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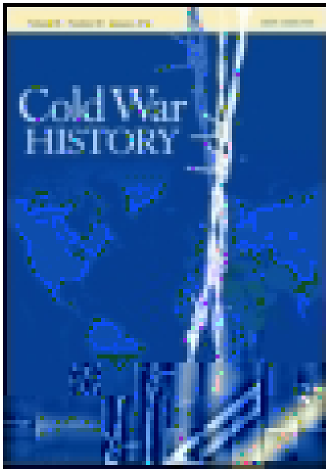

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Of ghosts and other spectres: the Cold War's ending and the question of the next 'hegemonic' conflict

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somewhat less optimistic side, it conveys a sense of acceptance, possibly even *c a e fe e*, in case fate does not generate the hoped-for outcome: the victors (the other team) will also realise how fleeting glory can turn out to be.

Either way, the cyclical epistemology of the baseball diamond yields lessons, to players as well as to their fans: things will turn out reasonably OK, in the end. We win, fantastic; we lose, there will always be another day. Neither one of this article's authors is a baseball player, though each is a fan of the sport, one more passionate about it than the other. But in the 'game' that the two of us do make our profession (the study of international security from the perspective of International Relations theory), we find the baseball apothegm to be apposite. It is true that most IR wonks and other political scientists might not express the consequences of cyclical analysis in the same manner as we do here, but it is obvious that for so many of them, theirs is a

historian, we leave to other contributors to this special theme issue the job of detailed historical analysis of the prominent moments and debates attending the ending of the Cold War, as glimpsed with the benefit of a quarter-century's worth of hindsight. Our own role in this project is to grapple with the problem of cyclical determinism. As will shortly become apparent, we ourselves are hardly immune from thinking and writing in cyclical terms. It is just that we do not see why the field of cyclical analysis should be handed over completely to the power transition pessimists, and their hegemonic warfare kith and kin. There can also be a more positive reading of cycles, especially insofar as analysis focuses upon the interplay between the alternating patterns of military revolutions and the development of diplomatic practices. We attempt to highlight this more positive reading immediately below, where we pay close heed to what one of us has termed the 'cycles of Mars'[2] – namely those periods in history during which it can be said that 'military revolutions' emerged to give structure to the international political system, as well as to the practices of the political entities that constitute the system.

In the second section of our article, we change the normative tone, and zero in on one particularly dyspeptic cyclical reading of that system, advanced by the body of scholars who labour in the fields of power transition theory, which maintains that one is correct to worry about the impending prospect of great power war. Following this is our third section, in which we argue that the [illegible]-pessimism of the hegemonic war theorists is woefully misplaced, in no small measure due to the absurdity attending claims about hegemony in the international [illegible] system. In our conclusion, we hint that the way in which the Cold War drew to an end a quarter-century ago suggests a good reason why, if one must resort to cyclical reasoning, the relative optimism of the baseball players is a safer bet than the unalloyed doom-and-gloomism of the power transition theorists.

The C cle of Mar

As we noted in the introduction, it is far from unusual to encounter analysts of international security relations resorting to cyclical modes of understanding, explaining, and possibly even predicting major trends and forces in the international system. One cyclical variant of theorising, not nearly so popular as power transition theory yet nevertheless pregnant with deep significance for the very evolution of the international system down to the present day, concerns the appearance and recurrences of what we might call 'military revolutions' (not to be confused with a more recent and even trendy term, the so-called 'revolution in military affairs', or RMA).

As we understand it, the idea of military revolutions expresses one of the most powerful forces to have, historically, accounted for the manner in which the contemporary states system has been structured. As such, it ranks as an outstanding heuristic device, serving to guide our thinking about the interplay between radical

[2] Michel Fortmann, [illegible] (Paris: Economica, 2010).

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alterations in the manner in which warfare is waged and the rise, decline, and (occasionally) re-emergence of sovereign states. All cyclical theorists, not even excluding the power transition ones (though they may not explicitly recognise it), owe a great debt to earlier work in the field of military revolutions, a debt that we argue in this section needs frankly to be acknowledged and assessed. So let us see what instruction can be gleaned from the cyclical interplay between military revolutions and changes in the nature of states – and, to some, even of the state system itself.[3]

Although it is hardly an uncontested concept, the idea of a military revolution seems to us to correspond rather well with observed reality. Whether we have in mind the development of artillery and fortifications in the sixteenth century, the emergence of professional armies and construction of naval armadas during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the changing nature of recruiting and financing armies during the French revolutionary and Napoleonic decades connecting the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the technological and organisational advances of the latter

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it is just that often there are many lags in the linkage between the so-called 'independent variable' of military revolution and the 'dependent variable(s)' produced thereby, and it is important to realise that sometimes a good deal of time can pass before the consequences of the revolution become apparent. One example of such a chronological discrepancy came with the invention of firearms in the early sixteenth century; the consequent adjustments in infantry tactics required to incorporate the reality of such portable weaponry were not fully effected until the eighteenth century – quite a time lag! Secondly, we sometimes find the reversal of the time-lag problem above, when the effect produced by the revolution turns out be both immediately consequential yet soon irrelevant: an example here would be the introduction of the dreadnought, whose pre-eminence for naval strategy was toele3(sh3.5(e)-3t-liv(odeig)-.7(ht7)-3530(

such that by the twentieth century warfare had led to the disappearance from the scene of the vast majority of the political units that had dominated the European scene over the course of the previous five centuries.

Yet amidst so much death and destruction, war, precisely because of what it was undoing, also tended to 'make' states, forcing those that survived the culling process to undertake radical transformations not only in the way they organised themselves militarily, but more importantly for our purposes here, in the manner in which they did so politically. This, of course, is the meaning of the Tilly dictum. But Porter highlights a second aspect of the process, one that suggests a certain paradox. War, and the radical transformations it brings in its train, can also lead to political reform of a 'progressive' nature, contrary to what is argued by so many scholars, who are prepared to argue that war's most lasting political significance is to enhance the coercive power of the state.

Not only did Tilly himself initially believe the latter to be so,[7] but so too has Brian Downing similarly stressed how warfare worked against the continued prospect of democracy in pre-modern Europe. For him, what war did was to uproot pre-existing constitutional dispensations that had safeguarded the rights of local communities and assured the relatively equitable distribution of competencies as between the central

were to recognise collective rights of the ruled, and obligations of the ruler. Not only this, but rulers had to take another step leading away from the absolutist state: they needed to erect public-administration institutions staffed by a corps of competent (in theory, at least) bureaucrats, whose existence and authority would serve as a check on absolutist tyranny. In a very real sense, bureaucratisation came to symbolise 'civilianisation' of the governing structure(s) and as such, constituted a major development in the progressive evolution of states.[10]

In sum, war has had a peculiar impact upon the development of the modern state, so peculiar in fact that we have used this section on the 'cycles of Mars' to make an important point regarding the manner in which historical cycles have been interpreted by students of IR: not all cyclical stories have an unhappy ending. It is possible to trace a line between warfare and the rise and solidification of democracy, odd as this must seem to many analysts. What else should we make of Bruce Porter's observation that if in the short run modern warfare had the effect of centralising state power, in the long run it contributed to the strengthening of democracy?[11] Certainly, it did not have this effect universally, not even in Europe where the relationship between war and the rise of the democratic state was most evident. But as a general rule, it is hard to dispute that over time, war was a constant handmaiden to the progressive transformation of the European (and by extension, North American) state from what it had once been to what it today represents.

Can we say, though, that the ironic transformation detailed above has resulted in an [illegible] one as well, such that today's Western state has so thoroughly shed its earlier war-induced development pattern as to constitute the foundation of a future 'world state' in which the spectre of great power war becomes an absurdity, because it is a contradiction in terms?[12] Not really. What we can say, though, is that great power war has become a rarity, and certainly not since 1945 have the states that make up both the West and 'the Rest' engaged in this species of conflict (unless, of course, one assumes that the proxy wars of the Cold War were simply great power wars in drag). Interstate warfare itself, extant rather than extinct, has nevertheless become much less common in recent decades, notwithstanding the plethora of [illegible] conflicts that continue to blight the face of global politics.

The declining frequency of great power wars is no mean accomplishment, and in theoretical terms many scholars have professed to detect the source of Mars's having been banished from at least some global neighbourhoods. Democracies, they claim, may fight non-democracies, but they rarely if ever go to war against each other democracies – or to be more precise, against fellow [illegible] democracies. This corpus of assumptions we know as 'democratic peace theory' (DPT), and to the extent that the upbeat cyclical tale we have told in this section makes sense, we can establish

[10] Tilly, [illegible].
[11] Porter, [illegible], 298.
[12] As argued by Wendt, in n3, above.

a connection, paradoxically enough, between war and its taming.[13] For us in the West, the cycles of Mars can and should be interpreted as having trended toward a happy ending, such that it is virtually axiomatic to take the members of this geopolitical space to be denizens of a Kantian ‘zone of peace’,[14] otherwise known as a (pluralistic) security community.[15] But not all cyclical stories end so happily, and in the following section we turn our attention to a particularly lugubrious cyclical account, one that attracts more than a little attention today.

From Po er ran i ion o Hegemonic War?

One prominent source of pessimism concerning the future relations between the US and China stems from the keyboards of numerous analtn9(folloT4-32.6(ara53e6(n)04(C)0(t)2228.1

Importantly, although systemic change can result in an alteration of polarity, it need not do this. The system might remain unaltered from the standpoint of its polarity, yet still be one in which a great deal of the latter kind of change (systemic) is occurring, as happened most famously during the long era of multipolarity, stretching from 1648 until the end of the Second World War. Multipolarity was a configuration in which there were always at least three roughly comparable great powers (and usually more than this number) vying for influence in the international system, and even though the structure of polarity was very long-lived, an enormous amount of change was underway, with momentous consequences for the units making up the system, to say nothing of the individuals living within those units. This is simply to say that power transition can be in operation either when polarity itself is up for grabs, as most recently happened when the disappearance of the Soviet Union resulted in the system's transformation from a bipolar to a unipolar one, or when the relative pecking order of multipolarity is shuffled, as it so often had been over the centuries spanning the Peace of Westphalia and 1945.

What makes power transition theory such an inducer of pessimism is the manner in which its adherents tend to freight it with deterministic qualities that complicate the chore of anyone seeking to falsify the theory. By this we mean that it possesses many of the attributes of a genuine 'spigot variable', such that no matter the direction in which one turns it, it can be counted upon to produce the same result, namely an outflow (in this case of conflict), even though the specific quality of that outflow will vary in degree – only not degree as measured by temperature of fluids, but rather by identity of system disturbers. The founding father of modern power transition theory is usually considered to be A. F. K. Organski, who during the early post-Second World War decades sent a clear message of despair to those analysts, 'realist' though many of them might otherwise have been, who preferred to detect in the 'balance-of-power' a structure that inclined the system toward equilibrium and general (though hardly ubiquitous) peace. Organski thought differently, and rather than wishing power to be balanced in the pursuit of peace, he saw in attempts to offset the relative capabilities of the most powerful state in the system nothing but trouble ahead. This, he said, was because of the insatiable lust for advantage evinced by the powers bent on supplanting the system's dominant state. Thus it was the appetite of the 'revisionist' challenger that would lead to conflict, because '[w]ars occur when a great power in the secondary position challenges the top nation'.[17]

Now turn the spigot of power transition in the other direction, which results in the same outflow – conflict – but yields a different culprit. Rather than the revisionist challenger upsetting the apple cart and bringing about the end of peace and stability, it is the upholder of the status quo who is most likely to resort to force in defence of interests. With the gap narrowing between number one and number two, the likelihood grows of a conflict between them. Only for this other sort of power

[17] A. F. K. Organski, [illegible], 2d ed. (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1968; orig. pub. 1958), 364.

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power transition logic, namely that between great powers. For preventive war conjures a show-down between number one and number two that is different from the rear-end collision envisioned by Organski. In this altered version of the peril inherent in power transition, it is not the revisionist upstart that is seen to be the culprit, but rather the systemic top dog. This variant of power transition theorising renders the most pessimistic expectation of consequences that must be expected to flow from the cyclical rise and decline of powers, as it throws the burden of war initiation not upon those (the revisionists) who have the most to gain by fighting, but on those (the top dogs) who have the most to lose by [illegible] fighting. Because it is assumed that the defence of what one possesses must always trump the desire to acquire something not yet obtained as a *ca*[illegible], some power transition theorists come to the confident

growing more, it can and does *wa* [illegible] to do more; its appetite swells with the eating,

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employed in the system, serving to fulfill the most important and necessary functions of an 'international' currency – namely providing liquidity, a store or value, and a measure of value. And since it is generally conceded that the US dollar, [illegible], does all of these things, then if one implication of hegemony is 'influence', surely it would be pointless to claim that the dollar lacked clout, tales of US economic 'decline' to the contrary notwithstanding. If another implication of hegemony is 'leadership', then once again the word seems to fit with international monetary realities, all the more so as the domestic entity charged with overseeing the US currency, the Federal Reserve, need drop but the slightest of hints regarding its unwillingness to keep pumping liquidity into the system, say by restricting the quantity of bonds it intends to purchase (the practice known as 'quantitative easing'), and currency values around the world can come under downward pressure, as is happening as we write these lines.[25]

The problem arises when hegemony is utilised as an explanatory, or even merely a

arrows in its diplomatic quiver suitable for unleashing in the Hermit Kingdom's direction, for that is even more absurd than claiming that the US is 'hegemonic' in its dealings with North Korea. But it is to remark upon the fundamental difficulties one administration after another has encountered in trying either to coerce or cajole North Korea into compliant behaviour. Now, it has been remarked by some writers that while the US may not be a 'global' hegemon, it can still be thought of as a regional one.[27] Even in this restricted sense, however, there is more wrong with the hegemon descriptor than right with it: witness simply two cases in America's 'near abroad',

to deduce therefrom any arguments regarding hegemony; the two simply are not

Similarly cautioning, though for a different reason, against the tendency to imagine primacy to be a marvellous advantage to America is Martha Finnemore, who claims that there are structural features of unipolarity that undercut the ability of the 'unipole' to lead (and, recall, 'leadership' is said to be a defining characteristic of the weak understanding of hegemony discussed above). For sure, domestic missteps also plague the unipole in its quest to translate structural position into policy gain, but added to these, Finnemore states, are three 'social forces' at work that combine to limit the unipole's ability to get its way. The first of these forces is the unipole's need for legitimation of its policies; the second is the self-induced pressure it feels for institutionalising its policy preferences; and the third, really a function of how to respond to the first two sets of forces, is the growing temptation to resort to hypocrisy. 'Actors inconvenienced by social rules often resort to hypocrisy proclaiming adherence to rules while busily violating them. Such hypocrisy obviously undermines trust and credible commitments but the damage runs deeper: hypocrisy undermines respect and deference both for the unipole and for the values on which it has legitimised its power'.[31]

In sum, hegemonic warfare – that most beastly of all postulated challenges on the global security horizon – turns out not to be such a monstrous threat, after all.

called, with reason, the ‘great rapprochement’ between Britain and America at the end of the nineteenth century.[32]

No wonder this case continues to serve as inspiration for some contemporary scholars, who ponder the future of Sino–American relations,[33] all the more so given the more frequent references that are made so regularly to another dyadic relationship of a century or so ago with a less fortunate outcome, the rivalry between Britain and Germany.[34] But the Anglo–American rapprochement of a century ago, however welcome it might be for those seeking to dispel the general gloomy aspect of most power transition theorising, is not really of particular significance to the argument we have been making here. Much more relevant is the way which the Cold War came to a halt: with a whimper not a bang.

The Cold War can be hypothesised as the closest thing to a great power conflict the world has known during the six-decades’ long nuclear age; certainly Gilpin’s 1981 book, with its pessimistically constructed hints about the dangers of uneven growth, tended to put readers on thete504.7(to)so2]TJ/31d5.4(w6(ab5.4(unev7ka805103(ith)-.6(A.5(we)