

2

INTERNATIONAL SOURCES OF INTERSTATE AND INTRASTATE WAR

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AS I WRITE THIS ESSAY, IN SPRING 2006, the United States is engaged in its second war in Iraq in fifteen years. Although each war began with a U.S. president named Bush authorizing military operations against Iraqi forces under the leadership of Saddam Hussein, the two wars were very different. The 1990–91 Persian Gulf War was a classic interstate war. Iraq invaded and occupied the sovereign state of Kuwait, and a U.S.-led coalition intervened to expel Iraqi forces and restore Kuwaiti sovereignty. The 2003 Iraq war, which began as an interstate war with the immediate U.S. purpose of defeating the Iraqi Army and overthrowing the repressive regime of Saddam Hussein, quickly evolved into an insurgency against the U.S. occupation and the Iraqi provisional government. The insurgents—primarily Iraqi Sunnis and international fighters associated with the al Qaeda terrorist network—could not match the numbers or firepower of the U.S. military, but they used improvised explosive devices, suicide bombers, political assassinations, kidnappings,

and beheadings against civilian as well as military targets. That insurgency gradually evolved into a low-level sectarian civil war, and after the bombing of a Shiite mosque in February 2006, many feared that the conflict would escalate into a large-scale civil war between Sunnis and Shiites, one that could draw in other states in the region.

During the 1990–91 Persian Gulf War, U.S. president George H. W. Bush and many others spoke of a “new world order.” Three years into the 2003 Iraq war, many observers spoke of a “new world disorder.” Although old-style interstate wars will undoubtedly continue to occur, and although insurgencies and terrorism are an age-old phenomenon in international politics, few would deny that the nature of warfare has been changing.

The essays in this volume reflect on different aspects of war, peace, and security in the contemporary world. My aim here is to place contemporary warfare in a broader historical and theoretical context. I begin by describing the changing nature of war over time, and ask

whether traditional Western conceptualizations of warfare going back to Carl von Clausewitz can adequately capture the “new wars” of the twenty-first century. I raise a number of conceptual issues involved in the analysis of the causes of interstate and intrastate war and suggest certain criteria that any theory of war or explanation for particular wars must satisfy. I then turn to the causes of war between and within states. I focus on international system-level factors, paying particular attention to “realist” theories of interstate war, and I explore the extent to which these theories, or modifications of them, are useful for the analysis of civil wars. I note that weak or failed states are particularly prone to civil war and identify some of the international conditions, both material and ideational, that contribute to state weakness in the contemporary era. After discussing the impact of Cold War bipolarity and then of unipolarity under U.S. dominance on patterns of interstate and intrastate warfare, I end with a discussion of resource scarcity as a condition for internal and external war.

This is not a complete survey of the sources of contemporary violence. I focus on international war and internal war but give little attention to terrorism, insurgency, or genocide. I focus on causal variables at the international level and mention internal variables only when the path leading from system-level factors to war runs through factors internal to states. Domestic variables can also have an important direct effect on interstate as well as intrastate war, and they are analyzed in chapters 6 through 10 and elsewhere in this volume.¹

THE CHANGING NATURE OF WARFARE

Historians usually identify 1500 as the beginning of the modern world. From that time until the end of World War II, the European great powers played a leading role in shaping the structure and evolution of the international security system and the global political

economy, based on their superior military power and wealth. They fought “great-power wars” against each other, including “hegemonic wars” for leadership and control over the system. They fought interstate wars against lesser states in the expanding but European-dominated international system and, in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, colonial wars to maintain and expand their worldwide empires. Significant increases in the destructiveness of great-power war over time contributed to a continued decline in the frequency of those wars until an upsurge with the two world wars and related conflicts of the twentieth century. Great-power war has yet to recur in the six decades since World War II, however, making this the longest period of peace between the great powers for at least five centuries. In addition, Europe, which has been the locus of a disproportionate number of modern history’s wars, experienced relatively little warfare after World War II.²

These trends have led some to characterize the period since World War II as the “long peace.”³ That view is misleading, because this period has been anything but peaceful for most of the world’s peoples. We have experienced a long great-power peace, not a general peace. Interstate wars continue to occur, but at a much lower frequency in the period after World War II than during the period before, and with a particularly sharp drop after 1970.⁴

What is new, in addition to the great-power peace and the shift in warfare away from Europe to other regions of the world, is a significant increase in the frequency of civil wars and other forms of intrastate conflict.⁵ Civil wars, after fluctuating around a moderate level of frequency for the first seven decades of the twentieth century, exploded in number in the 1970s and have remained fairly frequent despite a modest decline in the 1990s. By one count, between 1816 and 1945, there were 110 intrastate wars and 56 interstate wars. In the half century after 1945, when the number of states in the international system nearly tripled,

there were 103 intrastate wars and 22 interstate wars. Thus, before World War II the ratio of internal wars to external wars was about 2 to 1, while after World War II the ratio increased to 4.7 to 1.⁶

Many contemporary intrastate wars pit ethnic or religious groups against each other and are referred to as "ethnic wars" or "identity wars."⁷ Many of these take on a transnational dimension, since identity groups straddle state boundaries, and the distinction between interstate wars and civil wars is beginning to blur. The Bosnian wars of the 1990s, for example, were both civil wars within a disintegrating Yugoslavia and interstate wars between Serbia, Bosnia, and Croatia.⁸ In addition to civil wars fought for control of the state, or for secession from the state, or for the autonomy and security of an identity group within the state, we see increasing levels of involvement of warlords, private military contractors, and other nonstate actors, driven by their own parochial interests, including control over natural resources.⁹

Thus warfare has shifted away from the great powers, away from Europe, and, increasingly, away from state-to-state conflict toward civil war, insurgency, and terrorism. All of this is still warfare, but it is warfare that is in many respects quite different from the forms of organized violence that have dominated the past five centuries of human history.¹⁰ The typical wars of the past pitted state armies against each other. Particularly for great-power conflicts, but also for many other European interstate conflicts, wars were "symmetric" in the sense that the two sides were of roughly equal strength and fought with the same kinds of weapons. At least by the time that the leading states had consolidated their power internally, a process that occurred gradually and at different times for different states but that had become fairly complete by the seventeenth century, states had a monopoly or near monopoly of force within their borders. This was the basis for Clausewitz's classic formulation of

war as violent conflict fought by state armies, directed by state leaders, waged on behalf of state interests, and settled by decisive battles.

As interstate war has increasingly shifted from state-to-state conflicts to civil wars, and as nonstate actors have played an increasingly prominent role, scholars have begun to question whether the Clausewitzian model accurately captures the nature of contemporary warfare.¹¹ Most wars are not interstate wars and do not pit state armies against each other. Most recent civil wars, unlike the American one of the nineteenth century, do not involve a single rebel army under the leadership of a single military and political leadership, fighting on roughly equal terms with similar weapons against a state army. Instead, many insurgencies and civil wars involve loose coalitions of different groups fighting for their own purposes.¹² Rebel groups often cannot match the state in organization and advanced weaponry, and consequently they resort to different tactics, including guerrilla war and terrorism, long the "weapons of the weak." Instead of confronting state armies directly, they target civilians in an attempt to weaken morale, demonstrate that the state cannot protect its citizens, and induce a shift in loyalties. Massacre and ethnic cleansing have occurred with increased frequency.

The strategy of decisive battles has been replaced by the strategy of exhaustion, and symmetric war has given way to "asymmetric war." An era in which war and peace were clearly delineated, and war had a well-defined beginning and a well-defined end point,¹³ has given way to an intermediary state in which violence "smoulders on."¹⁴ Just as the line between peace and war has blurred, so has the line between war and crime, as criminal networks play a growing role in the funding of civil wars and insurgencies.¹⁵

While Clausewitz's emphasis on war as a clash between state armies fails to capture a great deal of contemporary combat, there is another aspect of the Clausewitzian model that accurately reflects an enduring core of warfare

that transcends the changes noted earlier. That is the idea that war is fundamentally *political*, in the sense that the use of violence is purposeful and intended to advance an actor's political objectives. As Clausewitz phrased it, "[W]ar is a continuation of politics with admixture of other means."¹⁶ True, Clausewitz thought primarily in terms of states, but the idea can easily be applied to other actors. Whether the actor in question is a state, an ethnic group, a rebel organization, or a terrorist group,¹⁷ Clausewitz tells us that we should think of war as one of several instruments or policies (diplomatic, economic, military, etc.) that actors have at their disposal to promote their interests.¹⁸ War involves the coordinated use of violent force, in combination with other instruments, to advance one's interests.

Some might argue that the same idea applies to individuals, that individuals are purposeful in their use of force. Whatever the merits of that argument, we do not think of individual acts of violence as constituting war. War is the coordinated use of force by a political organization or group. A single act of violence by a state or other group would not constitute war. The idea of war also implies that a certain threshold of violence is crossed.¹⁹ Thus war involves intense or sustained violence, though the relevant threshold of intensity varies significantly over the millennia and over different cultural systems. Finally, organized violence is not considered a war unless the other side fights back. The Soviet Union invaded Hungary in 1956 and Czechoslovakia in 1968. The Hungarian army fought back; the Czech army did not. Thus we talk about the Russo-Hungarian War of 1956 and the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968.

Having discussed both elements of continuity and elements of change in the evolution of war over time, we now turn to an analysis of the causes of war. Despite the enormous amount of intellectual energy that has been devoted to the question of war by philosophers, historians, social scientists, biologists, and

others, there is little scholarly consensus on the causes of war, even among scholars within the same discipline. It is important to note also that until recently the scholarly literatures on interstate war, civil war, and terrorism overlapped very little, and scholars of interstate war paid very little attention to research on civil war, and vice versa. This has gradually begun to change, as international relations scholars have shifted their focus and attempted to adapt theories of interstate war and use them to explain civil wars, but the differences are still significant. In the following discussion I attempt to integrate knowledge generated by both interstate and civil war researchers. Before I begin, however, it would be useful to explore some conceptual issues that plague the study of both interstate and intrastate war.

CONCEPTUAL ISSUES

Our earlier discussion of the changes in war over time reminds us that war is a variable, not a constant. It varies in form (interstate, intrastate), regional concentration, frequency, intensity, and other dimensions. This obvious fact has important but often neglected implications for the study of war. Any theory of war must account for variations in war over time and space, and any interpretation of a particular war must explain why that war occurred when it did, and not earlier or later.

With respect to theories of war, the requirement that theories explain variations in war and peace means that any theory that predicts that war is a constant must be rejected, or at least modified to include additional variables that explain observed variation. This means that any explanatory factor that is itself a constant cannot provide a complete explanation for war.²⁰ For example, while many trace war to human nature (whether in the form of aggressive instincts or other human imperfections) or to the anarchic structure of the international system (the absence of a higher authority to regulate behavior and enforce agreements

between states), these factors are basically constants and cannot by themselves explain the enormous variations in war and peace over time and space. They cannot explain the long great-power peace after World War II, the fact that most states are at peace with most other states most of the time, or evidence that humans fought relatively few wars before the development of agriculture and related aspects of civilization.²¹

To take another example, it has become popular to explain the explosion of ethnic violence in the past two decades in terms of "ancient hatreds" between rival ethnic or religious groups.²² While this factor might contribute to contemporary ethnic conflict, it does not constitute a sufficient explanation of ethnic wars. It fails to explain why wars have broken out between some ethnic communities but not between others, when those violent conflicts occur, and how intensely they are fought. At the level of individual wars, this means that an ancient-hatreds explanation by itself cannot fully explain the outbreak of a particular ethnic war.

To explain the Bosnian wars of the 1990s, for example, it is not sufficient to invoke ethnic rivalries. Serbs and Croats fought each other very little before the twentieth century, so additional factors are necessary to explain why they fought each other during the 1990s. Similarly, while ethnic differences between Persians and Arabs undoubtedly contributed to the outbreak of the Iran-Iraq War (1980–88), those differences led to very little violent conflict between the two peoples over the past two centuries. Moreover, a 1975 treaty resolved most outstanding conflicts of interest between the two states. Thus a satisfactory interpretation of the Iran-Iraq War must explain what happened after 1975 to trigger the war.²³

Let us now turn to the "levels-of-analysis" framework, which was first developed by Kenneth Waltz and which has been widely used as a framework for the classification of the causes of interstate wars and other forms of state behavior.²⁴ With some modifications,

this framework can also be applied to intrastate wars. The framework raises some additional conceptual issues in the study of war, which we also consider.²⁵

The levels-of-analysis framework classifies the causes of war in terms of whether they are located at the level of the individual, the nation-state, or the international system.²⁶ The individual level focuses primarily on human nature and predispositions toward aggression and on individual political leaders and their belief systems, personalities, and psychological processes. The national level includes both governmental variables, such as the structure of the political system and the nature of the policymaking process, and societal factors, such as the structure of the economic system, the role of public opinion, economic and noneconomic interest groups, ethnicity and nationalism, and political culture and ideology. System-level causes include the anarchic structure of the international system, the number of major powers in the system, the distribution of military and economic power among them, patterns of military alliances and international trade, systemwide norms influencing their behavior, and other factors that constitute the external environment common to all states. If a state acts on the basis of national-interest calculations, defined in terms of threats and opportunities in its external environment, we say that the state is influenced by system-level factors. It can also be useful to distinguish between global and regional systems and include the dyadic (or bilateral) relations between a particular pair of states.

Let us illustrate the levels-of-analysis framework with respect to various explanations that journalists and scholars have proposed for the U.S. decision to invade Iraq in 2003.²⁷ Some argue that the U.S. intervention derives from President George W. Bush's worldview and religious beliefs, his determination to finish the job begun by his father, or his disregard for information running contrary to his beliefs and policy preferences. We classify these at the

individual level. Individual-level explanations imply that if another individual had been in power, the state probably would have behaved differently.

Others argue that the U.S. decision derives from the traditional U.S. commitment to democracy and the promotion of democracy abroad, from the impact of the September 11 attacks on American political culture, from the hesitancy of members of Congress to argue or vote against the war for fear of possible political repercussions, from the influence of neoconservatives or the U.S. oil industry on the political decision-making process, or from a flawed intelligence apparatus that generated grossly misleading estimates about Iraqi nuclear weapons. These are national-level explanations.

Finally, arguments tracing the war in Iraq to a rational response to the terrorist threat, fears of an Iraqi nuclear weapons capability, or the permissive condition created by the collapse of Soviet power and end of the Cold War over a decade earlier fall at the system level of analysis. The collapse of Soviet power and the permissive condition it created for U.S. intervention relate to the global system, whereas concerns about the impact of a nuclear Iraq on the balance of power in the Middle East is a regional-system factor.

Given the complexity of international politics, many scholars have concluded that no single factor, and no single level of analysis, provides a complete explanation for the causes of war. As a result, many theories of war, and most explanations of individual wars, combine causal variables from different levels of analysis. Most explanations for the 2003 Iraq war, for example, include the rise of international terrorism, the domestic impact of the September 11 attacks, the aim of overthrowing Saddam Hussein's brutal regime and the establishment of democracy in Iraq, the personality and religious beliefs of George W. Bush, the influence of neoconservatives on U.S. foreign policy, and the intelligence failure regarding Iraqi weapons of mass destruction.

Although the levels-of-analysis framework has traditionally been applied to states and to interstate relations, with some modifications it can also be applied to the question of the causes of intrastate war. Consider Michael Brown's classification of the sources of internal war in terms of bad leaders, bad domestic problems, bad neighborhoods, and bad neighbors.²⁸ We can interpret this typology in terms of levels of analysis. Brown's first factor is an individual-level variable, the second is a domestic-level factor, the third is a regional-system factor, and the fourth refers to the external environment of a particular state.

We can also apply the framework to a wide range of nonstate actors, from international organizations like the United Nations to ethnic groups to transnational terrorist groups. We can ask whether decisions for UN intervention are driven more by the imperatives of the situation, by politics within the United Nations, or by the leadership of the secretary-general; whether the behavior of a particular ethnic group is influenced primarily by the external threats and opportunities it faces, by pressures from subgroups within it (including its military arm), or by the particular beliefs and charisma of an individual leader; or whether the behavior of a terrorist group is driven by the aim of advancing the interests of the group, by internal infighting between competing factions, or by the beliefs and risk-taking propensities of a particular leader.

Although the levels-of-analysis framework can be applied to any actor, the framework assumes that the actor in question is sufficiently coherent that it has a decision-making body that has the authority to act on behalf of the group. If the group is more amorphous, so that we cannot speak of a single group policy with inputs from different levels, it is harder to apply the levels-of-analysis framework. If observers are right that after 9/11 al Qaeda splintered into a loose coalition of distinct terrorist groups, with different but overlapping interests and no single chain of

command,²⁹ it will be difficult to apply the levels-of-analysis framework to a single al Qaeda entity.

The levels-of-analysis framework is useful for organizing the many disparate sources of conflict into categories that help simplify the way we think about war and other aspects of the behavior of states and other actors. Like any framework, however, it is not perfect. Its categories are neither exclusive—in that some factors appear to fit in more than one category—nor exhaustive—in that some factors do not fit easily into any category.³⁰

The levels-of-analysis framework highlights some logical problems associated with the analysis of the causes of war. Although analysts often trace the outbreak of a particular war to the beliefs or personalities of a single individual,³¹ that does not constitute a logically complete explanation of war. Two problems arise, each involving the definition of war.

First, war is defined in terms of the behavior of political organizations, whether the state, a rebel group, or a terrorist organization. It is not enough to know the preferences, beliefs, and personality of the leader. We have to explain how the leader's preferences, along with the preferences of other decision makers, are translated into a collective decision for the organization (in the case of a state, a foreign policy decision). What this means, for states, is that an individual-level theory of war has to be subsumed within a theory of foreign policy, since it is states, not individuals, that make war.³² Sometimes political leaders who want war are prevented from implementing that strategy by domestic constituencies. Alternatively (but less frequently), political leaders who believe that war is contrary to the national interest are sometimes pushed into war by a xenophobic public opinion. U.S. president William McKinley hoped to avoid war with Spain in 1898, but because of domestic pressures McKinley "led his country unhesitatingly toward a war which he did not want for a cause in which he did not believe."³³

Second, war involves violence *between* political organizations. Since it is not a war unless the adversary fights back, a theory of war must explain why both states fight. That is, war is a dyadic or systemic outcome resulting from the interactions of two or more states, and an explanation for war requires the inclusion of dyadic or system-level causal variables.³⁴ For this reason neither individual- nor societal-level explanations provide a logically complete explanation for the outbreak of war. War is the result of the strategic interaction, or joint actions, of two or more political organizations.³⁵

Consider, for example, what we might call the "predatory state hypothesis"—the idea that the primary cause of war is the existence of a predatory or aggressive state or political leader. Such behavior is often a primary cause of war, but the predatory-state argument is not a logically complete explanation for war. Nazi Germany was an aggressive state in the mid-1930s. It violated international treaties by remilitarizing the Rhineland, annexing Austria, and demanding the incorporation into Germany of the Sudetenland, a German-speaking region of Czechoslovakia. For several years, however, none of these actions led to war, because the West chose instead to pursue a policy of appeasement. There is ample evidence that Hitler actually wanted war over Czechoslovakia and was quite angry when the West responded with some concessions.³⁶ Hitler eventually got the war that he wanted, but only after German armies had invaded Poland, and the West, after some delay, had responded with military force. The point is that showing that a state or leader wants war is not a sufficient explanation for war. We must incorporate the behavior of the adversary into the explanation.

On the other side of the coin, the demonstration that a state pursues a conciliatory policy is not a sufficient explanation for peace. Under some conditions a strategy of extensive concessions does not promote peace but instead induces the adversary to increase its demands in the expectation that further concessions will

be forthcoming, which can result in war by miscalculation. The classic example here is the British and French appeasement of Hitler in the 1930s, though many argue that Hitler was bent on war and that consequently the strategy of appeasement, while futile, did not actually make an already likely war any more likely. The larger point is that a theory of war is technically incomplete without a theory of bargaining or strategic interaction that explains how states respond to each other's actions and how they act in anticipation of each other's responses.³⁷

We should keep these conceptual considerations in mind as we turn to an analysis of some of the leading theories of war. We begin with realist theories, which have dominated the study of interstate war since the time of Thucydides. Though realist theories were designed to explain interstate relations, they can be useful in explaining some aspects of civil war as well. We then turn to a broader discussion of how system-level factors have contributed to the rise of civil wars in the period since World War II.³⁸

INTERNATIONAL SYSTEM-LEVEL CAUSES OF WAR

Balance of Power, Power Transition, and Interstate War

The traditional literature on the causes of interstate war has been dominated by the "realist" paradigm, which subsumes several distinct theories.³⁹ Traditionally, scholars characterize realism as positing that the key actors are sovereign states that act rationally to advance their security, power, and wealth in an anarchic international system, with anarchy defined in terms of the absence of a legitimate authority to regulate disputes and enforce agreements between states.⁴⁰ International anarchy, along with uncertainties regarding the present and future intentions of the adversary, creates a system of insecurity and competition. The system induces political leaders to focus on short-

term security needs and on their relative position in the system, adopt worst-case thinking, build up their military strength, and utilize coercive threats to advance their interests, influence the adversary, and maintain their reputations. The core realist hypothesis is that international outcomes are determined by, or at least significantly constrained by, the distribution of power between two or more states. At the dyadic level (between two states), this is captured by Thucydides' argument that "the strong do what they can and the weak suffer what they must."⁴¹

At the system level, realists argue that the "polarity" of the system (multipolar, bipolar, unipolar), which reflects the distribution of power, shapes patterns of state interaction. During the Cold War, for example, international relations theorists debated whether the bipolarity of the Cold War period was more stable (in terms of minimizing the likelihood of a major war) than the multipolarity of the eighteenth or nineteenth century, when power in the system was distributed more or less equally among at least four or five great powers. With the end of the Cold War, scholars now argue about the relative stability of the unipolar system characterized by U.S. dominance. Many argue that U.S. hegemony is likely to persist, and others argue that U.S. dominance is likely to generate an opposing coalition to limit U.S. power and that a new leading state will invariably arise.⁴²

To take a more specific example, many argue that the end of the Cold War and the collapse of bipolarity was a permissive condition for U.S. intervention in the 1990–91 Persian Gulf War and initiation of the 2003 Iraq war. If the Soviet Union had not collapsed and if the Cold War had not ended, intervention in Iraq would have been too risky for the United States, either in 1991 or in 2003.

The distribution of power, and the nature of that power, is also the primary explanation for the declining frequency of great-power war over time and in particular for the great-power

peace after World War II. The increasing sophistication of military technology led to the ever-increasing destructiveness of warfare and consequently to the increasing costs of war and increasing disincentives for states to initiate war unless vital national interests were directly threatened. This process culminated in the development of nuclear weapons, the deterrent effects of which are posited by many to be the primary factor contributing to the absence of great-power war after 1945.⁴³

In the realist worldview, wars occur not only because of the actions of states that prefer war to peace but also as a result of the unintended consequences of actions by those who prefer peace to war and who are more interested in preserving their security than in extending their influence.⁴⁴ Even defensively motivated efforts by states to provide for their own security through armaments, alliances, and deterrent threats are often perceived as threatening by others and lead to counteractions and conflict spirals that become difficult to reverse. This is the “security dilemma”—actions to increase one’s security may only decrease the security of others and lead them to respond in ways that decrease one’s own security.⁴⁵

Many interpret the U.S.-Soviet Cold War as a conflict spiral between two states that feared each other and that were more interested in security than in domination. Similarly, many interpret the Israeli-Palestinian conflict as a security-driven conflict spiral, in which actions lead to counteractions that are difficult to reverse because of a ratchet effect.

So far, these general realist propositions—that actors behave reasonably to advance their interests, defined primarily in terms of security; that the distribution of power is the primary determinant of international outcomes; and that wars result both as the intended consequence of aggressive states that want war to advance their interests and as the unintended consequence of more defensively motivated behavior to provide for security—apply as well to civil wars and other forms of

organized violence as they do to interstate war. So do ideas about states forming alliances with other states, and the primacy of security motivations in those alliances. The idea that states have “neither permanent friends nor permanent enemies, just permanent interests” (in the words of Lord Palmerston, a mid-nineteenth-century British leader) applies to coalitions of rebels in civil wars as well as to the great-power politics of earlier centuries.⁴⁶

Other realist propositions are more specific to interstate wars. One of the oldest realist theories is balance-of-power theory, which posits the avoidance of hegemony as the primary goal of states and the maintenance of an equilibrium of power in the system as the primary instrumental goal. The theory predicts that states, and particularly great powers, will build up their arms and form alliances to balance against those who constitute the primary threats to their interests, and particularly against any state that threatens to secure a hegemonic position over the system.⁴⁷ Balance-of-power theorists argue that the balancing mechanism almost always works successfully to avoid hegemony, either because potential hegemons are deterred by their anticipation of a military coalition forming against them or because they are defeated in war after deterrence fails.⁴⁸ In this view, the world wars of the twentieth century and the European war against Napoleonic France a century before were all balance-of-power wars that resulted from the formation of a military coalition to block a threatening state from achieving a position of dominance.

Scholars have also applied balance-of-power theory to regional state systems. One important difference between great-power systems and regional systems, however, is that the central assumption of anarchy is less valid for the latter, where, unlike the former case, powerful states outside the system can play a significant role. For example, outside powers can support a regional hegemon against a coalition of other states within the region, a coalition that might otherwise have restored a balance of power in

the region. There are no significant powers outside a worldwide great-power system that might play this role. Thus some modifications may be necessary in applying balance-of-power theory to regional systems.

An important alternative to balance-of-power theory is "power transition theory," which shares many realist assumptions but emphasizes the existence of order within a nominally anarchic system. Hegemons commonly arise and use their strength to create a set of political and economic structures and norms of behavior that enhance the stability of the system at the same time that it advances their own security. Differential rates of growth lead to the rise and fall of hegemons, however, and the probability of a major war grows as the hegemon loses its dominant position. The probability of war reaches a maximum at the point at which the declining leader is overtaken by a rising challenger that is dissatisfied with the existing international system. Thus power transition theory appears to make the opposite prediction from balance-of-power theory—an equality of power, not a concentration of power, is most conducive to war.⁴⁹

Power transition theory has direct implications for the contemporary world. It predicts that unipolarity under U.S. leadership contributes to stability in terms of a continuation of the great-power peace.⁵⁰ With the inevitable decline of U.S. hegemony, however, new instabilities will arise, particularly in the context of the continued rise of Chinese power. Many believe that the greatest threat to great-power peace will involve the dangers of a Sino-American conflict as the point of power transition approaches, which is estimated to be in about three decades. Although most experts believe that the existence of nuclear weapons will help deter a Sino-American war, most expect an intense rivalry between the two mid-century superpowers. That rivalry might be somewhat mitigated, however, if China abandons its communist ideology and embraces liberal democracy. That would presumably

lessen its degree of dissatisfaction with the status quo, as defined by the capitalist international economic system currently led by the United States.⁵¹

Another prediction of power transition theory, one it shares with balance-of-power theory, is that leading states often act to block the rise of peer competitors. One balance-of-power theorist who explicitly makes this argument is John Mearsheimer, in his influential "offensive realist" theory. Mearsheimer argues, contrary to power transition theorists, that even the strongest states lack the resources to achieve hegemony over the entire world system. These states can sometimes achieve regional hegemony, however, and if they do they will use their power in an attempt to block other great powers from achieving hegemony in other regions.⁵²

One of the strategies that states sometimes adopt against rising challengers, in regional as well as great-power systems, is preventive war. The argument is that a state facing a rising adversary may be tempted to initiate a preventive war in order to defeat the adversary while the opportunity is still available—before the adversary achieves a dominant position or crosses a critical threshold of military power.⁵³ The logic of prevention is reflected in Thucydides' argument that "what made the Peloponnesian War inevitable was the growth of Athenian power and the fear which this caused in Sparta."⁵⁴ Preventive logic motivated the Israeli strike against the Iraqi nuclear reactor in 1981, and it was the initial rationale of the second Bush administration for its 2003 war against Iraq.⁵⁵ Preventive-war theories have yet to identify the specific conditions under which states take preventive action against rising adversaries, however, and there is considerable uncertainty about whether the United States or possibly others might strike preventively against North Korea or Iran. The former is believed to possess nuclear weapons, and the latter appears determined to develop them.

In power transition theory, it is the combination of equality of power and change in power that is destabilizing in the presence of dissatisfied states. We can separate the static component, which posits that at the dyadic level war is least likely when one state has a preponderance of power over another and most likely when there is an equality of power. This is the "power preponderance hypothesis," which draws strong support from empirical studies of interstate war.⁵⁶ It is based on the logic that under conditions of preponderance the strong are satisfied and do not have the incentives for war, and the weak, though dissatisfied, lack the capability for war.

Applications to Civil War and Ethnonational Conflict

Although theorists of civil wars have recently borrowed some ideas from realist theories, balance-of-power theory as a whole is rarely applied directly to civil wars or to domestic political systems more generally. The main problem is that balance-of-power theory is based on the assumption of anarchy—the absence of a legitimate authority to regulate disputes. This assumption is rarely satisfied in domestic political systems with functioning governments.⁵⁷ Whereas balance-of-power theory predicts that concentrations of power in the international system are conducive to interstate war, most analysts have concluded that the concentration of power in domestic political systems—in strong centralized states that dominate local influences—minimizes the likelihood for civil war.⁵⁸

Elements of power transition theory, including the power preponderance hypothesis, have some parallels in situations of ethnonational conflict. Just as power transition theorists argue that concentrations of power in the international system are stabilizing and minimize violent conflict, studies of ethnonational conflict generally find that wars that end in decisive victories are far less likely to be followed by renewed violence than are negotiated set-

tlements based on roughly equal power.⁵⁹ They also find that a situation characterized by the strong dominance of one ethnic group is less prone to violent conflict than one characterized by an equality of power or a moderate imbalance of power between the two groups.⁶⁰

Arguments about the consequences of a particular distribution of power between ethnonational groups need to be placed within a larger political context. Ethnonational minorities are often secure within stable political systems characterized by strong centralized state or imperial institutions (e.g., the communist political systems in the former Soviet bloc). The collapse of state power, however, leaves ethnonational communities in a condition resembling international anarchy, without any guarantees that their security and rights will be protected. Such ethnonational groups might have no hostile intentions toward other groups but still desire to build up militias for protection. The forces that provide protection might potentially do harm to others, however, and such buildups lead to counteractions, misperceptions, and conflict spirals.

Thus ethnonational groups in a condition of weakening centralized authority lack protection, fear for the future, and face an "ethnic security dilemma" that is quite comparable to the security dilemma facing states in the international system, with many of the same consequences.⁶¹ This ethnic security dilemma is intensified by historical animosities and memories, often exaggerated, of past injustices by the other. This is a realist explanation for ethnonational conflict, with the unit of analysis shifted from states to ethnonational communities or other identity groups. The argument is that much ethnic conflict has less to do with ethnic or religious differences than with security fears in a system that provides no reliable means of protection.

These security-driven insecurities can be exacerbated when the leaders of one group attempt to unify their own people, and to enhance their own standing among them, by

rhetorically exaggerating the potential threat posed by the other, acting to rectify past injustices (real or imagined), and generally using other ethnic groups as scapegoats for domestic problems. This is a common interpretation of the Yugoslav wars of the 1990s, with Serbian leader Slobodan Milosevic “playing the ethnic card” as a means of mobilizing his own support. Scapegoating foreigners as a means of enhancing the domestic support of political elites is also a source of interstate wars, as explained by the “diversionary theory of war,” which is a national-level theory.⁶²

The realist security perspective on ethnic conflict generates a number of propositions about the intensity of the ethnic security dilemma and hence the likelihood of violence. The lower the congruence between state territorial borders and communal boundaries, and the greater the ethnic intermingling, the harder it is to provide security, and the higher the likelihood of violence. Such conditions increase the probability of secessionist wars by captive peoples to withdraw from the territory of a larger state and create their own state, and of irredentist wars by ethnic groups in one state to retrieve ethnically kindred people and their territory from another state.⁶³

There are other ways in which weak or failed states create conditions that are ripe for internal violence. These causal paths are explored later in this volume by Rotberg, Ayoob, and others. Part of any explanation for violent outcomes, however, would be why so many contemporary states are weak in the first place, particularly relative to their European counterparts. Standard answers to this question focus on factors internal to states, but the fact that so many contemporary states find themselves in this position suggests that international system-level factors may play a role.

System-Level Sources of State Weakness and Conflict

The states that until recently have done much of the world’s fighting but that now do rela-

tively little fighting emerged in early modern Europe. Faced with a highly threatening international environment and internal imperatives to consolidate their power over domestic rivals, states built up their military power, fought frequent wars, and conquered new territories. They constituted the core of an emerging international system in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, in which there were no external powers to regulate their behavior and constrain their territorial expansion. The expanded armies needed for external conquest and defense led to expanded administrative and fiscal systems to support those armies, and thus to the increasing centralization of state power. That, plus the new military technologies states had incentives to develop, made wars more destructive.⁶⁴ States that lacked the resources, political organization, and military strength to compete on the battlefield were absorbed by their stronger neighbors, and the states that remained were well constituted—in terms of military power, economic resources, and institutional strength—to fight with their external rivals and to maintain internal order. In Charles Tilly’s classic formulation, “War made the state, and the state made war.”⁶⁵

The political units that emerged from the state-building processes in early modern Europe had the resources and ability to survive the trial by fire of a highly competitive and conflictual international system and were forced by the competition to increase their strength. The same is not true for states formed in the late twentieth century after the collapse of the European colonial empires and then after the collapse of the Soviet empire. These states followed a different developmental trajectory, with different consequences. In the words of Ann Hironaka, in contrast to “strong, battle-scarred states that had proven their capability to withstand both interstate and civil war,” former colonies and other new states emerged “not through victory in war, but through the encouragement and support of the international system.” The new environment, unlike

the one in which European states came of age, was characterized by external superpowers with both incentives and capabilities to maintain a stable international order and by international norms that discouraged both territorial conquest and secession. The competitive pressures that formerly weeded out all but the strongest states no longer operated, leading to the emergence of states that were weak in institutions and resources, vulnerable to internal threats, and less able to contain internal violence. Thus, Hironaka concludes, "the rules and behavior changed," and "the international system after 1945 has encouraged and supported the proliferation of weak states that are susceptible to protracted civil wars."⁶⁶

This argument emphasizes that many of the sources of state weaknesses lie in the international system and the causal paths leading from system-level structures and norms to the military, economic, and administrative strength of states. Moreover, state weakness may even be a source of ethnic differences or at least of the exacerbation of those differences. The absence of strong political institutions in weak states facilitates political mobilization around groups defined in terms of ethnicity or religion, rather than around political parties, and provides leaders with incentives to engage in ethnic scapegoating to bolster their internal support.⁶⁷

This situation has been exacerbated by the legacy of European colonialism. Most civil wars over the past several decades have taken place within the territory of former colonial and imperial empires. The territorial boundaries of these states reflect those of the European colonies they replaced, and European powers drew those borders for their own imperial convenience rather than to reflect ethnic, religious, or economic facts of life. The result is a marked incongruence between the territorial borders of the states and the "natural" boundaries separating various communal groups. Identity groups, cut off from their brethren in other states, were sometimes left too weak to provide for their security, too

small to be economically viable, and incomplete in their identity, and they had strong incentives to attempt to change the status quo.

This incongruence between state boundaries and the distribution of ethnic, religious, and other identity groups has been reinforced by international norms that discourage both territorial conquest and secession. Norms against territorial conquest mean that contemporary states, unlike states in early modern Europe, cannot easily expand to incorporate displaced national minorities and thus to form "natural" boundaries based on the congruence of nation and state. Norms against secession, which deny separatist groups the international recognition and funding that constitute near prerequisites for survival, reinforce the existence of disaffected minorities within states.

The result is a collection of states that have the formal trappings of sovereignty, including international recognition and equal votes in the United Nations, but not the functional capacity required to integrate their disparate parts into an effectively functioning political system. As Robert Jackson argues, "Ramshackle states today . . . are not allowed to disappear juridically—even if for all intents and purposes they have already fallen or been pulled down in fact."⁶⁸ The result is the persistence of weak states and of conditions that are conducive to civil wars.

The discrepancy between the boundaries of formal territorial units and communal groups is particularly pronounced in sub-Saharan Africa.⁶⁹ This incongruence has been more likely to contribute to civil conflict than to international conflict, as state leaders have hesitated to contest state boundaries for fear that doing so might set a precedent, unleash unpredictable behavior, and undermine the status quo. The normative constraint against challenging existing boundaries may be gradually disintegrating, and if that continues there could be an increase in interstate war in the region. Thus far, however, most wars have remained internal to states.

The legacy of colonialism also contributes to civil conflict through other paths. Imperial powers sometimes promoted internal rivalries in order to enhance their own influence through a divide-and-conquer strategy, and once in place those rivalries tended to persist beyond the collapse of imperial rule.⁷⁰ Anticolonial wars often transform into civil wars, as the internal opponents of external armies turn on each other after the external forces have departed.⁷¹

The institutional structures put in place by the imperial power, and the political cultures that grew up around them, could also have an impact on the strength of new states and their proclivities toward violence. Such institutional structures varied greatly, and this variation—particularly in terms of the strength of the central government—helps to account for the relative ability or inability of the government to withstand centripetal forces from within and possibly also for the extent of government repression. In many cases, the process of state building in new states got off to a particularly difficult start because of the rapid process of decolonialization. The rather abrupt withdrawal of several colonial empires was due in part to traditional U.S. hostility to imperial and colonial rule, U.S. determination to expand its own sphere of influence, and consequently U.S. pressure on European states to withdraw from their colonial empires. Given the politics of Cold War bipolarity and the Soviet threat, European colonial states had little bargaining leverage against U.S. pressure. As a result, many new states emerged from the colonial empires profoundly ill prepared for the tasks of statehood, as illustrated by the new states in the former Belgian and Portuguese empires in Africa and also by the case of Algeria.⁷²

From Bipolarity to U.S. Hegemony

Cold War bipolarity had other consequences as well, though how the superpowers and leading regional powers perceived and responded to the distribution of military power and the strategies they adopted were also important.

Within each of the superpower blocs, the hierarchical structure of power, in conjunction with each superpower's incentives and capabilities for maintaining stability, tended to dampen both interstate and intrastate conflicts.

Outside the superpower blocs, however, bipolarity induced a competition between the Soviet Union and the United States for power and influence in the Third World. Given their perceptions of a zero-sum game, the superpowers often had incentives to arm whatever side their adversary was not funding, and governments and rebel groups had incentives to play the superpowers off against each other. The result was that both sides in a civil war often received ample funding from the superpowers, in marked contrast to earlier eras.

In the nineteenth century, for example, European great powers, through the Concert of Europe, often acted together to support governments against domestic rebels. This led to an imbalance in military strength and relatively short civil wars. The funding of both governments and rebels in the Cold War period contributed to a stalemate on the battlefield and thus to longer civil wars. The duration of civil wars during the Cold War was also lengthened by the existence of two rival ideological models that could be used to mobilize recruits and provide additional incentives for fighting.⁷³ The superpowers also promoted a number of proxy wars to advance their own interests, though they had both the incentives and the ability to keep those wars from escalating out of control.

The erosion of Soviet power and the end of the Cold War had multiple effects. Within the Soviet bloc, the combination of the collapse of hierarchical rule and the movement toward democratization brought new social groups with widely divergent interests into a political process that lacked the institutional capacity and political legitimacy to accommodate those interests. This provided a fertile environment for political entrepreneurs to make nationalist appeals and engage in scapegoating marginalized groups and external enemies, in order to

help consolidate their political support.⁷⁴ Similar processes could be found elsewhere, as the withdrawal of superpower support for weak authoritarian regimes created power vacuums that facilitated conflict.

The dominant trend, however, was in the other direction. The superpowers no longer had incentives to support proxy wars, and their disengagement from such wars, their efforts to settle some of those wars, and their withdrawal of funding of others both reduced the frequency of new internal wars and helped shorten the duration of ongoing wars. At the same time, however, the increasing globalization of the arms market provided additional opportunities, for both governments and rebels, to find new sources of armaments and economic support. The existence of a global arms market has also generated alliances between rebel groups and international criminal networks, which provide an additional source of funds and arms.⁷⁵ The net trend, however, was to suppress conflict, and the end of the Cold War was soon followed by a significant decline in the number of ongoing civil wars.⁷⁶

This discussion has focused primarily on the distribution of power in the global system and the impact of bipolarity and then of unipolarity on internal warfare around the world. A different set of system factors involves resource scarcities in regional systems, which we now consider.

Resource Scarcities and Conflict

The problems confronting weak states are exacerbated by resource scarcities.⁷⁷ One of the central themes in the growing literature on environmental scarcity and its implications for international conflict is the neo-Malthusian argument that competition for scarce resources among states with rapidly growing and increasingly urbanized populations, coupled with the degradation of those resources by desertification, deforestation, rising sea levels, pollution, and environmental disasters, will generate famines, economic and social problems,

environmental refugees, political instabilities, and serious domestic and international crises.⁷⁸

This scenario is most likely to arise in developing countries, which generally lack the wealth and institutional capacity to respond to environmental disruptions.⁷⁹

The combination of population growth, uneven resource distribution, and the environmental degradation of limited resources exacerbates scarcities and contributes to violent conflict in a number of ways. The most direct path is through a "simple-scarcity conflict," or "resource war," in which one state or group uses military force against another for the primary purpose of gaining access to key economic and strategic resources.⁸⁰ The primary factor leading Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein to invade Kuwait in 1990, for example, was the goal of gaining control over Kuwait's vast oil supplies as a means of reviving the Iraqi economy, eliminating an oppressive debt, and in doing so further consolidating Saddam's hold on political power.⁸¹ This case is consistent with the argument that conflicts over nonrenewable resources tend to be more destabilizing than disputes over renewable resources. A particularly serious point of conflict in the future, however, may be disputes over fresh water.⁸²

Simple-scarcity conflicts are not the only path from environmental scarcity to war. Resource scarcity, sometimes compounded by environmental degradation, droughts, floods, and famines, often leads people to migrate in search of economic security.⁸³ Population movements can, in turn, contribute to conflict or exacerbate existing conflict through a number of causal paths.⁸⁴ Immigrants can generate social conflict within the host or receiving country by putting added strain on scarce resources, particularly in large urban areas. Migrations can change land distribution, economic relations, and the balance of political power among ethnic, religious, or other social groups; undermine state capacity to create markets and other institutions that facilitate adaptation to environmental change; generate

a perceived threat to the host country's cultural identity; trigger a social backlash by indigenous people in response to perceived threats to economic security or social identity from migrants; and generally increase communal conflict, political instabilities, and the likelihood of civil strife.⁸⁵

Migrations may also contribute to international conflict by serving as a focal point for relations between home and host countries. Host countries that cannot easily assimilate the new immigrants or deal with the consequent economic problems and social instabilities may attempt to influence the home government to stop or slow the flow of refugees or eliminate the conditions that gave rise to them. If cooperative efforts fail, governments may resort to coercive threats and possible military action to block the flow of refugees, which can trigger a conflict spiral. Political leaders with weak or declining domestic support may under some conditions be tempted to use the migrants or their home government as scapegoats, as a means of bolstering their own internal political support. A good example is the 1979 "Soccer War" between El Salvador and Honduras. While the trigger cause of the war was a dispute emerging from a soccer game, and while an important background cause was a simple-scarcity conflict driven by environmental pressures and famine, scapegoating and other governmental responses to those systemic pressures played a key role in the conflict.⁸⁶

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

My aim in this chapter has been to place contemporary warfare in the context of changing patterns of warfare over time and to consider ways in which the changing nature of the international system has shaped interstate and intrastate warfare, with particular attention to the six decades since the end of World War II. We have seen a substantial shift in war away from the great powers and away from Europe, a gradual decline in interstate wars more gen-

erally, and a significant increase in civil wars, particularly in the developing world. I have also raised a number of conceptual issues confronting the study of war and suggested several general criteria that any theory or interpretation of war would have to satisfy. One of the most basic criteria is that any theory of war must be able to account for variations in war and peace. Relatedly, any explanation of a particular war must be able to explain why the war occurred when it did and not earlier or later. I summarized the levels-of-analysis framework, which has been an influential framework for the analysis of interstate war and of other aspects of international relations. I then turned to a survey of some of the leading causes of war associated with the international system-level of analysis. I gave particular attention to realist theories and emphasized how realist theories of interstate war have been modified to explain ethnic wars and other forms of civil war. I emphasized the ethnic security dilemma facing many ethnic groups in the world today and how that security dilemma has been exacerbated by the economic, institutional, and military weakness of states in the developing world. I then explained how the international system has contributed to the weakness of states—and consequently to the incidence of civil war—in the contemporary world. I considered the impact, first of Cold War bipolarity and then of post-Cold War unipolarity, on patterns of interstate and intrastate war, and ended with a discussion of the impact of resource scarcity at the regional level. This survey has left many important causal factors uncovered, but many of these are treated throughout the remainder of this volume.

NOTES

The author thanks the editors of this volume for their helpful comments and suggestions.

1. For a more complete treatment of the causes of interstate war, see Jack S. Levy, "The Causes of War: A Review of Theories and Evidence," in *Behav-*

ior, *Society, and Nuclear War*, vol. 1, ed. Philip Tetlock, Jo L. Husbands, Robert Jervis, Paul C. Stern, and Charles Tilly (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 209–333; and John A. Vasquez, *The War Puzzle* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993). On terrorism, see Robert A. Pape, *Dying to Win: The Strategic Logic of Suicide Terrorism* (New York: Random House, 2005); and Mia Bloom, *Dying to Kill: The Allure of Suicide Terror* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005). On genocide, see Manus I. Midlarsky, *The Killing Trap: Genocide in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

2. Quincy Wright, *A Study of War* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1965); Jack S. Levy, *War in the Modern Great Power System, 1495–1975* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1983); and J. David Singer, “Peace in the Global System: Displacement, Interregnum, or Transformation?” in *The Long Postwar Peace*, ed. Charles W. Kegley, Jr. (Glenview, Ill.: Scott, Foresman, 1991), 56–84. If we count China as a great power beginning in 1949, then the Korean War (1950–53) was a great-power war.

3. John Lewis Gaddis, *The Long Peace* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987).

4. The decline in the frequency of interstate wars is particularly striking in the context of the enormous increase in the number of states in the international system—and hence in the mathematical opportunities for interstate war—in the period after World War II.

5. Kalevi J. Holsti, *The State, War, and the State of War* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

6. Jack S. Levy and William R. Thompson, “The Arc of War” (unpublished book manuscript, 2006). The decline in the frequency of civil war since the 1990s is well documented. See Monty G. Marshall and Ted R. Gurr, *Peace and Conflict 2005: A Global Survey of Armed Conflicts, Self-Determination Movements, and Democracy* (College Park: Center for International Development and Conflict Management, University of Maryland, 2005); Human Security Centre, *Human Security Report 2005: War and Peace in the Twenty-first Century* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), parts 1 and 4; and Lotta Harbom and Peter Wallensteen, “Armed Conflict and Its International Dimensions, 1946–2004,” *Journal of Peace Research* 42, no. 5 (September 2005): 623–635.

7. We should not necessarily assume that “ethnic” or “identity” wars are primarily about ethnicity or identity. The primary motivations of key players in

some of those wars may be security, economic resources, political power, or private interest. See John Mueller, *The Remnants of War* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2004); V.P. Gagnon Jr., *The Myth Of Ethnic War: Serbia and Croatia in the 1990s* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2004).

8. Susan L. Woodward, *Balkan Tragedy* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution, 1995). Even the U.S. war in Afghanistan is hard to classify. It began as an interstate war against the Taliban regime in 2001 and soon transformed into an “internationalized civil war” with an external power supporting the government against the rebels. Even in the war’s early stages, however, the United States basically took sides in an Afghan civil war and paid the Afghan Northern Alliance to conduct a majority of ground operations. Internationalized civil wars are hardly new—the Thirty Years’ War (1618–48) began as a civil war within Germany, and the French revolutionary wars soon became internationalized—but they have become much more common.

9. Herfried Münkler, *The New Wars* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004); and Deborah D. Avant, *The Market for Force: The Consequences of Privatizing Security* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

10. It is still war if we define war broadly as sustained, coordinated violence between political organizations (Levy and Thompson, “The Arc of War”). For a useful survey of definitions of war, see Vasquez, *The War Puzzle*, chap. 2. For discussions about the extent to which the “new wars” differ from “old wars,” see Holsti, *The State, War, and the State of War*; Mary Kaldor, *New and Old Wars: Organized Violence in a Global Era* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1999); Stathis N. Kalyvas, “‘New’ and ‘Old’ Civil Wars: A Valid Distinction?” *World Politics* 54, no. 1 (2001): 99–118; and Münkler, *The New Wars*.

11. Martin van Creveld, *The Transformation of War* (New York: Free Press, 1991); Holsti, *The State, War, and the State of War*; and Münkler, *The New Wars*.

12. Donald L. Horowitz, *Ethnic Groups in Conflict* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985).

13. For a critique of the Western conception of warfare, see John F. Guilmartin, Jr., “Ideology and Conflict: The Wars of the Ottoman Empire, 1453–1606,” *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 18 (Spring 1988): 721–747.

14. Münkler, *The New Wars*.
15. Mueller, *The Remnants of War*.
16. Clausewitz (*On War*) defines "political" broadly to include diplomatic, strategic, economic, ideological, and related objectives. For a critique of the idea that war is fundamentally political, see John Keegan, *A History of Warfare* (New York: Vintage, 1993), which opens (p. 3) with the provocative statement that "war is not the continuation of policy by other means." See also Holsti, *The State, War, and the State of War*; and Münkler, *The New Wars*.
17. Although scholars continue to debate the motivations of terrorist groups, a growing consensus suggests that the use of terror by terrorist organizations is purposeful and strategic, not nihilistic. See chapter 6, by Martha Crenshaw, in this volume. See also Pape, *Dying to Win*; and Bloom, *Dying to Kill*. With respect to al Qaeda, the standard interpretation is that its immediate aim is to force the withdrawal of U.S. and allied military forces from the Islamic world, in order to facilitate the goal of replacing existing regimes with "true" Muslim regimes.
18. Relatedly, Clausewitz argues that the logic of war itself is fundamentally political, not military. This means that the criterion by which a war is to be evaluated is not whether it results in "victory" or "defeat," which are often hard to define, but rather whether it leaves the actor, or at least its leaders, better off after the war than they were before. A good example of Clausewitzian thinking comes from the Vietnam War. The turning point of the war was the Tet Offensive by the North Vietnamese, which caused American public opinion to turn against the war. In strictly military terms, the Tet Offensive was a U.S. victory. But it was the political consequences that mattered. This is reflected in a conversation between an American colonel and a North Vietnamese colonel after the war. The American said, "You know you never defeated us on the battlefield." His North Vietnamese counterpart replied, "That may be so, but it is also irrelevant." In Harry G. Summers, Jr., *On Strategy* (New York: Dell, 1982), 21. Summers, the American colonel, was himself an admirer of Clausewitz.
19. Political scientists who study warfare in the past two centuries generally use the threshold of one thousand battle-related deaths. J. David Singer and Melvin Small, *The Wages of War, 1816-1965* (New York: Wiley, 1972).
20. In other words, an "independent variable" that is constant cannot explain a "dependent variable" that varies.
21. Robert L. Carneiro, "A Theory of the Origin of the State," *Science* 169 (1970): 733-738.
22. Robert D. Kaplan, *Balkan Ghosts* (New York: Vintage, 1993); and Samuel P. Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1996).
23. One key factor was the Iranian revolution, which brought a fundamentalist Islamic regime to power and threatened the domestic security of the secular Baathist regime of Saddam Hussein in Iraq. Dilip Hiro, *The Longest War: The Iran-Iraq Military Conflict* (New York: Routledge, 1991).
24. Kenneth N. Waltz, *Man, the State, and War* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1959). Waltz spoke of three "images" of war, but it is now common to speak in terms of "levels" of analysis.
25. This discussion builds on my treatment of levels of analysis and theories of war in the earlier edition of this volume: Jack S. Levy, "Theories of Interstate and Intrastate War: A Levels-of-Analysis Approach," in *Turbulent Peace: The Challenges of Managing International Conflict*, ed. Chester A. Crocker, Fen Osler Hampson, and Pamela Aall (Washington, D.C.: United States Institute of Peace Press, 2001), 3-27.
26. Each of the three levels is not in itself a theory but includes a variety of separate theories within it.
27. James Mann, *Rise of the Vulcans: The History of Bush's War Cabinet* (New York: Viking Penguin, 2004); and Michael R. Gordon and General Bernard E. Trainor, *Cobra II: The Inside Story of the Invasion and Occupation of Iraq* (New York: Pantheon Books, 2006).
28. Michael Brown, "Ethnic and Internal Conflicts: Causes and Implications," in Crocker et al., *Turbulent Peace*, 209-226.
29. Rohan Gunaranta, *Inside al-Qaeda: Global Network of Terror*, 3rd ed. (New York: Berkley Publishing Group, 2003).
30. The important factor of misperceptions, for example, can result from system-level uncertainty or adversary strategic deception, national-level ideologies that predispose leaders to interpret the behavior of others in certain ways, and individual-level personalities that contribute to further distortions in

incoming information. Economic factors include both national economic interests, such as the stability of a society's economic system, and the influence of private economic groups (e.g., arms manufacturers) on state foreign policies.

31. This argument reflects the "hero-in-history" approach. Sydney Hook, *The Hero in History* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1955).

32. It might seem that in a dictatorship such additional conceptual apparatus might not be necessary, but in fact the dictatorial structure of the regime is part of the explanation. Saddam Hussein's beliefs and personality may be central to an explanation of the origins of the 1990–91 Persian Gulf War, but only in conjunction with the highly centralized structure of the Iraqi regime that allowed Saddam Hussein to make policy in the absence of any significant internal constraints.

33. Ernest May, *Imperial Democracy* (New York: Harper and Row, 1961).

34. This does not necessarily mean that dyadic and system-level variables have a greater causal influence than do individual or domestic variables, only that the former cannot be logically excluded from the analysis.

35. The statement that a state makes a "decision for war" implicitly assumes that the adversary will fight back. On the distinction between war as strategy (of an actor) and war as outcome (of the joint actions of two or more actors), see Vasquez, *The War Puzzle*, chap. 2.

36. A. J. P. Taylor, *The Origins of the Second World War*, 2nd ed. (Greenwich, Conn.: Fawcett, 1961).

37. For hypotheses on the conditions under which threats of force tend to work, see Robert Jervis, *Perception and Misperception in International Politics* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1976), chap. 3.

38. There are a variety of system-level theories, including realist, liberal, institutionalist, and constructivist theories. We focus here primarily on realist theories emphasizing security interests and power, with some attention to constructivist arguments emphasizing norms. For a survey of international relations theories, see Walter Carlsnaes, Thomas Risse, and Beth A. Simmons, eds., *Handbook of International Relations* (London: Sage, 2002).

39. "Realist" is a nominal label given to the paradigm by its proponents. We should not automatically assume that realist theory provides a more "realistic" or valid portrayal of the world than do alternative theories. That is an empirical question.

40. Anarchy is a structural feature of the international system; it does not equal chaos. Realists hypothesize that anarchy often leads to chaos, which is different.

41. Thucydides, *History of the Peloponnesian War*, in *The Landmark Thucydides*, ed. Robert B. Strassler (New York: Free Press, 1996), 5.89, 352. See also Waltz, *Theory of International Politics*.

42. G. John Ikenberry, ed., *America Unrivaled: The Future of the Balance of Power* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2002).

43. For other explanations of the long great-power peace, see Gaddis, *The Long Peace*; and Kegley, *The Long Postwar Peace*.

44. In the second scenario, states aim to avoid losses rather than make gains. Most people have a tendency to place much greater value on preserving what they have than on acquiring something new and engage in riskier strategies to avoid losses than to make gains. States (and rebel groups) fight to hold on to territory that they might not have fought to acquire in the first place. This is a core insight of "prospect theory." For applications to international relations, see Jack S. Levy, "The Implications of Framing and Loss Aversion for International Conflict," in *Handbook of War Studies II*, ed. Manus I. Midlarsky (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2000), 193–221.

45. Jervis, *Perception and Misperception in International Politics*, chap. 3.

46. This is illustrated by the Arab coalition against Iraq in 1991, in which Arab leaders indirectly aligned with their Israeli enemy to counter the more immediate threat posed by Saddam Hussein's Iraq, and also by the constantly shifting coalitions in the civil war in the Democratic Republic of the Congo in the 1990s.

47. Hans J. Morgenthau, *Politics among Nations*, 4th ed. (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1967); and John J. Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2001).

48. Jack S. Levy, "Balances and Balancing: Concepts, Propositions, and Research Design," in *Realism and the Balancing of Power*, ed. John A. Vasquez and

Colin Elman (Upper Saddle River, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 2003), 128–153.

49. Robert Gilpin, *War and Change in World Politics* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1981); and Jacek Kugler and Douglas Lemke, *Parity and War* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1996). An important variation of power transition is long-cycle theory, which emphasizes leadership in the global system based on naval power (and airpower by the mid-twentieth century) and economic power based on dominance in leading sector technologies. See Karen Rasler and William R. Thompson, “Global War and the Political Economy of Structural Change,” in *Handbook of War Studies II*, ed. Manus I. Midlarsky (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2000), 301–331.

50. While many interpret balance-of-power theory as applicable to all international systems, a new line of argument emphasizes that the theory was based on the experience of five centuries of European history and designed to apply to continental systems like Europe, not to the global maritime system. There is an implicit distinction between land powers and maritime powers. Land powers have large armies that can invade and intimidate and are perceived to be more threatening than are maritime powers. The theory predicts that states will balance against aspiring continental hegemony and that such balancing will be effective in avoiding continental hegemony, but it makes no such predictions about balancing against potential global hegemony. Thus, while it is common to argue that balance-of-power theory incorrectly predicts great-power balancing against U.S. global hegemony, and that the absence of such balancing undermines balance-of-power theory, this alternative perspective suggests that just as British dominance in the nineteenth-century global system did not trigger a countervailing great-power balancing coalition, balance-of-power theory does not necessarily predict a great-power balancing coalition against the United States. See Levy, “Balances and Balancing.”

51. The power transition between Britain and the rising United States in the late nineteenth century provides an instructive example. Both were capitalist states and sought a capitalist world economy. This led Britain to anticipate that the United States would not overturn the international political economy, just acquire a dominant position in the existing system, which was acceptable to Britain.

52. Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics*.

53. See Jack S. Levy, “Declining Power and the Preventive Motivation for War,” *World Politics* 40, no. 1 (October 1987): 82–107.

54. Thucydides, *Peloponnesian War*, 1.23.

55. The Bush administration used the concept of preemption, but that was misleading. Preemption involves attacking an adversary who you believe is about to attack you, whereas prevention involves attacking an adversary before it crosses a critical threshold of military capability. As it turned out, Iraq did not have weapons of mass destruction, and there is growing evidence that Bush and some of his advisors may have known this at the time. Chaim Kaufmann, “Threat Inflation and the Failure of the Marketplace of Ideas: The Selling of the Iraq War,” *International Security* 29, no. 1 (Summer 2004): 5–48. On the distinction between prevention and preemption, and on the role of preventive logic in U.S. foreign policy, see Jack S. Levy, “Preventive War and the Bush Doctrine: Theoretical Logic and Historical Roots.” In *The Bush Doctrine: Psychology and Strategy in an Age of Terrorism*, ed. Stanley A. Renshon and Peter Suedfeld (London: Routledge, 2007).

56. The evidence is summarized in Kugler and Lemke, *Parity and War*. Note that the stabilizing effects of power preponderance at the dyadic level do not necessarily imply that imbalances of power are stabilizing at the system level, where balancing through alliances can create opportunities for war to restrict concentrations of power.

57. Balance-of-power theory might in principle be applicable in the case of “collapsed” or “failed states,” though other theories are more commonly applied to such situations.

58. For discussions of “failed states,” see chapters 6 and 7, by Robert Rotberg and Mohammed Ayoob, in this volume.

59. Roy Licklider, “The Consequences of Negotiated Settlements in Civil Wars, 1945–1993,” *American Political Science Review* 89, no. 3 (September 1995): 681–690.

60. Chaim Kaufman, “Possible and Impossible Solutions to Ethnic Civil Wars,” *International Security* 20, no. 4 (Spring 1996): 136–175.

61. Barry R. Posen, “The Security Dilemma and Ethnic Conflict,” *Survival* 35, no. 1 (Spring 1993):

- 27–47; and Jack Snyder and Robert Jervis, “Civil War and the Security Dilemma,” in *Civil Wars, Insecurity, and Intervention*, ed. Barbara F. Walter and Jack Snyder (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), 15–37.
62. Gagnon, *The Myth of Ethnic War*; and Jack S. Levy, “The Diversionary Theory of War: A Critique,” in *Handbook of War Studies*, ed. Manus I. Midlarsky (London: Unwin-Hyman, 1989), 259–288. The fact that students of diversionary war rarely apply their theories to ethnic conflict and that students of ethnic conflict rarely refer to the literature on diversionary war is an unfortunate reflection of the division between the study of interstate war and the study of intrastate war.
63. Stephen Van Evera, “Hypotheses on Nationalism and War,” *International Security* 18, no. 4 (Spring 1994): 5–39; and Donald Horowitz, “Irredentas and Secessions,” in *Irredentism and International Politics*, ed. Naomi Chazan (Boulder, Colo.: Lynne Rienner, 1991), 9–22.
64. These mutually reinforcing changes in war, military technology and strategy, and political and administrative organization constitute the “military revolution” in early modern Europe. See Michael Roberts, “The Military Revolution, 1560–1660,” in *The Military Revolution Debate: Readings on the Military Transformation of Early Modern Europe*, ed. Clifford J. Rogers (Boulder, Colo.: Westview, 1995), 13–35; and Levy and Thompson, “The Arc of War.”
65. Charles Tilly, “Reflections on the History of European State Making,” in *The Formation of National States in Western Europe*, ed. Charles Tilly (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1975), 42.
66. Ann Hironaka, *Neverending Wars: The International Community, Weak States, and the Perpetuation of Civil War* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2005), 7.
67. *Ibid.*, chap. 4; and Gagnon, *The Myth of Ethnic War*. For studies of ethnic conflict wars that give causal primacy to ethnicity, see Kaplan, *Balkan Ghosts*; Walker Connor, *Ethnonationalism: The Quest for Understanding* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1994); and Stephen M. Saidman, *The Ties That Divide: Ethnic Politics, Foreign Policy, and International Conflict* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001).
68. Robert H. Jackson, *Quasi-States: Sovereignty, International Relations, and the Third World* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990); and Bertrand Badie, *The Imported State: The Westernization of the Political Order* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2000).
69. Jackson, *Quasi-States*. The problem also applies to the Middle East. For decades before the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait in 1990, Iraqis insisted that part of Kuwaiti territory was historically and rightfully theirs, included in Kuwait only because of British imperial interests.
70. The Azerbaijan–Armenian rivalry, which escalated into war in the 1990s, was influenced in part by Joseph Stalin’s deliberate efforts to play one off against the other.
71. This was true of Vietnam, Algeria, and numerous other former colonies.
72. I thank the editors of this volume for bringing this point to my attention.
73. Münkler, *The New Wars*; and Hironaka, *Neverending Wars*.
74. Jack Snyder, *From Voting to Violence: Democratization and Nationalist Conflict* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2000).
75. Mueller, *Remnants of War*; Phil Williams and John T. Picarelli, “Combating Organized Crime in Armed Combat,” in *Profiting from Peace: Managing the Resource Dimensions of Civil War*, ed. Karen Ballentine and Heiko Nitzschke (Boulder, Colo.: Lynne Rienner, 2005), 123–152; and Münkler, *New Wars*. For a review of debates about the impact of globalization on civil war, see Katherine Barbieri and Rafael Reuveny, “Economic Globalization and Civil War,” *Journal of Politics* 67, no. 4 (November 2005): 1228–1247.
76. Hironaka, *Neverending Wars*; Marshall and Gurr, *Peace and Conflict 2005*; and Human Security Centre, *Human Security Report 2005*.
77. See also the essay by Nils Petter Gleditsch, chap. 11 in this volume. Resource scarcity is another subject that highlights the divergence between the studies of interstate and intrastate conflict. Although the contemporary literature on civil war gives considerable attention to resource scarcities, the traditional literature on interstate war, with its emphasis on power and process but its neglect of specific issues over which states fight (until the recent emphasis on territorial disputes), has given relatively little attention to resource scarcity. The most important exception is Nazli Choucri and Robert North, *Nations in Conflict: National Growth and International Violence* (San Francisco: W. H. Freeman, 1975).

Recent literature on environmental scarcity and its implications for both interstate and intrastate conflict includes Thomas F. Homer-Dixon, *Environment, Scarcity, and Violence* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1999); "Environmental Conflict," special issue, *Journal of Peace Research* 35, no. 3 (May 1998). On the importance of territorial issues in interstate and intrastate violence, see John A. Vasquez and Marie T. Henehan, "Territorial Disputes and the Probability of War, 1816-1992," *Journal of Peace Research*, 38, no. 2 (2001), 123-138; and Monica Duffy Toft, *The Geography of Ethnic Violence: Identity, Interests, and the Indivisibility of Territory* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2003).

It is interesting to note that the anthropological literature on the origins of war six to ten millennia ago gives considerable emphasis to resource scarcity. Carneiro, "Theory of the Origin of the State"; Ronald Cohen, "Warfare and State Formation: Wars Make States and States Make War," in *Warfare, Culture, and Environment*, ed. Brian R. Ferguson (Orlando, Fla.: Academic Press, 1984), 329-358; Jonathan Haas, "The Origins of War and Ethnic Violence," in *Ancient Warfare: Archaeological Perspectives*, ed. John Carman and Anthony Harding (Gloucestershire, U.K.: Sutton Publishing, 1999).

78. Robert D. Kaplan, *The Coming Anarchy* (New York: Random House, 2000).

79. This raises the question of whether environmental change is a security issue, and the broader question of whether "human security" should be defined narrowly in terms of violent threats to individuals or broadly to include as well threats from hunger, disease, and natural disasters. For debates, see Daniel Deudney, "The Case against Linking Environmental Degradation and National Security," *Millennium* 19, no. 3 (Winter 1990): 461-476; Marc A. Levy, "Is the Environment a National Security Issue?" *International Security* 20, no. 2 (Fall 1995): 35-62; and Human Security Centre, *Human Security Report 2005*, viii.

80. Homer-Dixon, *Environment, Scarcity, and Violence*.

81. Lawrence Freedman and Efraim Karsh, *The Gulf Conflict, 1990-1991: Diplomacy and War in the New World Order* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1993). There is also a consensus that Japan's quest for oil and other scarce resources was a primary factor leading to the Pacific War between Japan and the United States in 1941. Michael Barnhart, *Japan*

Prepares for Total War: The Search for Economic Security, 1919-1941 (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1987).

82. Homer-Dixon, *Environment, Scarcity, and Violence*; Miriam R. Lowi, *Water and Power: The Politics of a Scarce Resource in the Jordan River Basin* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993); Peter H. Gleick, "Water and Conflict: Fresh Water Resources and International Security," in *Global Dangers: Changing Dimensions of International Security*, ed. Sean M. Lynn-Jones and Steven E. Miller (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1995), 84-117.

83. Pressures for migration also come from within states. Communal conflicts, violent secessionist movements, and the political and economic oppression with which they are associated create incentives for ethnic minorities to migrate to find economic security or to join their national homelands. Large-scale population movements may also be the result of deliberate government strategies, which see forced emigration as a strategy of achieving cultural homogeneity or the dominance of one ethnic community over another, eliminating political dissidents, colonizing areas beyond borders, scapegoating a prosperous but unpopular ethnic minority, destabilizing another state, or influencing its policies. Ethnic cleansing in the Balkans during the Yugoslav wars is but one example. Myron Weiner, "Security, Stability, and International Migration," *International Security* 17, no. 3 (Winter 1992-93): 91-126.

84. International migration does not always lead to social conflict. Under some conditions migrants are assimilated into the host country, particularly when they provide needed labor and skills and particularly when population movements take the form of gradual migrations (often in response to gradual changes in demography and economic incentives) rather than sudden displacements arising from ethnic conflicts or environmental disasters.

85. Weiner, "Security, Stability, and International Migration"; Ronald R. Krebs and Jack S. Levy, "Demographic Change and the Sources of International Conflict," in *Demography and National Security*, ed. Myron Weiner and Sharon Stanton Russell (Providence, R.I.: Berghahn Books, 2001).

86. William H. Durham, *Scarcity and Survival in Central America: Ecological Origins of the Soccer War* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1979).