

QUIET CATAclysm

REFLECTIONS ON
THE RECENT TRANSFORMATION
OF WORLD POLITICS

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*TO JAM AND ESM,
TO KARL, MICHELLE, KAREN,
ERIK, SUSAN, AND KRAIG,
TO ROBERT AND HELEN DICK,
AND TO THE MEMORY OF CARL HONIG*

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Quiet Cataclysm: Reflections on the Recent Transformation of World Politics

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INTRODUCTION

A *New Yorker* cartoon published sometime in the midst of the Cold War depicted some Eskimos gazing skyward at two missiles, one labeled “USSR,” the other “US,” which were hurtling past each other in opposite directions. One Eskimo remarks, “Well, I guess that’s the end of the world as they know it.”

Recently we did come to the end of the world as we knew it then, but, as it happens, no missiles were ever launched. This book comprises a set of reflections centered around that amazing development, and it builds from a central conceit holding that over a period of less than three years—from major shifts in Soviet foreign policy by 1988 to the collapse of a conservative coup in Moscow in 1991—the world underwent a cataclysm that was something like the functional equivalent of World War III.

The recent pleasantness (as Winston Churchill might have called it) was preceded, like its unpleasant and far noisier predecessors of 1914 and 1939, by a lengthy process in which rival countries jockeyed for position as they proclaimed competitive visions of the way the world ought to be ordered, armed themselves to the earlobes, made threatening noises, and confronted each other in traumatic crises. As with World Wars I and II, a consequence of the recent cataclysm was that a major empire was dismembered, important political boundaries in Europe were reorganized, and several nations were politically transformed. And, as the ancient institution of monarchy met its effective demise in Europe in World War I and as the newer, but dangerous and seemingly virile, ideologies of Nazism and Fascism were destroyed by World War II, so a major political philosophy, Communism, over which a tremendous amount of ink and blood had been spilled, was discredited and apparently expunged in World War III.

Following World Wars I and II it took a few years for the basic political order to be settled, after which it remained substantially stable until revised by the next war (or war-equivalent). A similar process of shaking-out seems to be going on now in eastern Europe and in the former Soviet Union—and perhaps also in China. In addition, the victors of World War III, like their predecessors in 1918 and 1945 (and, for that matter, 1815), have been given to proclaiming a new world order in which former enemies can expect to collaborate in international police work. Moreover, the winners have moved to help the losers reestablish themselves as responsible and cooperative members of the international community—a process that was a spectacular success for the Western victors after World War II, but an equally spectacular failure for them after World War I.

Although there may be some merit in considering the experience of the 1989–91 period to have been the functional equivalent of a world war, there are at least two extremely important respects in which the conceit fails miserably.

First, of course, the recent cataclysm, unlike its bloody predecessors, was astoundingly quiet: It took place with very little violence. Some shooting occurred in a few places, particularly in Romania where there was a brief period of warfare between the old guard and the new. But this was nothing compared to what had happened in World Wars I and II. E. H. Carr once observed, “Normally, the threat of war, tacit or overt, seems a necessary condition of important political changes in the international sphere” (1946, 216). Our remarkable recent experience provides an important counter to that proposition—neither war nor the threat of war necessarily impelled the changes.

So many people so quickly became so blasé about this phenomenon that it is perhaps worth screaming a little: *over the course of a couple of years, virtually all the major problems that plagued big-country (sometimes known as Great Power) international relations for nearly half a century were resolved with scarcely a shot being fired, a person being executed, or a rock being thrown.* Among the issues resolved were the unpopular and often brutal Soviet occupation of eastern Europe; the artificial and deeply troubling division of Germany; the expensive, virulent, crisis-prone, and apparently dangerous military contest between East and West; and the ideological struggle between authoritarian, expansionist, violence-encouraging Communism and reactive, sometimes-panicky capitalist democracy.

During the Cold War—the runup to the quiet cataclysm—many people were deeply concerned (terrified, might be a better word) that these problems would reach resolution only through war or violence. Political scientist Hans J. Morgenthau was far from unusual when he glumly, if authoritatively, concluded in 1979 that “the world is moving ineluctably towards a third world war—a strategic nuclear war. I do not believe that anything can be done to prevent it. The international system is simply too unstable to survive for long” (cited in Boyle 1985, 37).

Moreover, the Cold War often seemed intractable, and the contestants seemed deeply committed to their own irreconcilable and divergent views of the world. Coping with Soviet strength, observed Secretary of State Henry Kissinger in 1976, is a condition that “will not go away. And it will perhaps never be conclusively ‘solved.’ It will have to be faced by every Administration for the foreseeable

future" (1977, 304). "This book is based on a central proposition," declared a major policymaker of one of those later Administrations, Zbigniew Brzezinski, in 1986: "The American-Soviet conflict is not some temporary aberration but a historical rivalry that will long endure" (1986, xiii). Although they show great sensitivity to the important changes being brought about by Mikhail Gorbachev at the time, Soviet analysts Seweryn Bialer and Michael Mandelbaum still anticipated in 1988 that "the Soviet Union will continue to be a rival of the United States; indeed, it will continue to be the preeminent rival, and vice versa, far into the twenty-first century" (1988, 5). And in particular the Soviet Union seemed so physically and ideologically committed to its eastern European empire, and even more so to its Russian one, that it would never relax its grip without a fight—that it did so essentially by default was amazingly "contrary to the normal behavior of great powers," as Robert Tucker and David Hendrickson observe (1992, 190). Although he is fully aware of the problems of ethnic violence within parts of the former Soviet Union, Sergo Mikoyan, the son of a former Soviet President, thought it worth stressing in 1992 that Russia "has just completed a miracle: a great empire was dissolved and a totalitarian dictatorship was liquidated absolutely peacefully."

Second, although World War III may have caused great changes in international politics, it did not, unlike World Wars I and II, notably change the world's military balance. Indeed, about the only thing that *had not* changed very much by 1991 was the balance of weaponry, particularly the supposedly crucial nuclear weaponry, arrayed on both sides. A negative arms race between East and West had begun by that time, but little real reduction had yet taken place.

The experience of the quiet cataclysm impressively demonstrates that radical change can sometimes happen with astonishing speed. The central Cold War issues concerning eastern Europe were settled over a matter of a few months in 1989 and 1990—a transformation that is as astounding in retrospect as it was at the time. Even as this was happening, George Kennan, noting that the "problem was tremendous in scope and difficulty," and pointing out how "complex" and "profound in its implications is the task of designing this new Europe," predicted that "we will be lucky if the task is substantially accomplished before the end of the century" (1989). Meanwhile Henry Kissinger anticipated that it would take "three or four years" to see "a de facto unification of Germany," a process that was accomplished, *de jure*, in one (Gordon 1989). And Soviet Communism received its coup de grâce almost overnight during a failed coup d'état in Russia in 1991.

This book is concerned with how this came about, how it changes our views of the past, and what it suggests about the future. Three themes, derived from these observations about the quiet cataclysm, recur at several points. One theme suggests that big problems are often merely reflections of differences of ideas, and thus can change without big means, and particularly without war. The second suggests that military considerations are often substantially irrelevant to the central issues of international politics—weapons are more likely to be indicators of tensions and difficulties than their causes. And the third, related to the first, suggests that big problems—precisely because they are merely about ideas—can, rather like a new rage in hairstyles or skirt length, change very quickly.

Chapter 1 reflects on the future for war and for peace in the aftermath of the quiet cataclysm. Despite the turmoil in portions of eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union, it is possible to be guardedly optimistic about the prospects for future war in the wake of the quiet cataclysm: not only has the likelihood of major war diminished markedly, but the death of the venerable myth of revolution and the end of the Cold War contest may reduce two factors which tended to exacerbate local conflicts while the rise of democracy and of a concerned collegial international community may help to limit and mitigate (but not completely eliminate) them. However, as with the triumph over smallpox, the quiet cataclysm inspired no victory parades, and the catastrophe quota remains comfortably full: as many of the major problems that have bedeviled the world over the last half-century have been resolved, concerns which would previously have been considered minor have risen in perceived importance. It appears that the character in George Bernard Shaw's 1903 play, *Man and Superman*, was on to something when he observed, "There are two tragedies in life. One is not to get your heart's desire. The other is to get it."

Chapter 2 deals with the impact of the demise of the Cold War on certain concerns and concepts promulgated in the international relations theory literature, particularly that of the "structural realist" persuasion. Some theorists argue that the essential structure of world politics is determined by the way capabilities, particularly military ones, are distributed. The experience of the quiet cataclysm suggests, in contrast, that the structure was determined by ideas and ideologies, particularly by the expansionary notion accepted by Communists that worldwide capitalism ought to be overthrown. When Communist leaders changed their minds about that, the structure of world politics changed profoundly even though "capability" measures changed little, particularly at first. Moreover, contrary to the anticipations of some theorists, it seems entirely possible for massive changes in the world order to take place—for the international system to be fundamentally transformed—without war, indeed almost completely without violence. And the experience also suggests that notions central to the realist perspective, like "power" and "anarchy," might productively be reassessed in the new emerging world where economics, not military structure, substantially determines status and influence relations among the major countries.

Chapter 3 further assesses the relationship between weapons and policy and suggests the dependence of arms on politics (rather than the reverse). As happened between the United States and British Canada after 1870, the demise of the Cold War between the USSR and the United States brought about what might be called a negative arms race, suggesting that when countries no longer deem it necessary to fight they will get rid of their arms. It seems clear, accordingly, that weapons are often indicators of tensions, not their causes. The experience also suggests that formal arms control measures can be unnecessary, even counterproductive.

Chapter 4 reconsiders deterrence in the new era, and it suggests that the concept should be broadened to include nonmilitary, as well as military, considerations. Most wars that never take place are deterred by factors that have little to do with weaponry, as should be obvious when small countries so often live peacefully

alongside large ones. A model that prominently incorporates such nonmilitary considerations is proposed and developed.

Chapter 5 reflects on the role nuclear weapons played during the Cold War. Although they are often given credit for having prevented a major war, for making the world bipolar, and for keeping the central contestants cautious, it seems rather that they had little to do either with the carrying out of the contest or its resolution. Essentially, they were irrelevant. A direct war between the risk-averse Cold War opponent was never really in the cards: thus, nuclear weapons may have been sufficient to prevent a major war, but they were not necessary to do so.

Chapter 6 reassesses, in retrospect, the Western policy of containment as a method for dealing with expansionary, threatening international Communism. It argues that the policy may well have been misconceived in some important respects. Rather than containing international Communism, the most expeditious method for crushing it might have been to let it expand until it collapsed of its own increasingly unmanageable weight. Events suggest that the containment theorists of the 1940s had it essentially right when they argued that Communism was fundamentally defective and would eventually self-destruct. They were also right when they prescribed policies designed to harass Communism. However, their notion that it was vital to contain Communism as part of this strategy was flawed: Communism died not so much because it was successfully contained but because it was given enough rope to hang itself. When containment effectively lapsed in the late 1970s and Communism dramatically expanded, its fundamental flaws were heightened and this helped to trigger its collapse.

Chapter 7 reexamines Pearl Harbor and the Pacific War in light of the experience of the postwar era. It makes two arguments. First, it concludes that from a military standpoint, Pearl Harbor was more of an inconvenience than a disaster for the United States—damage was quite limited and the attack had little impact on the pace of the Pacific War. Second, it suggests that it would have been better after the attack to have continued a policy of containment and harassment policy toward Japan, rather than direct war. After Pearl Harbor, Japan was vastly overextended and a highly auspicious target for the kind of strategy applied successfully (with the caveats of Chapter 6 in mind) to the Soviet Union after the war: a firm, patient policy consisting of harassment and containment, economic pressure, aiming to deter and to threaten, assistance to antagonistic combatants, and perhaps limited warfare on the peripheries. If the point of the war was to force Japan to retreat from its empire and to encourage it to return to more liberal ways, hindsight suggests that a policy of cold war could well eventually have had the same result as hot war and at far lower cost to all involved.

Chapter 8 looks at the nature of war itself and concludes that, while it is clearly impossible to make war impossible, war is not a requirement of the human condition nor does it fulfill a crucial social function. Thus, although war exploits natural instincts and proclivities, it is neither necessary nor inevitable. Accordingly, war can shrivel up and disappear without losing its fascination, without a notable change or improvement in human nature, and without being replaced by anything else.

Chapter 9 considers the historical movement of ideas and traces the growing acceptance, particularly in the last 100 years, of the idea of war aversion. In my 1989 book, *Retreat from Doomsday: The Obsolescence of Major War*, I concluded, as the subtitle suggests, that major war (war among developed countries) is obsolescent (not obsolete), and since publication the world seems to have retreated so far from doomsday that the word, recently so fashionable in alarmed political discourse, has already taken on a patina of archaic quaintness. Developing some of the themes in that book (and responding to some of its critics), this chapter seeks to explain how ideas develop, prosper, and become accepted. It focuses particularly on the profound way attitudes toward war changed in Europe at the time of World War I. This change came about, it seems, not because of objective economic or social developments or because the war was all that peculiarly destructive, but because the idea of war aversion was successfully promoted before the war and because the war experience helped to confirm the arguments of war opponents.

Chapter 10 deals with one of the most dramatic developments accompanying the quiet cataclysm and the demise of Communism: the remarkable, and remarkably effortless, rise of democracy. This experience suggests that in many ways, some of them unanticipated either by its proponents or by its detractors, democracy is substantially superior to its competitors. It also appears that democracy is really quite a simple idea, that it can come into existence quite naturally, and that even elections are not necessary for it to take effect. In addition, it seems that democracy has been able to become established and accepted because, despite the assertions of many of its advocates, in practice it has little to do with equality—indeed, effectively it relies on, and celebrates, inequality—and because of that it can often deal rather effectively with minority concerns, a quality which may make it especially useful for addressing some notable problems in the aftermath of the quiet cataclysm. Moreover, one of democracy's great strengths is that it does not demand much of people and that it can function quite well with the minimal human being. Thus about the only prerequisite for the establishment of democracy is the more or less general desire—probably only by its elites—to do so. The chapter sketches a model that seeks to account for the remarkable growth in acceptance of democracy over the last 200 years, a model that, as in the case of the rise of war aversion, finds the promotional efforts and activities of idea entrepreneurs to be more important influences than broader social or economic changes. Some speculations about the interrelationship—or lack thereof—between democracy and war aversion are also included.

All the chapters were developed from material previously published in various forms and formats, mostly during or shortly after the quiet cataclysm (respectively: Mueller 1992a and 1994c; 1993; 1989-1990 and 1991a; 1991c; 1988b; 1989b; 1991/92; 1991e; 1991b; 1992b and 1992c). In all cases, however, the material has been reworked, updated, embellished, and rethought—sometimes extensively. The appendix arrays for leisurely perusal a set of predictions—mostly cataclysmic ones—from the last few centuries about peace, war, and other issues. Some (particularly before World War I) predict the imminence of world peace, while others (particularly after that war) predict the imminence of catastrophic destruction.

WAR, PEACE, AND TROUBLE IN THE AFTERMATH OF THE QUIET CATAclysm

In his farewell address upon leaving the Presidency in January 1953, Harry Truman looked to the future with confidence. He considered the “menace of Communism” and “our fight against it” to be the “overriding issue of our time.” But he had no doubt that “as the free world grows stronger, more united, more attractive to men on both sides of the Iron Curtain—and as the Soviet hopes for easy expansion are blocked—then there will have to come a time of change in the Soviet world.”

He also looked forward, and with great pleasure, to the “world we hope to have when the Communist threat is overcome.” It would be a “new era,” he suggested, “a wonderful golden age—an age when we can use the peaceful tools that science has forged for us to do away with poverty and human misery everywhere on the earth. Think what can be done, once our capital, our skills, our science—most of all atomic energy—can be released from the tasks of defense and turned wholly to peaceful purposes all around the world. There is no end to what can be done.” With “peace and safety in the world under the United Nations, the developments will come so fast we will not recognize the world in which we live” (Truman 1966, 378).

We have, it appears, entered that “new era.” It took a while, but the Soviet Union underwent the fundamental change Truman predicted, and the Communist threat has not merely been overcome, but essentially extinguished. Although we are free as never before to use capital, skill, and science to do away with poverty and human misery, however, it somehow doesn’t really feel too much like “a wonderful golden age.”

Truman’s phrase is extreme, of course—it even dangerously borders on the poetic. And if it is taken to suggest a trouble-free utopia, it could casually be

dismissed as an unattainable dream. But, while Truman may sometimes have been a bit of a dreamer, he was too realistic to expect utter perfection. Some of our difficulty in surrendering to such a vision may be that, because of the way we tend to look at the world, we wouldn't know we were in a wonderful golden age if it came up and kissed us on the left earlobe.

As we venture through this new era in the aftermath of the quiet cataclysm, this chapter speculates about world affairs in the new era and particularly on the prospects that substantial violence can be significantly contained or avoided in the current version of the new world order. It also reflects on the remarkable tendency for perceptions to change. Specifically, as big problems—"overriding issues," in Truman's terms—become resolved, we tend to elevate smaller ones, sometimes by redefinition or by raising standards, to take their place. Golden ages, accordingly, never happen.



THE PROSPECTS FOR MAJOR WAR

In evaluating the present, it may not be completely irrelevant to point out that it was only a few years ago when very many people were consumed by the concern that a major war might break out among developed nations. Remember the sword of Damocles? Remember the two scorpions in a bottle? Remember the ticking doomsday clock on the cover of the *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*? "Nuclear war," observed Bruce Russett in 1983, "is the central terror of our time" (1983, 1).

As the doomsday clock kept suggesting, moreover, many thought calamity was imminent, even nearly certain. An array of predictions about the imminence and danger of our demise in nuclear war is included in the appendix. A sampling here will give a feel for the concern. In 1945, H. G. Wells declared that "the end of everything we call life is close at hand and cannot be evaded," and the usually prescient diplomat Joseph Grew concluded, "A future war with the Soviet Union is as certain as anything in this world." In 1950, historian Arnold J. Toynbee wrote, "In our recent Western history war has been following war in an ascending order of intensity; and today it is already apparent that the War of 1939–45 was not the climax of this crescendo movement," and Albert Einstein was certain that "unless we are able, in the near future, to abolish the mutual fear of military aggression, we are doomed." In 1961, strategist and futurist Herman Kahn wrote, "I have a firm belief that unless we have more serious and sober thought on various aspects of the strategic problem . . . we are not going to reach the year 2000—and maybe not even the year 1965—without a cataclysm," and C. P. Snow in the same year assured his listeners that unless nuclear weapons were restricted, it was a "certainty" that within "at the most, ten years, some of those [nuclear] bombs are going off." As noted in the Introduction, realist Hans J. Morgenthau concluded in 1979 that "the world is moving ineluctably towards a third world war—a strategic nuclear war. I do not believe that anything can be done to prevent it. The interna-

tional system is simply too unstable to survive for long.” Three years later William McNeill advocated that a “global sovereign power willing and able to enforce a monopoly of atomic weaponry” be fabricated because the “alternative appears to be sudden and total annihilation of the human species,” and in 1982 also Jonathan Schell proclaimed, “One day—and it is hard to believe that it will not be soon—we will make our choice. Either we will sink into the final coma and end it all or, as I trust and believe, we will awaken to the truth of our peril . . . and rise up to cleanse the earth of nuclear weapons.”

As will be argued in Chapter 5, these concerns were substantially overdone, but many felt them to be very real. As late as the mid-1980s, polls found that 20 to 37 percent of the American population considered the prospect of war to be the most important problem facing the country (Mueller 1994a, Table 45).

It is surely clear that the prospects of major war became far lower after the quiet cataclysm, whatever the likelihood may have been in the past. As Colin Gray puts it, “the prospect of a nuclear World War III has all but vanished” (1992, 13). And former Central Intelligence Agency chief Robert Gates observes that “the danger of a major war in Europe or global thermonuclear war has diminished nearly to the vanishing point” (1993). Polls find agreement: by 1989, the portion fearing war had dropped to 2 percent.

The most likely way such a major war could have come about was out of the deep rivalries and disagreements between the well-armed Cold War contestants. With the evaporation of that contest, the prospects for major war have substantially diminished, even though the earth has hardly become cleansed of nuclear weapons.



THE RECONCILIATION OF GERMANY AND JAPAN

Another major improvement ought to be celebrated—or at least acknowledged. Western foreign policy after 1945 had not one, but two, major themes. Because of its trauma, vast scope, and dramatic intricacies, the contest with international Communism—the Cold War—has garnered the bulk of the attention, and the Western success at the time of the quiet cataclysm received great notice and comment. The other policy theme focused on Germany and Japan, and the goal was to bring those defeated countries into the responsible family of nations and, of course, to keep them from repeating what they had done in World War II. Although this policy success inspired far less notice than the Cold War, policy *failure* in this case would certainly have been of cosmic concern.

Of necessity, the Japanese and the Germans were the principal charters of their own destinies, but Western efforts to guide, nudge, assist, browbeat, bribe, and encourage them along the path they took deserve some credit as well. In the process Germany and Japan have been converted from violent and intensely destructive enemies into prosperous friends, allies, and peaceful competitors whose

perspective on the world is much the same as that of the Western victors. As policies go, this might well be among the greatest triumphs of enlightened self-interest in human history, and it deserves appropriate appreciation.

LOCAL WARS

However, even with these very substantial triumphs—vastly reducing the thermonuclear threat, reconciling former enemies—there is still plenty of conflict in the world. Major war may have evaporated as a central concern, but local war remains a problem. There has been a plethora of these since 1945—although the vast majority of these have been civil wars and almost all of them have been fought in what is still being called the Third World. In the wake of the quiet cataclysm, many still flourish, and there are escalating troubles in other areas, particularly within Yugoslavia and the former Soviet Union, where armed turmoil increased and several civil wars—or expanded blood feuds—erupted. And perhaps the other shoe has yet to drop in China.

There are, however, at least four important developments which may act to reduce the frequency and intensity of at least some local wars.

THE DEATH OF THE MYTH OF REVOLUTION

As Communism died, so did many romantic myths about revolution. Over the last two centuries many pundits, philosophers, and political activists have waxed enthusiastic over the alleged purifying effects of violent revolution and, most specifically, Communism has for decades preached that successful revolutions and wars of liberation in the Third World would be followed by social, political, and economic bliss.

Through the 1970s at least, even many non-Communists were still working up enthusiasm for violent, undemocratic revolution. In her multiple-award-winning book about Vietnam, American journalist Frances Fitzgerald, in consonance with many people around the globe, fairly glowed with anticipation at what successful revolutionaries could bring to Southeast Asia. “When ‘individualism’ and its attendant corruption gives way to the revolutionary community,” she breathlessly anticipated, “the narrow flame of revolution” will “cleanse the lake of Vietnamese society from the corruption and disorder of the American war” (1972, 589–590). But in each of the ten countries that edged or toppled into the Communist camp between 1975 and 1979, successful revolutionaries variously led their societies into civil war, economic collapse, and conditions of severe social injustice. Neither corruption nor disorder was eradicated when revolution’s narrow flame sliced through Vietnam, and notable evils were perpetrated.

The disasters that followed the successful revolutions in Vietnam and elsewhere principally cleansed the world of the notion that revolution can be cleansing. In the process, a political construct that has inspired cauldrons of ink and

acres of blood over the last two centuries has been unceremoniously abandoned. Increasingly, violent revolutionary movements that continue to linger in places like Peru and the Philippines have come to seem odd and anachronistic.

THE RISE OF DEMOCRACY

As violent revolution has become discredited, peaceful democratic reform has begun to look pretty good by comparison. As a result, the democratic idea has flared up—not unlike, perhaps, a narrow flame—throughout the world. As discussed in Chapter 10, democracy is an imperfect, but often effective, method for resolving local conflicts peacefully. Moreover, contrary to conventional expectations, it often seems to have been remarkably easy to institute.

THE DEMISE OF THE COLD WAR CONTEST

Few wars since 1945 have been directly initiated by the major belligerents in the Cold War, but quite a few local wars were exacerbated by interfering Cold War contestants. As discussed in Chapters 2 and 6, a central tenet of Communist ideology was that violent revolutionary conflict was inevitable, and that the Communist states were duty-bound to help out. Meanwhile, the Western policy of containment often suggested that force would have to be used to oppose this thrust.

At times the big countries in the contest restrained—or tried to restrain—their smaller clients. But more often they jumped in. In addition to Korea, Vietnam, the Dominican Republic, Lebanon (1958), India, Afghanistan, and Grenada where troops from the United States, the Soviet Union, and/or China became directly involved, the Cold War can be said to have exacerbated violent conflict within Thailand, Burma, Guatemala, Nicaragua, El Salvador, Venezuela, Cuba, Greece, Peru, Uruguay, Argentina, Bolivia, Cambodia, Laos, Angola, India, Mozambique, Chile, Congo, Brazil, Ethiopia, Algeria, Iraq, various Yemens, Hungary, Zanzibar, South Africa, Guyana, French Indochina, Malaya, Iran, Indonesia, and the Philippines.

With the demise of the Cold War, it is to be expected that such exacerbation will not take place. To the extent that this means that fewer foreign arms and less aid will now be infiltrated to the local contenders, violence will be lower: indeed, by 1991 arms sales to the Third World had dropped to one-third of their 1985 peak (Wright 1993) and by 1993 they had dropped another 20 percent (Schmitt 1993). However, experience suggests that encouragement and sophisticated arms are not required for local warriors to prosper and to commit mayhem, so the improvement is by no means total.

THE PROSPECTS FOR INTERNATIONAL POLICING

In the wake of the quiet cataclysm, two contradictory, even paradoxical, lessons about the future of East-West cooperation can be drawn. On the one

hand, as the Gulf crisis of 1990–91 demonstrated, East-West cooperation has become far easier to arrange than before. On the other hand, the two sides are likely to find few trouble spots worthy of their active cooperative efforts.

During the Cold War, cooperation was extremely difficult to bring about because East and West were locked in an intensely competitive struggle. Now, however, both sides seem to agree that their interests are best served by “a reliable peace” and by “a quiet, normal international situation,” as Mikhail Gorbachev put it in 1985 (Colton 1986, 191). Thus, there is now a strong incentive to cooperate to generate peace and stability.

The dynamic of the Cold War contest also caused the two sides to believe that their interests were importantly engaged almost everywhere: the Western policy of containment was based on the notion that any gain for Communism would lead to further Western losses elsewhere, while the Soviets held that they should aid anti-Western forces throughout the globe. As this elemental contest has evaporated, however, most areas of the world have become substantially less important to the two sides. In the 1960s, a civil war in the Congo inspired dedicated meddling by both sides; in the 1990s no one wanted to become involved very much in the civil war in Liberia—or in such intractable conflicts as those in Lebanon or Sri Lanka. Even costly conflicts in such once-important Cold War arenas as Angola and Cambodia mainly elicited hand-wringing from the former contestants—certainly neither offered to send troops to pacify and police the situation.

Thus, although both sides have an interest in peace and stability, they probably will be stirred to significant cooperative action—sending their troops into harm’s way—only in those few remaining areas, like the Persian Gulf, where they feel their interests to be importantly engaged. In this respect, the Gulf experience bodes rather well for at least two potential trouble areas: eastern Europe and Korea. Should resurgent nationalism in the one case or persistent division in the other lead to international conflict or to substantial international crisis, the United States and Russia, together with Western Europe and Japan, may well be launched into cooperative action, possibly even into military action, to contain damage and to rectify problems in these important areas.

Cooperation will certainly be an improvement over the hazardous competition of the Cold War. But euphoria about the emergence of a peaceful new world order or of global collective security is hardly justified. Moreover, with respect to the most likely form of violent conflict—civil war—the big countries may not be able to stir themselves into anything like action. For the most part, they are likely to cheer from the sidelines as organizations like the United Nations take over the singularly unglamorous work of peacekeeping and peace enforcing in peripheral areas. A limited number of lives will be lost in such ventures, but if the organizational structure of such operations is arranged so that losses are suffered by comparatively faceless international volunteers, not by identifiable national units, the domestic political impact in individual countries will be attenuated (see Urquhart 1993).

The contrast of the edgy tedium of Cyprus and Northern Ireland with the dramatic catastrophe of Bosnia suggests that the patient police work carried out in Nicosia and Belfast has probably saved thousands of lives over the years. But it

tends to be a profoundly thankless job because the people whose lives have been saved do not know who they are, and they are often critical or even contemptuous of their unappreciated saviors.¹ With the demise of the Cold War competition, such ventures become far more possible, however, as East and West find themselves on the same side of many conflicts. Indeed, of the twenty-six peacekeeping missions the UN undertook between 1945 and 1992, fully twelve were begun after 1988, in the wake of the Cold War (Prial 1992), and the UN's peacekeeping budget quadrupled from \$700 million in 1991 to \$2.8 billion in 1992 (*New York Times*, 12 December 1992, 12).

In addition, with the application of economic sanctions to Iraq in 1990, to Haiti in 1991, and to Serbia in 1992, the big countries may be honing a credible, inexpensive, and potentially potent new weapon for use against small and medium-size aggressors and troublemakers. Essentially, they have been able to demonstrate that the world can get along quite well without the economic participation of such countries, and that, in their new era of comparative harmony, they can inflict enormous pain on such countries at remarkably little cost to themselves. In some respects, economic sanctions require more patience and fortitude than military action, but, if cooperative harmony continues to reign among the major countries, sanctions may prove to be a credible and sometimes effective weapon of control.

THE QUEST FOR TROUBLE AFTER THE QUIET CATAclysm

This survey has suggested a few reasons why one might be guardedly optimistic about some (but certainly not all) issues of war and peace in the aftermath of the quiet cataclysm. However, the quest for things to worry about has continued unabated.

For example, the notion quickly took hold that international affairs had somehow become especially tumultuous, unstable, and complex, an idea repeated so often it soon began to sound like a mantra. Thus, Bill Clinton proclaimed in his

¹The mission to Somalia in 1992–1993 helped to bring order to an anarchic and deadly situation that was causing a famine reportedly killing at its peak thousands of people per day. Within a few months that figure had been brought down to two or three a day. Unlike the Gulf War which cost the lives of tens or even hundreds of thousands, however, this spectacularly successful military mission which merely *saved* large numbers of lives brought no calls for celebratory parades, and the troops who pulled it off remember it most for the boredom and for the teenagers who cursed them (in English) and pelted them with stones and fruit (Lorch 1993). Asked if the mission was worth it, one Army specialist responded, “How many Americans did we lose? Seven? Well, not one of those lives was worth it. . . . Heck, a lot of these people didn’t even let us help them” (Fineman 1993). *New York Times* columnist William Safire has blandly observed of the venture that “the saving of hundreds of thousands of lives is no small thing” (1993). What, one might wonder, would he consider to be a *large* thing? Perhaps never in human history has so much been done for so many at such little cost.

1993 Presidential inaugural address that “the new world is more free but less stable.” And a few days later his nominee to become the head of the Central Intelligence Agency, James Woolsey, testified darkly (and not, perhaps, without a degree of institutional self-interest) that “we have slain a large dragon, but we live now in a jungle filled with a bewildering variety of poisonous snakes.” For the skeptical, he helpfully enumerated the snakes: “the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and the ballistic missiles to carry them; ethnic and national hatreds that can metastasize across large portions of the globe; the international narcotics trade; terrorism; the dangers inherent in the West’s dependence on Mideast oil; new economic and environmental challenges.” His predecessor at the CIA, Robert Gates, fully agreed: “The events of the last two years have led to a far more unstable, turbulent, unpredictable and violent world” (1993). This theme has also been echoed by some international relation scholars as they try to come to grips with a field undergoing tremendous change, in which old categories no longer work very well and at times there is an apparent decreased interest in the Academy. Thus as Harvard’s Stanley Hoffmann puts it, “the problem of order has become even more complex than before” (1992, 37).

To arrive at such conclusions, five techniques have been applied: the past has been simplified, a Eurocentric bias has been introduced, definitions have been changed, standards have been raised, and problems previously considered to be comparatively minor have been elevated in perceived importance.

SIMPLIFYING THE PAST: RECOLLECTIONS OF THE COLD WAR

Conclusions about the comparative complexity of the world in the wake of the quiet cataclysm stem in part from a remarkably simplified recollection of what went on during the Cold War.

This phenomenon is related to the tendency to look backward with misty eyes, to see the past as much more benign, simple, and innocent than it really was (by contrast, see Bettmann 1974). That is, no matter how much better the present gets, the past gets better faster in reflection, and we are, accordingly, always notably worse off than we used to be. Golden ages, thus, do happen, but we are never actually *in* them: they are always back there somewhere in the past (or, sometimes, in the ungraspable future).

For example, those reminiscing about the “happy days” of the 1950s casually forget McCarthyism, a terribly destructive war in Korea, and an intense unease brought about by the apparently credible Communist threat to “bury” the West in a decade or two, something that was bolstered by CIA predictions that the Soviet Union’s Gross National Product might be triple that of the United States by the year 2000 (Reeves 1993, 54).

Or there is Woolsey’s recollection that the Cold War threat could be characterized “precisely and succinctly” because our adversary was “a single power whose interests fundamentally threatened ours” (1993). Or the belief of the *New York Times*’ Thomas Friedman that “all the policy-makers had to do was take out their compasses, point them at any regional conflict in the world, see which side Moscow was on and immediately deduce which side America should take”

(1992a). Or the confident assertion of *Newsweek*'s Meg Greenfield that "conducting the nation's business overseas has become more difficult with the disappearance of a unifying, clearly defined and universally understood threat" (1993).

But the Communist threat was shifting, multifaceted, and extremely complicated. And most of the time there were two central sources of threat, China and the USSR, not one. Indeed, the challenge the Vietnam War was principally designed to counter came from China, not from the Soviet Union (Mueller 1989a, 168–73). Moreover, China and the Soviet Union, while jointly threatening the West, were often intensely at odds with each other—nearly at war a few times—over both strategy and tactics, complicating things further. And it was often extremely difficult to deduce which side to take: the United States supported the Chinese group against the Soviet one in Angola, puzzled for years over whose side Cuba's Fidel Castro was on, joined with the Soviet Union to support the formation of Israel as well as the leftist regime in Tanzania, found that virtually all Communist rebellions were confusingly associated with indigenous ones, and never really did determine whether some countries, like Mozambique, were Communist or not.

Friedman and others may think that the policy of containment—with its overarching theory about confronting Communist expansionism—gave a clear and easily followed guideline and allowed for a great deal of consistency in U.S. foreign policy, but the actual experience of the Cold War surely suggests that there was a great deal of bobbing and weaving in the application of the policy: the policy was inconsistently carried out and dilemmas proliferated. Even as the containment policy was being formulated, the Truman administration was allowing China to fall into the Communist camp. Eisenhower was unwilling to use military measures to prevent a Communist victory in Indochina, but he held fast on the islands of Quemoy and Matsu off the China coast. Kennedy sought to shore up the anti-Communist position in South Vietnam even as he was acquiescing in an agreement that gave the Communists effective control of large portions of neighboring Laos. Containment policy may have been a useful general guide, but it clearly did not make policy easy to formulate.

Indeed, if the post-Cold War world resembles a jungle filled with poisonous snakes, the Cold War was a jungle filled with at least two dragons *and* with poisonous snakes, some of whom were variously, changeably, and often quite ambiguously in devious complicity with the one or the other of the dragons. It seems obvious which jungle is preferable—and less complicated.

In the process, the Cold War added an especially difficult layer of complexity to U.S. relations with a whole host of countries. At one time the United States had to treat Mobutu of Zaire as a dictator who had brought his country to ruin but who was on the right side in the Cold War. After the quiet cataclysm it can treat him merely as a dictator who has brought his country to ruin. In that very important respect, international policy has become far *less* complex than it was during the Cold War.

Greenfield bemoans "the disintegration of order, authority and institutions all over the world" (1993), implying that we have just emerged from a world where everything was nice and orderly and where authority was unchallenged—a bizarre

suggestion. Relatedly, Hoffmann argues that “during the Cold War, the superpowers, driven by the fear of nuclear war, devised by trial and error, a network of rules and restraints aimed at avoiding direct military collision” (1992, 37). This is true, although it is certainly worth noting that those countries still managed to get into quite a few *indirect* military collisions, some of them extremely bloody. And in our new world, however “disorderly” and “complex” it may be, the dangers of a military collision, direct or indirect, between East and West have become so attenuated that it becomes almost absurd to suggest that “a network of rules and restraints” are necessary to avoid it—any more than one would maintain that such a network is necessary to prevent military conflict between the United States and Canada.

EUROCENTRISM AND THE PERSISTENCE OF NATIONALISM

As will be discussed more fully below, most of the poisonous snakes Woolsey specifies were already there in full measure during the Cold War and thus, applying his metaphor, the post-Cold War jungle has snakes whereas the Cold War jungle contained not only snakes but a dragon as well. Some people might consider that a notable improvement and, as jungles go, a notable reduction in the complexities of daily life.

Warfare arising from ethnic and national hatreds, one of Woolsey’ snakes, is certainly not new. As Barry Posen has pointed out, “Nationalism was hardly quiescent in the last forty-five years: it played a key role in the decolonization process, fueling both revolutionary and inter-state warfare” (1993, 80). But there are new concerns about this in Europe, and those who find the world more complicated and unstable than during the Cold War tend to focus on conflict on that continent. For a long period after the end of the Greek civil war in 1949 there were no civil wars in Europe, and that remarkable record has now been shattered with the civil wars that have erupted in the former Yugoslavia. In addition, political and economic chaos—some of it violent—has accompanied the disintegration of the Soviet and then the Russian empires in eastern Europe and particularly in Asia.

These problems are, of course, very real. But it is surely worth pointing out again that they have followed a remarkable—and remarkably peaceful—resolution of a host of key international problems centered in Europe. Moreover, although the resolution of the Cold War may sometimes conceivably have had the unintended effect of releasing ethnic, national, and racial forces that had previously been bottled up by the Cold War contest itself, these forces were kept under control by some of the most brutal police methods ever devised and, while the police may have been able to suppress some ethnic and national violence, they were obviously unable to mitigate the supposed underlying hatreds. Moreover, it is not really clear that the Cold War was so instrumental in arresting civil conflict. “Ethnic cleansing” is hardly new—for years Bulgarian Communists had a persecution policy focused on domestic Turks, for example—and fighting between Armenians and Azeris began before the Cold War ended while Yugoslavia’s ethnic conflicts derived from an ill-managed effort to confederate the country, something that could have happened almost as well during the Cold War as after it (see Bell-Fiakoff 1993).

In addition, if it is correct in some sense to suggest that post-Cold War Europe now has more armed conflict than during the Cold War, much of the rest of the world was suffering *less* armed conflict than earlier. Specifically, during the Cold War Latin America underwent a long and bloody series of civil wars most of which were inspired or exacerbated by the Cold War contest. After the Cold War this area became far freer of civil war. Even more notable is the experience of East Asia. The Cold War led to, or notably exacerbated, lengthy and costly wars in Korea, Malaya, Thailand, China, Vietnam, and elsewhere, and in Cambodia it led not only to civil war, but a postwar peace that was even worse. Problems remain in East Asia, but surely it became far more stable, peaceful, and economically productive after the Cold War than it had been during it.

It would be difficult to argue that problems of war have changed much one way or the other in the other major non-European areas—South Asia, the Middle East, and Africa. Troubles obviously persist, although it may be worth observing that there has not been a conventional international Arab-Israeli or India-Pakistan war for decades. Amazingly, present-day Hindu-Muslim violence has occasionally been credited to the demise of the Cold War, a perspective that manages blithely to ignore the wars, riots, and massacres that took place between those two communities with a fair amount of regularity during the Cold War.

Thus, even if it is conceded that instability and complexity have increased in Europe in the wake of the Cold War in some sense—a development, however, that has been attended by enormous gains in freedom and in the resolution of some old and very dangerous territorial and political issues—stability, particularly in the sense of freedom from civil war, has been greatly enhanced in two other areas, Latin America and East Asia, and is probably no worse than before in the rest of the world. Unless one adopts a thoroughly Eurocentric perspective, it is simply not true that “conflicts among nations and ethnic groups are escalating” (Huntington 1993a, 71). The world as a whole is no less stable in this sense than it was during the Cold War.

Because nationalism, or hypernationalism, was a cause of World Wars I and II in Europe, a concern about its reappearance there is certainly reasonable (see, for example, Mearsheimer 1990, Van Evera 1990/91). It is not clear, however, that nationalism has grown any less strong in peaceful western Europe. It is certainly true that few national differences there are being expressed in violence, in threats of violence, or in once-fashionable messianic visions about changing the world to reflect the national perspective (Howard 1991, chs. 2, 4). But that does not necessarily mean that western Europeans are less nationalistic than they were in the 1920s or the 1890s. Do the British (many of them distinctly unamused by the prospects of the new Channel tunnel) love the French any more or less than in days of yore? Do Italians think of themselves less as Italians? Closer economic relations in Europe may only suggest that it has finally dawned on those countries that there is benefit in economic cooperation, not that Europeans love each other any more or that they identify themselves more now as Europeans. German unification was a spectacular (and peaceful) triumph of national desire: if German nationalism had been truly dampened, one might have expected two Germanys to

have emerged when the Soviets left, but instead the general conclusion was that an independent East Germany made no sense, and the Germans rushed into each other's arms.

Nationalism can lead to war and turmoil, of course, but as the experience in western Europe suggests, it does not have to be eradicated for peace to prevail. France and Germany today do not by any means agree about everything but, shattering the pattern of the century previous to 1945, they no longer even conceive of using war or the threat of war to resolve their disagreements. As F. H. Hinsley has put it, in Europe and North America, once "the cockpit for the world's great wars," states "are coming to terms with the fact that war has ceased to be one of their options" at least in their dealings with one another (1987, 78–79).

As will be discussed more fully in Chapters 8 and 9, there has been a great change in attitude toward war in most of the developed world. A hundred years ago, as Michael Howard has observed, "war was almost universally considered an acceptable, perhaps an inevitable and for many people a desirable way of settling international differences" (1984, 9). Those views, so common then, are remarkably rare today in the developed world, and this may suggest that the appeal of war has diminished markedly, that war is going out of style, on a continent that for centuries was the most warlike in the world. As Robert W. Tucker and David Hendrickson have put it, in our times, "war is no longer a means generally permitted to states for the redress of rights that have been violated. Still less is war considered a legitimate means for changing the status quo." It "no longer serves as an apt and proportionate means for resolving international conflicts" (1992, 133–34).²

It will be of great interest to see if that attitude has infected eastern Europe as the countries there chart their destinies after the quiet cataclysm. As noted, they did remarkably well at avoiding violence during their liberation from Soviet rule, and that may lead one to hope that, despite the Yugoslav case, international war, at least, can be avoided in the area and that the apparent surge of militant nationalism will prove to be a momentary historical blip. Indeed, nationalism in some form could well be a constructive force: if Poland survives its current test of trauma and turmoil, Polish nationalism will probably have been an important strength.

SHIFTING DEFINITIONS

To inspire, or justify, worry in the wake of the Cold War, trouble-spotters have ingeniously changed the meanings of several key words.

²It is interesting in this regard that many people found Saddam Hussein's invasion of Kuwait in August 1990 to be remarkably odd. Although the Iraqis had been building up troops on the border, the director of the U.S. Defense Intelligence Agency "just did not find it conceivable that Saddam would do something so anachronistic as an old-fashioned land grab. Countries didn't go around doing things like that anymore" (Woodward 1991, 217). That perspective may be premature since there have been a number of out-of-the-blue land grab efforts in recent memory—by such countries as India (1961), China (1962), and perhaps Iraq (1980)—but the general notion that that sort of behavior is going out of style may prove to have substance.

STABILITY. During the Cold War, instability was usually equated with the dangers of a nuclear war between the United States and the Soviet Union. For people with that perspective, stability was enhanced whenever the United States and the USSR seemed to move farther from conflict with each other. Using that still reasonable standard, the world began to wallow in stability after the quiet cataclysm (see pages 59–60).

For Cold War nostalgists, there are two ways out of the dilemma posed by this seemingly desirable development. One is blithely to deny that thermonuclear war was really all that big a deal. Thus, Karen Elliott House of the *Wall Street Journal* has calmly concluded that “the post–Cold War world is less threatening only in the simplistic sense that superpower confrontation, for the time being, is a thing of the past” (1992). Accordingly, decades of Cold War traumas and fears are casually dismissed out of hand.

Or one can deftly finesse the definition and argue that localized blood feuds and border conflicts are now to be considered signs of instability. But to be consistent, one would then have to suggest, as I have above, that the Cold War by that standard was also very unstable because blood feuds and border conflicts happened all over the place and because conflict among the Great Powers was often real or potential in many of them.

MAJOR WAR AND GLOBAL CONFLICT. In the olden days of the Cold War, major wars or global conflicts were conflagrations in which the big countries—Great Powers, some people called them—became viscerally and directly involved: the kind of thing that happened in World Wars I and II. However, on 14 July 1992, former President Jimmy Carter made a speech about foreign policy at the Democratic National Convention (a distinct rarity at that venue) in which he announced that there were thirty-five “major wars” going on in the world. As he explained it later, he designated a “major war” as any conflict in which at least 1,000 people had been killed.³ Thus, he took a standard definition for “war” (see Singer and Small 1972, 49) and relabeled it “major war.” For Carter, apparently, wars are like olives: they are all at least gigantic.

Similarly, in a review in 1991 in the *New York Times* of a book by Michael Howard that came out before the Gulf War of that year, Herbert Mitgang argued that the following observation of Howard’s is “prescient”: “The one place in the world today where a global conflict might still conceivably originate is the Persian Gulf” (Howard 1991, 169). The only way that statement could be considered prescient would be if one elevated the Gulf War to the status of “global conflict.” Mitgang adds, rather opaquely, that “after two World Wars, it’s hard to distinguish local wars from large-scale wars” (Mitgang 1991). One would have thought it would continue to be easy to discriminate: the differences, after all, are not really all that subtle.

³MacNeil/Lehrer NewsHour, 15 February 1993.