

IR Theory, Historical Analogy, and Major Power War

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*For Isabel encore! For Celine and Francesca: May their generation,
and that which is soon to be born, surmount the dangerous legacy left
before them!*

PREFACE

Chapters 1 through 6 develop theoretical basis for understanding Cold War and post-Cold War dynamics from an “alternative realist” and “critical comparative historical” perspective. These chapters set forth the basic themes of the book: the inadequacy of concepts of polarity and indivisible sovereignty to explicate actual interstate behavior; the traditional realist and neorealist misinterpretations of concepts derived from the 1648 Treaty of Westphalia and 1713 Treaty of Utrecht (indivisible sovereignty, religious tolerance, national self-determination, and balance of power); the significant role that intergovernmental, non-state, and alt-state actors play in state decision-making processes; the critical need for engaged diplomacy to work to prevent, transform, resolve, or at least attempt to manage violent revolutions and wars so that they do not become even more destructive. The book argues that engaged alternative realist diplomacy needs to seek out a range of practical alternatives to perpetual conflict, including power-sharing, multilateral security guarantees, international peacekeeping, joint sovereignty, and confederation, among other options.

Chapters 7 and 8 more closely examine the causes and consequences of the transition from the bicentric Cold War system to a highly uneven post-Cold War global system from a more empirical perspective, with a methodological focus on NATO enlargement and global alliance formation during the transition period from Mikhail Gorbachev in the former Soviet Union to Boris Yeltsin in the new Russian Federation. These two chapters examine: the gradual breakdown of the collaborative aspects of

the US–Soviet “double-containment” during the Cold War and the subsequent post-Cold War development of a polycentric global system consisting of actors with highly uneven power capabilities and influence; the new post-Cold War games of “encirclement” and “counter-encirclement” involving the rise of a new “polarizing” or “counter-positioning” system of alliances, which pits the USA and its allies against a new Russia–China “axis” and its allies. Most importantly, Chapter 8 examines the failure to seize the opportunity, in the sense of Machiavelli, to reach a new entente or alliance with Moscow. Instead, the USA would opt to seize the “unipolar moment”—in a risky effort to sustain global hegemony.

After having developed a critical comparative historical approach in Chapters 2 and 6 in particular, Chapter 9 compares and contrasts the geostrategic constellation of the alliance systems and global political-economic crises before both World War I and World War II with the nature of the geostrategic constellation of the alliance systems and global political-economic crises today. It argues why even early stages of the Cold War are not entirely relevant to today’s circumstances even if there are some similarities. The final Chapter 10 looks back into history since the Franco-Prussian War to see if there are any previous strategies that might be relevant in the effort to prevent the post-Cold War global system from once again degenerating into major power conflict—after “containment” had failed to prevent war with Imperial Germany, Austria-Hungary, and the Ottoman Empire before World War I and “appeasement” (meaning capitulation) had failed to prevent war with Nazi Germany, Fascist Italy, and Imperial Japan before World War II.

While the predominant literature on the subject has argued against the possibility, major power wars have been recurrent throughout history, and the forces, such as alliance formations, arms races, and financial crises, that have generally preceded those titanic conflicts, appear to possess enough significant parallels that the similarities can override the differences between eras and their particular systemic and structural contexts. While it appears nearly impossible to prevent all forms of socio-political conflict both within and between states, it appears absolutely crucial to find new ways and creative policy approaches to prevent future major power wars from ever occurring again.

Paris, France
October 2018

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This work represents a major extension of my Ph.D. dissertation, *Alternatives to Global War: Geohistory, Strategic Leveraging, and a Critique of the Pre-World War I Analogy*, which I had completed at the Johns Hopkins Paul H. Nitze School of Advanced International Studies in 1987, under my mentor George (Juri) Liska. That work had taken the first steps toward the development of a critical comparative historical method which I have tried to refine over the years. My more recent books that seek to explore history as a means to better understand the present include: *Crimea, Global Rivalry, and the Vengeance of History* (2015) and my chapters “General Introduction”; “Alienation and the Causes and Prevention of War”; “The Failure to Prevent World War I”; “Reflections on Polemology: Breaking the long cycles of wars of initial challenge and wars of revanche” in Gardner, Hall, and Oleg Kobtzeff, *The Ashgate Research Companion to War: Origins and Prevention* (2012).

I have also written a number of articles and chapters in edited journals and books on the impact of history and other articles that are relevant for this book: “From the Origins of World War I to Global Conflict Today: World War I, World War II, World War III” in the *Florida Political Chronicle*, v. 25, n. 1 (2016–2017), edited by Marco Rimanelli; “The Geopolitical Convolutions of Fighting the Global War on Terror (GWOT)” in *A New Global Agenda: Priorities, Practices, & Pathways of the International Community*, edited by Diana Ayton-Schenker (2018); “Ukraine: A New Plan” *American Affairs* (Volume I, Number 2, Summer 2017), edited by Julius Krein and Gladden

Pappen; “Breaking the U.S.-Russia Impasse: Keeping the Door Open to Dialogue” *Russian International Affairs Council* (June 28, 2017), edited by Andrey Kortunov; “The Russian annexation of Crimea: regional and global ramifications” *European Politics and Society* (2016), edited by Nicolai Petro; A Critical Response to *NATO Rethink, Realign, React*: La Fondation pour la Recherche Stratégique (FRS) 13 June 2016, edited by Yves Boyer; “Hybrid Warfare: Iranian and Russian Versions of “Little Green Men” and Contemporary Conflict” (NATO Defense College: Rome, 2015) eds. Guillaume Lasconjarias and Jeffrey A Larsen; “From World War I to the Present: Comparative Hegemonic Rivalries and the Disintegration of World Order” *World Association of International Studies* (WAIS) (October 2015), edited by John Eipper; “War and the New Media Paradox” in *Cyber-Conflict and Global Politics*, edited by Athina Karatzogianni; “From the Egyptian Crisis of 1882 to Iraq of 2003: Alliance Ramifications of British and American Bids for ‘World Hegemony’” and “World Hegemony and its Aftermath” published in *Sens Public* No 3. March 2005, edited by Gérard Wormser; “NATO Enlargement and Geohistory” in *NATO for a New Century: Enlargement and Intervention in the Atlantic Alliance* (2002), edited by Carl Hodge; “NATO, Russia and Eastern European Security: Beyond the Interwar Analogy,” in *NATO Looks East* (1998), eds. Piotr Dutkiewicz and Robert J. Jackson; “Averting World War III: Beyond the World War I, World War II Analogies” *SAIS Review*, Johns Hopkins University Press (Volume 8, Number 2, Summer-Fall 1988).

As the intent of *IR Theory, Historical Analogy, and Major Power War* is to develop a new approach to IR theory, with an express focus on theoretically and empirically explaining the transition from the essentially bicentric Cold War period to the highly uneven polycentrism of the post-Cold War period, the book relies on a number of my previous books and articles for a closer empirical analysis. The Cold War and early Cold War period are examined in *Surviving the Millennium: American Global Strategy, the Collapse of the Soviet Empire and the Question of Peace* (1994). Post-Cold War Clinton, Bush, and Obama administration policies are discussed in *American Global Strategy and the War on Terrorism 2005/2007*; *Averting Global War: Regional Challenges, Overextension, and Options for American Strategy* (2007/2010); in *NATO Expansion and the US Strategy in Asia: Surmounting the Global Crisis* (2013); and in *Dangerous Crossroads: Europe, Russia, and the Future of NATO* (1997). The Trump administration is critiqued in *World War Trump*:

The Risks of America's New Nationalism (2018). My book, *The Failure to Prevent World War I: The Unexpected Armageddon* (2015), analyses the origins of World War I, with an emphasis on French security policy and its relationship with Imperial Germany since the 1870–1871 Franco-Prussian War.

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CONTENTS

1	The Cold War Is Dead! Long Live the Cold War!	1
2	Alternative Realism and a Critical Comparative Historical Method	9
3	A Critique of Polarity and Sovereignty	39
4	Uneven Polycentrism, Alliances, and Global Hegemony	61
5	Radical Disaccord and International Diplomacy	97
6	States, IGOs, NGOs, Alt-state, and Anti-state Actors	127
7	Fracturing of the Collaborative US–Soviet “Double Containment”	163
8	The Gorbachev and Yeltsin Transition: From the Pre-World War I to the Interwar Analogy	193
9	Uprooting Demons of the Past	227

10 Averting Armageddon	275
Bibliography	309
Index	317