The Cold War and After
Prospects for Peace

An *International Security* Reader

Edited by
Sean M. Lynn-Jones

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Preface

Sean M. Lynn-Jones

Since 1945 the world's great powers have enjoyed an uneasy peace. For all its costs in terms of tension and tyranny, the Cold War was a remarkably stable era in world history. Despite frequent crises and harsh rhetoric, the United States and the Soviet Union avoided armed conflict with one another. Europe, which had decimated itself in two bloody and catastrophic world wars in the first 45 years of the twentieth century, suffered only limited and brief wars in Hungary and Cyprus, as well as intermittent terrorist violence. Conflicts raged outside Europe, but even these wars rarely involved major powers and remained limited compared to the two world wars.

The dramatic events of 1989 and 1990 have brought the long postwar era to a close. The collapse of the Soviet Empire in East Central Europe has ended the division of Europe and restored democracy to several countries that had been ruled by communist parties for over 40 years. These momentous changes were accompanied by perceptions of a shift in the structure of world power. Many observers have argued that the United States and the Soviet Union are in decline and that the bipolar world dominated by the two superpowers will be replaced by a new multipolar system in which a united Germany, economically vital Japan, and populous China will join the top ranks of the leading powers.

Will this new world be at least as peaceful as the old? Why was the Cold War era so remarkably stable? Has war become obsolete? Is there still a need to worry about the traditional security problems that have dominated international politics? What kind of international system will the future bring? The essays in this book attempt to answer these questions by applying the insights of international relations theory to contemporary world politics.

Several central themes run throughout this volume. First, there is the question whether the most important causes of war are to be found in the configuration of the international system or within the domestic political orders of states. Some observers, particularly realist theorists of international politics, emphasize the importance of systemic causes and claim, for example, that bipolar international systems are less prone to war than multipolar ones, while others argue the opposite. Another school of thought finds many causes of war at the level of the state. In particular, the argument that democracies tend to be peace-loving has inspired considerable research and debate. All of these arguments have obvious relevance to the emerging post-Cold War international system.

Second, the role of nuclear weapons in the postwar world has been a central question. Have nuclear weapons maintained peace by eliminating incentives to start wars? Or have they put the world on a hair-trigger footing in which enormous destruction could result from the slightest miscalculation or mistake? In the absence of nuclear war, there can, of course, be no empirical resolution of such questions, but the importance of preventing nuclear war requires a continuing search for answers.

Third, how do international economic relations affect the prospects for peace? The classic nineteenth century liberal argument that economic interdependence breeds peace is widely discredited as an oversimplification. Liberal theories of international cooperation now go beyond interdependence in explaining how international regimes and institutions can affect the probability of war. In addition, changes in the primary means of production—from agricultural to industrial, and then to post-industrial—may alter the incentives for war.

The first four essays collected here (Gaddis, Mueller, Jervis, and Kaysen) begin by analyzing the sources of the post–1945 peace. They then turn to a consideration of whether nuclear weapons or other factors have prevented war. The next three essays (Snyder, Mearsheimer, Van Evera) debate whether the new Europe will see war or peace, and offer different prescriptions for preventing a return to chaos.

John Lewis Gaddis's "The Long Peace," explores the reasons why the United States and the Soviet Union kept the Cold War from becoming a shooting war. Gaddis suggests that the bipolar distribution of power in the international system has helped to preserve stability. This structure is simple enough that it does not require sophisticated leadership to maintain it. Alliance patterns since 1945 thus have been remarkably stable. Even defections to opposing alliance systems, such as that of China (twice) and Cuba, have not had much effect on the basic distribution of power, because the two major poles each have been in a position to defend themselves without allies. The United States and the Soviet Union also have been economically independent; they are geographically remote and do not depend on one another for trade or resources in any important way. This independence has eliminated potential sources of conflict.

Gaddis also considers arguments at the state level, noting that claims that capitalist (or Marxist) states are innately aggressive and expansionist do not seem to fit the pattern of Cold War politics. He recognizes that the democratic

American system of government often has made U.S. foreign policy erratic, but that the resulting deficiencies have not made the United States more likely to risk war. Both superpowers moderated their ideologies during the Cold War. Systemic imperatives apparently triumphed over domestic sources of instability.

Nuclear weapons have provided an additional source of stability. As Gaddis points out, before the nuclear age statesmen could optimistically contemplate how their countries would gain from war. The clear threat of nuclear destruction makes optimistic miscalculation far more difficult and induces a healthy degree of caution.

Gaddis suggests that another technological revolution—the development of the reconnaissance satellite—may have been almost as important as the advent of nuclear weapons. Sophisticated satellite monitoring gives states a better idea of their opponents' capabilities and reduces the risk of surprise attacks. Further, it has made verification of arms control agreements possible.

The United States and the Soviet Union also developed largely tacit "rules of the game" to manage their rivalry during the Cold War. Gaddis proposes the following list, based on the observable pattern of U.S.-Soviet behavior: (1) Respect spheres of influence; (2) Avoid direct military confrontation; (3) Use nuclear weapons only as an ultimate resort; (4) Prefer predictable anomaly (e.g., West Berlin, Cuba) over unpredictable rationality; and (5) Do not seek to undermine the other side's leadership.

Writing in 1986, Gaddis notes that the most important test for the Soviet-American relationship may come when one or both of the superpowers faces the prospect of its own decline. Under such conditions, Gaddis suggests that the preservation of stability may require great powers to recognize that they have a stake in the survival of their rivals.

Like Gaddis, John Mueller in his "The Essential Irrelevance of Nuclear Weapons" finds redundant sources of stability in the postwar world. He argues that nuclear weapons may have enhanced this stability, but even in their absence the United States and the Soviet Union almost certainly would have avoided a major war. Mueller contends that nuclear weapons influenced public debates and defense budgets, but that they have had far less impact on the course of world affairs since World War II than have nonnuclear factors. The memory of the Second World War, superpower contentment with the status quo, the cautious, pragmatic nature of Soviet ideology, and fears of escalation to a major conventional conflict would have sufficed to

deter World War III without the added prudence engendered by nuclear weapons. Alliance patterns and crisis behavior also would have been similar in the absence of nuclear weapons.

Mueller argues that the stability of the postwar world is part of a long-term trend away from war among the major developed countries. He claims that the idea of war has lost its legitimacy in the developed world. Before 1914, war was considered an acceptable, even glorious, instrument of state policy. Its proponents declared that war could be spiritually elevating and a necessary means of moral purification. Since the First World War, however, war has been regarded as repugnant and futile. World War II—an aberration brought on by Adolf Hitler—reinforced these lessons. Since 1945 there have been virtually no international or civil wars among the advanced industrialized countries. Mueller thus concludes that war in the developed world is obsolescent, like dueling, slavery, and other once-fashionable or acceptable practices.

The next two essays challenge Mueller's arguments in different ways. Robert Jervis's "The Political Effects of Nuclear Weapons" responds to Mueller by arguing that nuclear weapons have had unique political effects because they ensure that all parties to a conflict face the threat of enormous and rapid destruction. These effects are qualitatively different from those of conventional warfare. Jervis thus suggests that the stability of the postwar world cannot be attributed to conventional deterrence alone. He agrees, however, with Mueller's argument that nonmilitary dimensions of deterrence must be taken into account to explain postwar stability. Jervis nonetheless concludes that satisfaction with the status quo is not enough to prevent major war and that nuclear weapons are necessary to make mutual security more feasible.

In "Is War Obsolete?" Carl Kaysen presents a broader challenge to Mueller's thesis. He begins by reviewing Mueller's book, *Retreat from Doomsday*, which presents an extended version of the argument that war is obsolescent. Kaysen suggests that Mueller is wrong to conclude that war has become "subrationally unthinkable." Kaysen agrees, however, with Mueller's central claim that war is becoming increasingly unlikely among advanced industrialized countries. But he argues that a complete account of why war is becoming obsolescent must go beyond Mueller's analysis of attitudes toward war to consider the changing political and economic calculus of war.

The bulk of Kaysen's essay is devoted to his explanation of why war is no longer politically or economically profitable for developed countries. Kaysen examines six centuries of social, political, and economic changes that have

influenced the likelihood of war among major powers. According to Kaysen, war was profitable from the ninth to the fifteenth centuries for traditional European agricultural societies because it was relatively easy to seize and control land without destroying its productive energies. Warrior elites waged wars, which had little impact on most of the population. This basic pattern remained unchanged through the eighteenth century. Despite the growth of cities and commerce, war still paid, and ruling elites still made the decisions for war. In the nineteenth century, the industrial revolution ushered in an era of large-scale manufacturing in which capital assumed greater economic importance than land, thereby increasing the scale and cost of war. War entailed larger economic burdens, and the difficulty of organizing a hostile population for continued production in an industrial society reduced the probable economic benefits of war. The gradual spread of democracy changed the basis of political legitimacy. Publics generally sought increased economic welfare, which could not be obtained through war. Attitudes took time to catch up to these changes in society, economy, and polity, but the wars of the twentieth century removed hereditary elites and provided ample evidence that war no longer pays. Far from being irrelevant, the development of nuclear weapons has reinforced these conclusions. Although Kaysen recognizes that domestic violence may continue and that wars may rage between nonindustrialized countries, he concludes that Europe can be transformed without war.

After the revolutions of 1989, it appeared that Kaysen's guarded optimism about the new Europe was more than justified. A relatively peaceful transition to democracy was underway in Poland, Hungary, and Czechoslovakia, and possibly in Romania and Bulgaria. Even Stalinist Albania showed signs of political change. The essays by Jack Snyder, John Mearsheimer, and Stephen Van Evera focus on the prospects for peace in the new Europe.

Jack Snyder's "Averting Anarchy in the New Europe" examines the impact of the transformation of Central and Eastern European polities on European stability after the Cold War.[1] Snyder begins by examining two widely-held perspectives on the collapse of the communist order in Central and Eastern Europe. The first, liberal end-of-history optimism, holds that liberal, market-oriented, democratic regimes in the former Soviet bloc will keep Europe peaceful, because democratic governments virtually never go to war with

1. Snyder's article, which appeared in the Spring 1990 issue of *International Security*, was written in the midst of rapid political changes in Central and Eastern Europe. The version published here has been updated in several places to take into account recent events.

one another. According to Snyder, the flaw in this vision of the future is that democratic regimes may not flourish in all the former communist countries of Eastern and Central Europe.

The second perspective, which Snyder calls Hobbesian pessimism, argues that domestic political orders are irrelevant to war and peace. In this realist view, the bipolar division of Europe has been the decisive factor in averting conflict since 1945. Without the co-hegemonic rule of the two superpowers, a multipolar Europe would revert to the warlike patterns of politics that caused the two world wars. Insecurity also would fuel nationalism and militarism, especially in the former Soviet bloc. But, as Snyder notes, realism offers few prescriptions for the dangers it predicts.

Snyder's own perspective, neo-liberal institutionalism, grows out of concern that the gap between political participation and political institutions in the emerging democracies of East Central Europe will lead to praetorian patterns of politics, in which nationalist demagogy will emerge to threaten international stability. Imperial Japan and Wilhelmine Germany are the two leading examples of this type of state in the twentieth century. To head off the development of praetorian regimes, Snyder recommends integrating Eastern and Central Europe's new regimes into the existing institutional framework of the European Community. This proposal is not based on the belief that economic interdependence will ensure peace, but on the hope that international economic regimes will create an environment in which democratic regimes can emerge and flourish in Eastern and Central Europe. Changes at the international level thus would influence events at the state level to reduce the likelihood of war in the new Europe. Such a strategy of institution-building, Snyder argues, can avert the potential anarchy that could accompany the transformation of the Soviet bloc.

In "Back to the Future," John Mearsheimer presents a pessimistic vision of Europe's future. Mearsheimer adopts a realist position, and contends that Europe has enjoyed peace for the past 45 years because bipolar systems tend to be stable, because war is less likely when there is a rough equality between the two leading states of a system, and because the presence of thousands of nuclear weapons has induced general caution. If the Cold War comes to a complete end and the Soviet Union and the United States withdraw their armed forces from Europe, he argues, Europe will devolve to multipolarity and a new era of wars and major crises may erupt on that continent. Following other realists, Mearsheimer argues that the absence of central governance in international politics ensures that states compete for security and period-

ically go to war. Major crises and wars are much more likely in a multipolar system because potential aggressors confront uncertain alliances and thus are not deterred. These uncertainties and complexities of multipolarity contributed to the outbreak of both world wars. In a bipolar system, like the one that has existed in Europe since 1945, the major powers confront more certain opposition and war is less likely. The rough equality of the United States and the Soviet Union has enhanced the stabilizing effects of bipolarity, because neither power has been able to entertain hopes of achieving preponderance.

The effects of bipolarity have been supplemented in Europe by the presence of thousands of nuclear weapons, which make escalation and destruction even more certain. If the United States and the Soviet Union were to withdraw their nuclear weapons from Europe, Mearsheimer argues, many European countries might seek nuclear weapons, with potentially destabilizing effects.

Mearsheimer examines three alternative explanations of Europe's long peace and finds them wanting. First, he argues that Mueller's claim that the idea of war is obsolescent is wishful thinking. There is little evidence that European attitudes toward war have changed. If any war could have made war unthinkable, it was World War I. But Europe went to war on an even greater scale only two decades after the guns of the Great War fell silent. Even if European attitudes have turned against war, public opinion could shift again, particularly if manipulated by a clever leader.

What Mearsheimer calls economic liberalism is a second theory of peace that he finds deficient. This theory suggests that the growth of European institutions, economic interdependence, and international regimes has stabilized post–1945 Europe and will continue to do so even after the bipolar division of Europe ends. Mearsheimer contends that this theory fails to take into account the extent to which security concerns prevent economic cooperation. States are not motivated solely by a desire for prosperity. They fear the relative economic gains other states may achieve through cooperation and thus prefer independent strategies. Moreover, economic ties actually can build frictions. The historical record shows that economic interdependence did not prevent wars in Europe before 1945. The postwar economic integration has been made possible by the stability of the Cold War. Mearsheimer suggests that it will dissolve with the passing of the bipolar order.

Third, Mearsheimer also finds the theory that democracies do not go to war with one another unpersuasive. He suggests that even democratic states

cannot transcend the anarchic logic of the international system. Although the historical record suggests that democracies do not fight one another, Mearsheimer argues that there have been too few democracies to draw firm conclusions and that other factors—such as the unity imposed by a common German or Soviet threat—can explain the absence of wars between democracies. In any event, some states in the new Europe may not be democracies, rendering this theory irrelevant.

To preserve peace in Europe, Mearsheimer recommends that the United States maintain troops in Europe, limit proliferation so that Germany acquires nuclear weapons but other European states do not, and take steps to prevent a resurgence of hypernationalism.[2]

Stephen Van Evera's "Primed for Peace" offers a more optimistic outlook on Europe's future. According to Van Evera, the principal causes of Europe's major wars have vanished or are vanishing. At the international level, the dominance of the offense over the defense has disappeared with the deployment of nuclear weapons, the lasting commitment of the United States to Europe, and the growth of knowledge-based economies that cannot flourish under the heel of a conqueror.

Domestic changes in European states have had an even more decisive impact. The decline of social stratification and the rise of democracy have removed elites with incentives to purvey nationalist myths. Democratization also has eliminated the dangers of militarism, which can breed war because military organizations have numerous incentives to propagandize in ways that encourage war. Most of these changes cannot be quickly reversed.

Van Evera argues that Snyder and Mearsheimer have false fears about the new Europe. Snyder is wrong because praetorianism will not emerge in Central and Eastern Europe. It is a disease of highly stratified societies and thus it will not take root in the leveled polities of the post–communist states. Mearsheimer places too much faith in the theory of bipolarity. The effects of multipolarity and bipolarity are essentially indeterminate; other factors determine the probability of war.

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2. Mearsheimer's article provoked widespread discussion and debate. For critical perspectives, and Mearsheimer's replies, see the letters from Stanley Hoffmann and Robert O. Keohane in "Correspondence: Back to the Future, Part II: International Relations Theory and Post–Cold War Europe," *International Security*, Vol. 15, No. 2 (Fall 1990), pp. 191–199; and from Bruce M. Russett and Thomas Risse-Kappen in "Correspondence: Back to the Future, Part III: Realism and the Realities of European Security," *International Security*, Vol. 15, No. 3 (Winter 1990/91), pp. 216–222.

Van Evera also asks—and answers—the great unspoken question about the new Europe: Will the new united Germany follow the aggressive path of Hitler's Reich and the Kaiser's German Empire? He gives the reassuring reply that the new Germany poses no threat to European stability. Germany is now thoroughly democratized, its civil-military relations are a model for the rest of Europe, and it understands its past in a way that makes future aggression unlikely.

The real danger in the new Europe, according to Van Evera, lies in the potential turmoil that could accompany the collapse of the Soviet Empire and the Soviet Union itself. In Eastern and Central Europe long-buried national and ethnic conflicts, as well as several boundary disputes, seethed under the surface of Soviet suppression. Withdrawing Soviet troops could be like lifting the lid off Pandora's box.

To preserve peace in Europe, Van Evera argues that the post-communist states of Eastern and Central Europe should be "Finlandized"—prevented from aligning militarily with the Western powers. For its part, the West should abstain from supporting secessionist movements within the Soviet Union.

The questions explored in this volume are too complex to be answered by the articles collected here. Iraq's invasion of Kuwait and subsequent developments already have shattered any complacency about the peacefulness of the post–Cold War world. Tomorrow's headlines will tell whether the authors of these essays are right in their predictions. To help readers search for more complete answers, an annotated list of suggestions for further reading appears at the end of this volume.

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