates differ across countries, relative power is constantly changing. Occasionally one country grows so much that it achieves power parity (rough equality) with the international system's dominant state. If the newly rising country (also known as the challenger) is dissatisfied with the international status quo, it will demand changes which will likely be resisted by the dominant state. The combination of power parity between challenger and dominant state combined with the challenger's negative evaluation of the status quo provides the necessary condition for war (according to power transition theory). This war is fought for control of the 'rules of the game', or status quo, of the international system, with the expectation that victory by the challenger will be followed by a restructuring of international diplomatic, economic, and military relations. However, so long as the dominant country is preponderant the Great Power system is at peace. Only when a dissatisfied challenger rises to parity is war among the most powerful countries anticipated by power transition theory.

Because the theory suggests that parity and the challenger's dissatisfaction are jointly necessary for war, a weak dissatisfied challenger is not to be feared. Similarly, a rising country satisfied with the status quo is not expected to start a war even if parity with the dominant country is achieved, because in such instances there is no marginal gain to be achieved through fighting. Satisfied states are pacific states to whom the rules of realist power politics do not apply. Since international structures such as the distribution of power have different impacts on dyads of satisfied states than on dyads that contain both satisfied and dissatisfied states, the status quo clearly differentiates power transition theory from realism or neorealism.3

If one were to understand the present and predict the future based on extrapolations of a pre-existing theory, one should select a theory that accounts well for the events of the past. Power
transition theory enjoys a distinguished empirical record. First of all, Organski & Kugler (1980) provide strong evidence that wars between contender great powers are fought when parity prevails between them. This finding has been extended to all great powers by Houweling & Siccama (1988), and by Kim (1989). Additionally, a general relationship between dyadic parity and war, or between dyadic preponderance and peace, has been reported by a wide range of scholars (Bremer, 1992; Bueno de Mesquita, 1990; Garnham, 1976a, b; Geller, 1993; Gochman, 1990; Maoz, 1993, p. 37; Weede, 1976). Recently, scholars have begun to document a relationship between challenger dissatisfaction with the status quo and war. Kim (1991) measures dissatisfaction by observing the challenger's tau-b alliance score (Bueno de Mesquita, 1975) for the dominant state, arguing that when the challenger and the dominant state have sharply different alliance portfolios these differences are symptomatic of different views of the status quo. The results suggest that a negative tau-b alliance score between the challenger and dominant state is a strong predictor of subsequent war involving that challenger. Werner & Kugler (1995) measure challenger dissatisfaction by observing extraordinary military buildups by the challenger as parity with the dominant state approaches. Their military buildup measure of dissatisfaction is a strong predictor of subsequent war between the challenger and dominant state. Finally, recent extensions have demonstrated a relationship between parity and dissatisfaction with war as far back in time as 1648 (Kim, 1992), as well as to minor power wars in South America (Lemke, 1993). In short, there is impressive empirical evidence to support power transition theory’s claims that parity and challenger dissatisfaction are strong correlates of war.

3. The Long Peace
It is likely that we will be better able to understand the current international order if we understand the situation from which it arose. The post-Cold War world is the successor to the Cold War; and, hopefully a continuation of the ‘Long Peace’ (Gaddis, 1986). Gaddis offers this phrase to describe Great Power relations since World War II, as this represents the longest continual period without a war among the Great Powers. It is important to understand why this period has been characterized by the absence of Great Power war, because identification of the factors responsible for the Long Peace during the Cold War could provide important clues as to whether or not the Long Peace will persist now that the Cold War has ended.

Gaddis considers bipolarity to have strongly contributed to the absence of Great Power war during this period. He argues, paralleling Waltz’s (1964) prior arguments, that bipolarity is easier to maintain than multipolarity, that it leads to stability in alliance configurations, and that it makes any alliance defections that do occur less worrisome. The overall effect is stabilizing. Finally (although this does not exhaust his list of contributing elements), Gaddis argues that Cold War decision-makers were generally risk-averse, with this unaccustomed caution arising from the devastating costs nuclear weapons can inflict upon countries that find themselves at war with a nuclear opponent. The combined effect of these elements was the creation of a set of tacit ‘rules’ for Great Power interaction that provided order and stability. A clear implication is that should these elements be removed from the international scene, as, arguably, happened with the end of the Cold War, the Long Peace could end in hot war as the rules break down.

Others have recognized the pacifying effect of bipolarity and nuclear weapons. The notion that nuclear weapons are responsible for the absence of Great Power war after World War II is not a new idea (Intriligator & Brito, 1984; Kissinger, 1957; Waltz, 1981). Similarly, as mentioned, Waltz makes comparable arguments about the stabilizing effects of bipolarity. It is possible that such elements, singly or in combination, do have stabilizing effects on international relations, but this claim cannot be made based solely on the Long Peace. We must evaluate these claims against a larger set of cases if we are to use them as explanations to be extrapolated into the future.

Is bipolarity really a stabilizing element? Deutsch & Singer (1964) provide a logically consistent argument suggesting multipolarity is stabilizing. Thus, there is no exclusive logical claim behind bipolarity as a stabilizing effect. Haas (1970) considers polarity across three sub-
systems at various time periods, and finds that whereas bipolarity is generally more stable than multipolarity, although multipolarity is associated with fewer but longer wars. He suggests that unipolarity is the most pacific type of system. Hopf (1991) argues that consideration of 16th-century instances of bi- and multipolarity in European history makes it difficult to suggest one is more stable and peaceful than the other. In more recent work, Kegley & Raymond (1994) differentiate between types of multipolarity, drawing on detailed consideration of six modern time periods. They argue that some types of multipolarity are more dangerous than others. The logical and empirical evidence regarding polarity and war suggests we should be cautious in accepting any argument that bipolarity is a significant cause of the Long Peace.

Have nuclear weapons contributed to the Long Peace? There has only been one time period in history in which two or more countries had nuclear weapons they could deliver to each other’s territory, and this period overlaps with the absence of Great Power war. As a result, it is impossible to test propositions about whether nuclear weapons have prevented war during the Long Peace, since there is no variation in either the presence of nuclear weapons or the occurrence of war during this period. What we can do, however, is analyze the logical bases and subsidiary propositions of those who argue that nuclear deterrence promotes peace. First, the logical bases. The core argument of the nuclear deterrence school is that the extreme costs nuclear weapons can inflict make countries avoid going to war. Thus, we should logically expect a negative relationship between expected costs and the propensity of countries to engage in war if nuclear deterrence arguments are correct. If this proposition is true, then we should observe some evidence of continually declining propensity for war through history as advances in technology created first the flaked-point projectile, the atlatl, the bow and arrow, rudimentary firearms, machine guns, war-planes, and so on, thereby raising the costs of war. Whereas it is true that the frequency of Great Power war has declined over time (Levy, 1983, Ch. 6), the evidence of the first half of this century should make us pause before blindly accepting the proposition that high expected costs deter war.

Related to this concern about costs are the questions of extended deterrence and of crises pitting nuclear against non-nuclear countries. If nuclear weapons make countries cautious, then we should expect a notable role for nuclear weapons in the peaceful resolution of extended deterrence situations. Similarly, in situations where a nuclear state finds itself in a conflict with a non-nuclear state, we should expect the non-nuclear state to be more likely to concede whatever is at dispute, because the potential costs for it are higher than those facing the nuclear state. Contrary to these expectations, Huth & Russett (1984) find little or no role for nuclear weapons in the resolution of extended deterrence situations, and Kugler (1984) reports that nuclear states generally do not get their way in crises with non-nuclear states. Based on these indications, we should exercise some caution in accepting arguments that suggest nuclear weapons have been an important part of the stability of the Long Peace.

Gaddis’s argument about the Long Peace differs somewhat from the presentation offered here. Specifically, Gaddis argues that it is the unique joint occurrence of bipolarity and nuclear weapons that caused the postwar world to avoid Great Power war. Since my critique is about the independent effects of nuclear weapons or bipolarity I am not able to reject his argument (although if the underlying logic of each part of his argument is questionable, he has to specify better how the interaction is pacifying). Of course, it is not possible to offer any evidence supporting his argument either. The postwar period is the source for his argument. As such, this period cannot be used to confirm his argument. Such an attempted confirmation would fail by tautology. At the same time, there has never been another period in which the unique joint occurrence of bipolarity and nuclear weapons has occurred. However, there have been previous periods of Great Power peace. Any explanation of the Long Peace that could also account for these previous periods of peace would be superior on logical and philosophical grounds.

Thus, if the two principal elements are suspect to such re-interpretation, and if the explanation for the Long Peace is not relevant to analysis of any other eras of Great Power peace, perhaps we should reconsider the argument altogether. If we question this explanation we
might do well to consider an alternative explanation; that of power transition theory. Recall that power transition theory argues that Great Power war is anticipated when there is power parity between the dominant country and a dissatisfied challenger. Great Power war cannot occur, according to this theory, unless these two conditions are jointly present. Throughout the Cold War the United States was the dominant country, and the Soviet Union was the (potentially) dissatisfied challenger. However, the Soviet Union never achieved parity with the United States, and therefore war was not expected. As Figure 1 shows, the Soviet Union rarely achieved a GDP of even half that of the United States. The power transition explanation of why the Cold War was part of a Long Peace is that power parity between the US and USSR was never observed.

To the skeptical reader this may appear to be an unexceptional explanation of the absence of war, but, as Most & Starr (1982) write, any good theory of the causes of war must simultaneously be a theory of the causes of peace. Power transition theory is both. It accounts well for the instances of Great Power war and peace, at least from the 17th century to the 20th, and this gives us confidence that the explanation of peace since World War II is well founded as well. Alternative explanations of the Long Peace do not possess this historical grounding; their explanations cannot extend backward in time as power transition theory can. Consequently, power transition’s explanation of the Long Peace is likely to prove superior to the alternatives discussed above. Arguments such as Gaddis’s may provide the best explanation of a single case, but if one is interested in explaining international relations in general such specific explanations prove unsatisfactory. If the emergence of nuclear weapons and bipolarity changed international relations qualitatively, then a theory that does not take this sea-change into account will be a poor basis for extrapolation into the future. I argue above that there are strong reasons for doubting that nuclear weapons or bipolarity have had this effect independently, no explanation has been offered for how the joint occurrence has changed international relations in some fashion different from the independent effects, and thus it is up to those who would argue that the present or recent past does not resemble the past or distant past to explain why this is so. Absent evidence of and an explanation for sea-change, those who would argue that such a sea-change has occurred offer nothing more than opinion, a poor basis for foreign policy.

4. The End of the Cold War
The Cold War ended because the Soviet system became so untenable that the USSR could no longer compete with the USA. Failing at competition, the USSR, and now Russia, has turned toward conciliation. This is evidenced by democratization, privatization, decreasing military confrontation, and the dissolution of the Soviet Empire. The Cold War ended in parts. The first part involved Soviet internal decay (both economic and political). The second saw the dis-
appearance of Cold War competition, tensions and antagonisms.

Did anyone predict that this would happen? There seems to be pretty widespread agreement within the scholarly literature that the answer is no. As far as predicting internal decay, the only explicit prediction I am aware of is that of George F. Kennan, who wrote in 1947:

... the possibility remains (and in the opinion of this writer it is a strong one) that Soviet power, like the capitalist world of its conception, bears within it the seeds of its own decay, and that the sprouting of these seeds is well advanced (reprinted in 1951, p. 125, parenthetical statement in original).13

If Kennan is the only one to predict the internal decay, did anyone predict that the consequence of this would be the diminishment in tensions and competition? Lebow writes: ‘The Soviet response to decline is not one captured by any realist theory’ (1994, p. 263). Ray & Russett (1996), who argue forcefully that the behavioralist/positivist/empiricist tradition does provide predictions of international phenomena, admit: ‘there were few specific assertions in the international relations literature regarding the end of the Cold War in the year before its demise’. However, they contend that Russett did predict (at least partially) the end of the Cold War in a 1982 publication. They argue that the end of the Cold War is consistent with the arguments associated with the democratic peace proposition, reprinting an earlier argument by Russett:

stable peace [between the United States and Soviet Union] could be possible only if the government of the Soviet Union were to evolve into something more democratic than the current ‘state socialism’ ... (quoted in Ray & Russett, 1996).

The argument is that since relations within a dyad composed of democracies are more peaceful than those in dyads including at least one non-democracy, should the Soviet Union become more democratic (as it did in an effort to deal with its internal decay), the tensions between the superpowers would ease considerably, thereby ending the Cold War. This sort of contingent statement of probable events is evidence of the ability of some theories to predict the future.

Did power transition theory predict the end of the Cold War? The immediate answer is no. No writing on power transition theory made any contingent statements about the Cold War’s end. However, it is possible to interpret Soviet internal decay as consistent with the underlying force driving power transition theory: internal growth. Organski originally wrote of three stages in each country’s growth path: an initial stage of potential power marked by slow or no growth, a stage of transitional growth in power during which rapid, fast-paced growth occurs, and finally a stage of power maturation in which the now much more powerful country tapers off and returns to slow growth reminiscent of the first stage (Organski, 1958, Ch. 12; for an elaboration, see Organski, 1965). This trend can be visualized as an S-shaped curve in which the rise during the second stage provides the growth that propels one country past another in terms of power. It is this middle stage that leads to the transition from preponderance to parity, from which power transition theory draws its name.

It is fair to say that power transition theory suggests that if a country does not reach parity with another during its stage of transitional growth in power, any subsequent power transition is unlikely. The Soviets did not overtake the United States during their stage of transitional growth in power. As the Soviets realized they would not, in fact, ‘bury the West’ they attempted reforms conciliatory with the international status quo, and as a result the Cold War ended. Having failed at competition with the dominant country, the USSR turned toward conciliation. This is the power transition theory interpretation of the end of the Cold War. There is no prediction of Soviet internal economic and political decay here, but the consequences of that decay are consistent with the theory. Power transition theory argues that unless the USSR catches up there will not be a war. The USSR did not catch up, and no war occurred.

5. The Post-Cold War World

5.1 The Optimists

There are a number of arguments that take a very optimistic view of what we can expect in the future. I deal with only two here in order to be brief, yet hope to convey some of the breadth of the optimistic arguments in print.

One argument suggests that people have come to understand that the use of force is a
rather poor way of dealing with conflicts of interest. War is now seen as so costly that it will go the way of other inefficient institutions, like dueling and slavery. The result is that increasingly we have a more and more peaceful world. This process was greatly accelerated by the World Wars of the 20th century. The peaceful Cold War and what is anticipated to be even less violent post-Cold War world are simply further stages in this process of decreasing frequency of wars.

Perhaps the most familiar expression of this viewpoint is Mueller’s (1989) ‘obsolescence of major war’ argument. He argues that following World War I a dramatic change of opinion about the value of war took place in the developed world. Where previously war had been viewed as a necessary evil at worst or as an heroic institution developing men’s characters at best, by 1919 it was viewed pretty uniformly as a barbaric, outdated and inefficient way of dealing with conflicts of interest. Evidence is offered by the development of anti-war movements, as well as the subsequent statements and actions of international decision-makers. Now that the developed world has ‘learned’ the truth about war, major war is obsolete. As soon as the developing world learns this lesson as well, war will be obsolete altogether.

A second optimistic view of the future sees the post-Cold War world as representing a radical departure from the past. With the end of the Cold War a sea-change in international behavior has occurred, the like of which is unprecedented in history. Singer & Wildavsky (1993) argue that the world can now be divided into ‘zones of peace’ and ‘zones of turmoil’. The former comprise advanced, developed democracies like the United States, Western Europe, and Japan, while the rest of the world falls into the latter type. Within the zones of peace, war is now impossible because democracies do not fight each other. Further, developed states have a preponderance of power and thus need not fear attack from the zones of turmoil. According to Singer & Wildavsky:

> What counts about the zones of peace is that they are something new in the world. Without a government over them they will be peaceful and democratic. They will be a daily reminder to the world that the old message of history, that war is a natural and inevitable part of life, no longer has to be true. The zones of peace will be a demonstration that peace is possible among countries that used to fight one another – a model of how world peace may be obtained without world government. (1993, p. 30, emphasis added)

Modern developed democracies have existed in increasing numbers over the past century, but what is different now is that the main threat to these countries, the Soviet Union, has disappeared. The advanced developed democracies are now able to rest content in their preponderance, secure in their stable and prosperous peace. The extraordinarily optimistic expectation about the future is that ultimately all states will inevitably develop, liberalize, and join the zones of peace. According to Singer & Wildavsky, this is joyous news. The days of war are numbered. The future will not resemble the past.

5.2 The Pessimists

Perhaps the most familiar pessimistic argument is that of Mearsheimer (1990), who cautions us that the end of the Cold War – and the subsequent end of bipolarity – means the return of multipolarity in Europe. Mearsheimer makes explicit use of neorealist/balance of power theory in order to argue that this reversion from bi- to multipolarity will likely have disastrous consequences for Great Power peace. He compares the future of the Great Powers with that experienced in Europe in the 20th century prior to the Cold War. He criticizes optimistic counter-arguments that the future will be peaceful due to the high costs of modern war, the existence of so many democracies, or due to some learning process, and persuasively argues that flaws in these alternative theories undercut our ability to accept the scenarios they advance. He concludes that the USA must carefully ‘manage’ the dangerous multipolarity that the end of the Cold War will bring.

Huntington (1989) expresses similar cautions about accepting the optimists’ views of the future. He also is critical of expectations based on the democratic peace proposition, cautioning us that the democratic peace proposal: ‘is valid as far as it goes, but it may not go all that far’ (1989, p. 7). When discussing Mueller’s learning process argument, he asks us to consider if perhaps murder, rather than slavery, is not a better comparison to war. Since murder is anything but obsolete, he cautions us against expecting that war will become obsolete too. Huntington
does not see the end of the Cold War as the end of history or as the introduction of something new in history. Like Mearsheimer, he sees it as the return of danger, of the past.\textsuperscript{18} Where the optimists see the end of the Cold War as the negation of the international system’s war-like past, the pessimists see it as the return of the past.

5.3 Expectations Based on Power Transition Theory

According to power transition theory the end of the Cold War provides reason to celebrate, similar to the optimists, but also suggests areas of grave caution and concern requiring attention much like the arguments of the pessimists. Recall that the twin components of power transition theory are relative power differentials and evaluations of the international status quo. Soviet decline means the disappearance of the main competitor to US leadership. This has immediate consequences for expectations about war between the United States and the Soviet Union/Russia. Subsequent Russian democratization, liberalization and efforts to engage the international economy rather than foment international military tensions suggest that, even when Russia stabilizes and begins to grow, it is likely to be a satisfied country. This has long-term consequences for expectations about war between the United States and Russia. The combination of these immediate and long-term factors suggests that a war between the United States and Russia is very unlikely. Further, this is consistent with how peaceful the end of the Cold War was. The United States benefited in terms of security by the dissolution of the Soviet Empire, and could expect no gain by attacking since the Russian political and economic system was becoming more like that favored by the USA. Consequently the Russians had no reason to fear the United States would take advantage of Russian weakness and strike. This is contrary to the power maximization underpinnings of realist and neorealist thought that expect the United States to have taken advantage of Soviet decline.\textsuperscript{19}

The power transition theory expectation for the post-Cold War world is the continuation of Great Power peace. Contrary to the arguments of Mearsheimer and Huntington, a multipolar post-Cold War Europe is not one that should cause great concern. The current and near-future Europe may have a similar power arrangement to that associated with the World Wars, but the crucial difference now is that the major states of Europe are arguably satisfied with the international status quo. They are all democratic, capitalist, and have defensive military postures. Prior to both World Wars there were powerful dissatisfied states in Europe. Now there are not. European war is as unlikely as the proponents of the democratic peace proposition claim, but war is unlikely because Europeans are satisfied with the status quo – democracy is a part of satisfaction under the current status quo (for an empirical evaluation supporting this argument, see Lemke & Reed, 1995). Barring some dramatic and unforeseen changes in status quo evaluations among the Great Powers, war amongst them is not anticipated.

There is one very notable contingency that could undercut this predicator. The People’s Republic of China arguably is not, despite recent experiments with limited economic liberalization, a member of the satisfied coalition of states. Recent Chinese growth rates are very impressive, and suggest that a potential transition to parity between the People’s Republic and the United States within the next few decades is possible. As evidence, consider Figure 2, which extrapolates current GDP growth trend into the future. Should such a transition occur without any change in Chinese evaluations of the status quo, war is expected based on power transition theory.\textsuperscript{20} Thus, this pacific Great Power prediction of the future of the post-Cold War world is contingent on Chinese growth and attitudes toward the international system’s status quo.\textsuperscript{21}

Chinese growth represents only one potential threat to continued Great Power peace, although arguably this is the most realistic threat. The re-emergence of a centralized or authoritarian political and economic system in the former Soviet Union coupled with a resurgence of growth in the area could also present a threat; a re-emergence of the antagonism associated with the Cold War. It is also possible that other political units could challenge the current international status quo. Although satisfied today a united Europe would possess the capacity to challenge the United States. Such a contingency assumes dramatic changes in the international order, changes for which no ready explanation comes
because it suggests there will never again be a world war. However, such deterrence arguments are based on the assumption that high costs deter conflict. This assumption is not supported by empirical evidence (Huth & Russett, 1984; Kugler, 1984). Thus, although the power transition theory expectation of war should China remain dissatisfied and achieve power parity with the United States appears somewhat mechanistic and perhaps unrealistic, it is more consistent than deterrence arguments with the empirical evidence we have thus far. This chilling logic suggests that faith in a nuclear peace may be unfounded.

The optimists and pessimists are, based on this analysis, each half right about what to expect in the future. According to the extrapolation of power transition theory we can expect the Long Peace to continue. However, it is conceivable that the current period of peace will come to a very violent end. Should this occur the expectations of the pessimists will be tragically borne out.

The power transition account of what to expect in the future is perhaps superior to that of either the optimists or the pessimists for a number of reasons. First, consider Singer & Wildavsky’s (1993) claim that the zones of peace are something radically new in international relations. Is this so? Power transition theory can be interpreted such that the satisfied countries of the world do not anticipate fighting each other (since there is nothing for them to fight over). The members of the satisfied coalition of states thus constitute, and arguably always have constituted, zones of peace. Would it have been reasonable to expect any circumstances under which the United States and Canada would have gone to war at any point since Canada achieved her independence? Similarly, did anyone anticipate any situation in which the United States and Great Britain would have gone to war with each other at any point during the 20th century? How about West Germany with any of her Western European neighbors after post-war reconstruction? Satisfied countries have always constituted zones of peace amongst themselves. The difference between these historic zones of peace and the post-Cold War zone of peace Singer & Wildavsky recognize is one of size, not kind. The satisfied coalition of states includes more

to mind. Similarly, a dissatisfied Japan might rise to a position from which it could initiate a war in an attempt to change the status quo. This assumes Japanese growth or US decline that is perhaps not reasonably expected, and also assumes that Japan’s current evaluation of the status quo will change. In the long term other actors, perhaps India, might rise in power and desire changes that might necessitate war.

One might be tempted to argue that all of these scenarios are hopelessly unrealistic due to the presence of nuclear weapons. Surely any dissatisfied challenger contemplating world war with the United States must realize that such a conflict involves a (perhaps unacceptably) high probability of nuclear escalation and that this potential eliminates the gains that might be achieved by fighting. Admittedly, this argument has a certain intuitive appeal. It also is appealing
countries now than it ever has in the past. But, the satisfied coalition of states/zone of peace of the immediate post-World War II period enjoyed a greater preponderance of power (admittedly due to the destruction of the war itself and consequent US preponderance) than the current satisfied condition of states/zone of peace. Any claim that the modern zone of peace is different in kind because it need not fear attack from without must address this point if it is to be accepted.

Second, consider the argument that the developed countries, due to a learning process, have turned away from war as a means of resolving disagreements. Whereas this may have some validity for the post-World War II period, it is only on this one specific ‘peace’ that it has any claims. Power transition theory can also account for this Long Peace (power parity between the USA and USSR was absent). But, additionally, power transition theory can account for other peace at other times and in other areas of the globe. For example, South America has been one of the most internationally peaceful areas on earth. Mueller’s learning process argument cannot explain this Minor Power long peace because the South Americans have not had the opportunity to learn, first-hand, the lessons that Europeans have learned. But the multiple hierarchy model version of power transition theory can account for the long periods of peace South Americans have enjoyed, and in the same manner that the Great Power Long Peace is accounted for – the necessary conditions for war have usually been absent among South American states. Thus, power transition theory can account for the peace that is of interest to optimists like Mueller, and a great deal more.

6. Conclusions and Implications
Throughout this article I have argued that power transition theory is an especially useful tool that can be used to understand the past, interpret the present, and predict the future. The Long Peace is consistent with the theory because the necessary conditions for war were not present. Similarly, the peaceful end of the Cold War, although not predicted by power transition theory, is certainly consistent with the theory, as is the peacefulness of the post-Cold War world thus far. This explanatory power, both historical and contemporary, gives confidence to those who would advance power transition theory predictions of what the future will likely hold.

We should be cautiously optimistic about the future. The end of the Cold War means the evaporation of the major challenge to the current initial status quo. Russian efforts at liberalization, democratization and privatization suggest that Russia has moved toward being a member of the satisfied coalition of states. The size of the satisfied coalition means that Great Power war is not to be anticipated anytime soon. However, there are threats to this optimistic scenario. These include Chinese growth unaccompanied by a change in attitude toward the status quo, as well as the possibility of dramatic changes in powerful satisfied countries that could lead to a change in their evaluations of the status quo. In this regard the true threat of hyper-nationalist chauvinism such as that of Vladimir Zhirinovsky becomes apparent. To ensure against these threats taking material form, the United States and other leading satisfied Great Powers should continue patient cooperation with the Chinese leadership in an effort to encourage democratization and liberalization. The leading satisfied states should also assist the Russians, financially as well as rhetorically, in achieving stability and growth under a democratic market-oriented framework.

In terms of Great Power conflict the world is a safer place now than it has been since the Cold War began. But, in order to prolong this period of safety the powerful satisfied countries will have to remain vigilant and fully engaged in international relations, paying attention to the contingencies that could negate power transition theory’s prediction of continued Great Power peace.

NOTES
2. Although not a perfectly democratic political body, the United Nations clearly reflects many characteristics of democratic politics. As evidenced in its Charter, the UN is based on claims of equal rights for nations large and small, ostensibly is charged to safeguard fundamental
human rights, is charged to promote the principles of justice and international law, and allows each member an equal number of votes (if only in the General Assembly). I am not suggesting that the Charter ‘makes’ the UN a democratic organization. Rather, I am suggesting that the general tenor of the (arguably) premier international body reflects the same political principles that underlie democracies.

3. For an interpretation that places power transition theory within the realist paradigm, see Lebow (1994, pp. 249–277). Lebow writes: ‘Power transition theories comprise the branch of realism that analyzes great power responses to [relative] decline’ (p. 251). Most of his discussion is about Gilpin’s (1981) work, and is accurate in description of that work. However, I do not include Organski’s power transition theory in this realist vein because consideration of the status quo means that not all countries respond to decline in the same way. The decline of one satisfied state relative to a second satisfied state is not expected to be conflictual, because the gaining satisfied state has no exception of net gains from fighting the declining satisfied state. The rising state would not change the declining satisfied state’s status quo (assuming the declining satisfied state is the dominant country). Thus, power considerations between satisfied states are of little importance at best. By contrast, the relative decline of a satisfied dominant country relative to a dissatisfied state is, according to power transition theory, expected to be associated with a much higher probability of war. Evaluations of the status quo are a critically important, non-realistic element of the power transition theory discussed here. Further, I refer to Organski’s theory as the power transition theory because it pre-dates others by a considerable margin.

4. The dyadic element of these results must be stressed, as little or no evidence has been presented to suggest a relationship between the existence of systemic party and war or between systemic preponderance and peace. Ferris (1973) and Siverson & Tennefoss (1984) consider a systemic relationship between parity and peace while Singer et al. (1972), Bueno de Mesquita (1981), Siverson & Sullivan (1983), and Maoz (1993) all present evidence or otherwise argue that there is no relationship between power distributions and war at the level of the international system.

5. Power transition theory, as represented here, bears strong resemblance to Galtung’s (1964) structural theory of aggression. Galtung argues that rank disequilibrium, discontinuities between ascribed and achieved status, will likely make actors (including states) aggressive. The dissatisfied challenger in power transition theory is almost certainly a rank disequilibrated state. This challenger is the second most powerful state in the Great Power system (high achieved status), but enjoys few or no benefits from the status quo, and arguably is not accorded the prestige its power warrants (low ascribed status). Power transition theory further anticipates that this challenger will be the initiator of conflict (since it is the actor that desires change to the status quo). Galtung also argues that such a rank disequilibrated actor would be the prime candidate for aggressive behavior in a situation like that described by power transition theory. The structural theory of aggression and power transition theory are clearly compatible. Galtung’s theory is more general, since it applies to interactions between individuals, groups, and states. However, power transition theory enjoys wider empirical support, and is thus perhaps better suited for evaluation of prospects for the post-Cold War world. (The compatibility between the theories has been explored by Danilovic (1995)).

6. These rules for order and stability are similar to, but not the same as, power transition theory’s status quo. Recall that in power transition theory the status quo is consciously established by the dominant state. In Gaddis’s conceptualization these rules were an unconscious reaction to international Cold War reality.

7. Some question whether the distinction between bipolarity and multipolarity is a useful one at all. Consider Wagner (1994).

8. These are cases where one state threatens a second, and subsequently a third state threatens the first in an effort to deter it from acting on its initial threat.

9. This point is persuasively made by Bueno de Mesquita: ‘In order for one explanation to supplant another, it is necessary that the new explanation yield a net increase in knowledge. Both hitherto unexplained facts and previously explained facts must be accounted for, within the limits of measurement error. This requirement alone indicates a need to “test” hypotheses against more than one case. With one case it simply is not possible both to account for previously unexplained facts . . . and previously accorded-for facts. It is difficult to see how excess content over previous explanations may be attained with a single observation.’ (1985, p. 124)

10. As is usually the case with power transition studies, I employ national product to measure power. I define the USA as the dominant country because it emerged after World War II with a much larger national product than that of the USSR. Power transition theory argues that national power is determined by national growth. The resources of a state define the potential power assets that might be put to various purposes. The generality of national product nicely represents this domestic power potential, and is thus often used in power transition studies (Organski & Kugler, 1980; Lemke, 1993; Lemke & Werner, 1996), although several power transition studies have used alternative measures of power (Houweling & Siccama, 1988; Kim, 1989; Lemke & Werner, 1996). The choice of a measure should be driven by theory as much as possible, and I argue that power transition theory is most accurately evaluated using national product data. (Not surprisingly, there is a very high correlation between national product data and more traditional power measures such as that of the Correlates of War Project; see Organski & Kugler, 1980, p. 38, as well as Kugler & Arbetman, 1989.) One specific problem with employing national product data here. However, concerns questions of how accurate the estimates are for closed economies (such as those of the USSR and PRC). In recognition of this problem, only general statements about relationships described by the data are made here. The figures that follow are based on data found in Maddison (1989), and extended with data from Mitchell (1994).
11. Recently, Volgy & Imwalle (1995) provide additional evidence against the existence of sea-changes in international relations. They investigate the extent to which bipolar or hegemonic characteristics of the postwar period influenced the levels of conflict (variously defined). They find consistently that hegemonic characteristics were more important than bipolar influences. This is certainly consistent with the argument advanced here, but also highlights the importance of a recurring condition, hegemony, rather than a 'new' bipolarity. Not surprisingly, Volgy and Imwalle argue that the past is potentially a good predictor of the future.

12. No less an authority than Mikhail Gorbachev writes: 'At some stage - this became particularly clear in the latter half of the seventies - something happened that was at first sight inexplicable. The country [Soviet Union] began to lose momentum. Economic failures became more frequent. Difficulties began to accumulate and deteriorate, and unresolved problems to multiply. Elements of what we call stagnation...began to appear...' (1987, pp. 18–19). Additional Russian claims of Soviet internal decay are expressed by several of the contributors to Midlarsky et al. (1994). Of course, the Soviet system may not be completely at fault. It could be that the 'defection' of the PRC after the Sino-Soviet rift and subsequent US-Chinese rapprochement 'forced' the Soviets to over-commit resources to defense purposes, such an over-commitment overtaxed the system, and collapse followed. It may be that the potential of competition with both China and the USA would cause any domestic system to fail.

13. It is probably possible to assemble a rather extensive list of economists who made statements about the inherent inefficiencies of central planning, and to interpret this as somewhat predictive of the Soviet Union's internal decay. However, Kennan's is the only statement within the international relations literature with which I am familiar.


15. For a similar, although probabilistic, argument about learning leading to a morally advanced world in which war could be abolished, see Ray (1989).

16. For an argument that comes to a similar conclusion that the 'new world order' is qualitatively different from what preceded it, see Fukuyama (1989).

17. 'The failure of the Soviet Union and of communism permanently removes the last systematic challenge to democracy in existence' (Singer & Wldavsky, 1993, p. 36).

18. 'The end of the Cold War does not mean the end of political, ideological, diplomatic, economic, technological, or even military rivalry among nations. It does mean increased instability, unpredictability, and violence in international affairs. It could mean the end of the Long Peace' (Huntington, 1989, p. 6).

19. This point about realism's failure to incorporate the peaceful end of the Cold War is repeatedly and finely made by both Lebow (1994) and Ray & Russett (1996).

20. The PRC is labeled dissatisfied with the status quo because it is neither democratic nor market-oriented. Thus, the general tenor of structured international relations at the global level does not reflect the ways in which China structures its own domestic relations. This incongruity is synonymous with dissatisfaction because if China preferred democratic and market-oriented interactions it could so organize its domestic affairs.

21. Concern about potential transitions between the USA and PRC are not new. Consider the following: 'The question is not whether China will become the most powerful nation on earth, but rather how long it will take her to achieve this status' (Organski, 1968, p. 486).

22. Note that nothing is said about minor power conflict. Transitions to parity between dissatisfied local challengers and local dominant powers are still potential sources of conflict in various minor power regions of the world, as a recent extension of power transition theory suggests (see Lemke, 1993). Also, note that nothing is said in this prediction about peace between great powers and minor powers. There is nothing in the great power peace prediction of power transition theory to preclude the possibility of war between Russia and one of the newly independent constituent republics of the former Soviet Union. The prediction of peace is only one of continued great power peace.

23. For a detailed discussion of the multiple hierarchy model, see: Lemke (1993) and Lemke & Werner (1996).

24. Even here, however, there may be cause for optimism. This self-same dramatic Chinese growth has been, to a considerable extent, fundamentally different from dramatic Soviet growth under Stalin. Chinese growth has involved a large amount of interaction with capitalist East and West. Foreign investment and trade have been major components of recent Chinese economic development. By contrast, Soviet development under Stalin was largely divorced from the West (or East for that matter). Thus, the process that could allow China to develop to the point where it might challenge the status quo entails a very real possibility of guaranteeing that the Chinese will be satisfied with the current international order before parity is reached. Of course, this discussion considers only economic elements of the international status quo. Arguably, economic concerns are the most important, but other concerns certainly exist as well.

25. This threat is really only operative if a re-unified and hyper-nationalist or again communist Soviet Union enjoys a period of sustained growth in which it catches up to the United States.

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