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Escalation to world war: The power transition hypothesis as an alternative to systemic theories

Henk W. Houweling
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I. Introduction

Between 1495 and 1975 one hundred and nineteen wars have been fought in which at least one great power participated. Of these, sixty-four wars were fought with at least one major power on each side. (Levy 1983) Within this category, only a very small number of military struggles escalated to world wars.

This study addresses the question why some great power wars escalate to the global level, while others do not. The widespread belief in a significant portion of contemporary literature on international relations is to the effect that the category of 'world wars' is a separate class of warfare within the wider set of major power wars. This belief shared by is three sorts of studies at the systemic level: (i) Wallerstein's 'world economy' approach, (ii) the hegemonic-stability framework developed by Gilpin, and (iii) Modelski's world leadership model. Though these schools differ in their view on which processes generate world wars, they share the functional and historicist form of explanation, in which transitions in the international order are considered to be the result of 'world wars' involving 'structural causes'. These causes summarize all those forces that together bring down a reigning hegemon and let other states rise relative to the leader, ushering in a period of capability deconcentration in the interstate system, to be followed by a period of global war or world war.

The research reported in this article consists of a further inquiry into the onset of world wars. Instead of a functional form of explanation at the level of the international system, we introduce a two-step causal answer to the question when and why world wars break out. The major difference between the functionalist schools of thought mentioned above and our approach is that the functionalists assign a useful, that is, a system-maintaining and rejuvenating function, or meaning, to world wars. Our approach, on the other hand, is multi-level in the sense that we focus on

the effects of dyadic power transitions at the systemic level, based on data-analysis, causal in nature and devoid of speculations on the functional meaning behind the bloody affair of warfare.

The article consists of three sections. In section 1, we briefly introduce the three functionalist schools. In section 2 we present our own empirical findings. In section 3 we enter into some caveats on the significance of our findings.

2. Three functionalist schools

2.1. *Economic hegemony* – In Wallerstein's (1980) framework, the 'core' dominates the 'periphery', causing unequal terms of exchange and thus transferring surplus value toward the core. Capital accumulation is the most intense within the core country dominating all other core powers economically. Wallerstein defines this superior economic efficiency of the hegemon simultaneously in production, trade and finance. Once a hegemon dominates the world economy, its interests shift to maintaining the status quo and to opposing intra-core wars. At their peak, hegemons can only lose in a major war. As the hegemon declines, the relative economic and military power of core states equalizes and states are willing to fight to improve their positions.

In his later work, Wallerstein (1984) considers each of the three thirty-year world wars (the Thirty Years War of 1618-1648, the Napoleonic Wars of 1792-1815 and the Eurasian World Wars of 1914-1945) as important in *securing* hegemony. According to Wallerstein, the hegemon's economic edge is expanded by the very process of the war itself, and the post-war inter-state settlement is designed to encrust that greater edge and protect against its erosion. When the hegemon declines, its inability to enforce the post-war settlement or to coordinate the joint interests of the core *vis-à-vis* the periphery results in a "scramble [...] among the leading powers to maintain their share" and an "incentive to a reshuffling of alliance systems". (Wallerstein 1984, 106-107) The scrambling and reshuffling continue until the next world war secures the hegemony of one of the competing great powers.

At the end of each of these three war periods, a new configuration of international politics at the core of the world system emerged. The Treaty of Westphalia, the Congress of Vienna, and the arrangements of 1945 each revamped the hierarchical system of great powers, coronating a new hegemonic power as the head of a new world order. Each war period thus brought a political restructuring of the core and a realignment of

economic relations among core countries (winners and losers, new trading spheres, differential costs of the war to participants, bankruptcies, reparations, and so forth).

In Wallerstein's view this cyclical pattern is "merely one aspect of the central role of the political machinery in the functioning of capitalism as a mode of production", the essence of which is "predicated on the endless accumulation of capital". (Wallerstein 1984, 104-105)

The gist of the argument about the functional utility of world wars is very well summarized by one of Wallerstein's students in the following terms:

The accumulation process expands within a certain political framework to the point where that framework is no longer adequate to the scale of world commodity production and distribution. Thus world wars and the rise and fall of hegemonic core powers can be understood as the violent reorganizations of production relations on a world scale, which allows the accumulation process to adjust to its own contradictions and to begin on a new scale. Political relations among core powers and the colonial empires which are the formal political structure of core-periphery relations are reorganized in a way which allows the increasing internationalization of capitalist production. (Chase-Dunn 1981, 23)

2.2. *Hegemonic stability* – Gilpin (1981) states that it will be rational for nations to expand territorially, politically and economically as long as they perceive a net benefit. A dominant power has already expanded to its profitable limits and therefore has an interest in a stable status quo. If powerful enough, the hegemon will be willing to provide the rules of order as a public good for the world system as a whole. Both the United Kingdom (1815-1873) and the United States (1945-1967), and in an earlier phase the Habsburg Empire (1495-1558), have acted as beneficial hegemons, by supplying the world with free trade and monetary stability.

Eventually, however, the costs of maintaining stability become too high for the hegemon, necessitating its economic decline and/or military withdrawal. As a result the international order regains its anarchic nature and the probability of war increases.

In Gilpin's hegemonic stability approach, hegemonic wars or world wars have the function to reorder the basic components of the international system, viz. to adapt mutual relations between and among states, their reciprocal expectations and subjective states of mind, to the distribution of capabilities among states. For world wars to have these functions, they have to bring forward a new hegemon, that is a state powerful enough to impose order, viz. its desired order, on lower ranking states, and so to 'divert history into new channels'. Hegemonic struggles

resolve, and have to resolve, the disequilibrium in the international system between costs and benefits of further expansion of its members. The basic engine of change driving the system of states through successive cycles of growth, expansion, and eventual decline is 'the law of uneven growth'. The results at the systemic level imply that:

The conclusion of one hegemonic war is the beginning of another cycle of growth, expansion, and eventual decline. The law of uneven growth continues to redistribute power, thus undermining the status quo established by the last hegemonic struggle. Disequilibrium replaces equilibrium, and the world moves toward a new round of hegemonic conflict. It has always been thus and always will be, until men either destroy themselves or learn to develop an effective mechanism of peaceful change. (Gilpin 1981, 210)

The conclusion is that: "In short, hegemonic wars have (unfortunately) been functional and integral parts of the evolution and dynamics of international systems". (Gilpin 1981, 198)

2.3. *World leadership* – Modelski applies a structural-functionalist analysis to the world system. Since 'every political system' needs leadership, he thinks that 'World Powers' are necessary to fulfill this functional need, thereby creating a certain order. (Modelski 1987, 13) He differentiates between two developments: the long cycle (a 'repetitive beat') and a process of growth ('upward thrust'), encompassing several long cycles.

Each long cycle consists of four phases, each with its specific learning mode:

(i) *Global War*, rather cynically defined as "period of armed hostilities involving the global powers over the issues of the organization and the constitution of the global political system". (Modelski 1987, 100) In terms of learning theory, this phase is dominated by politics ('goal attainment').

(ii) *World Power*, i.e. the phase during which the victorious power provides the system with order. In Parsonian terms, this phase is dominated by 'adaptation', and is characterized by economic growth and free trade.

(iii) *Delegitimation*. In this phase, the supply of world order is still large, but various clients begin to think about their opportunities ('clarification'). In terms of Parsonian learning theory, this phase is dominated by 'culture reproduction'.

(iv) *Deconcentration*. The system becomes multipolar and coalitions for a new Global War are formed. In terms of learning theory, the system is in need of integration, but no leading power has yet been able to satisfy this demand.

At the international level, global wars are a kind of substitute for national elections, deciding which nation will get the opportunity to define the nature of the subsequent interstate order. Both are selection mechanisms in the sense that different political programs are subjected to a trial of strength that must be won before these programs can be put into effect.

In both mechanisms political relations are adapted to social change which is already going on. Thompson argues that:

As a unique category with immense significance for how world politics operate, global wars deserve special theoretical and empirical attention. They must also be placed within the context of political-economic structural change. Global wars and structural change are greatly intertwined processes [...] structural change and the deconcentration of power in the system lead to global war. Global war in turn, facilitates systemic change and the reconcentration of politico-military power. The study of global war then means that we must also come to grips with the phenomenon of the rise and fall of the major powers in world political arena. (Thompson 1988, xxi)

Modelski and Thompson are pitting sea power against too much entangled land power, consequently putting respectively Portugal, the Netherlands, the United Kingdom (two cycles), and the United States in the leadership seat, after they had defeated the primarily territorial-based challengers, subsequently the Habsburgs, Louis XIV, Napoleonic France, and Germany.

This theme was addressed earlier in an identical way by Mahan and Dehio. Phrased in the language of leadership ('world power'), delegitimation and erosion of leadership, and global war, Modelski and Thompson have in fact produced an updated version of Mahan's *The Influence of Sea Power Upon History, 1660-1783* as well as of Dehio's *Gleichgewicht oder Hegemonie*. In the tradition of Mahan, Modelski and Thompson define power primarily as ocean-going, maritime, or global reach capabilities of world-wide active nations. Unlike Wallerstein and Gilpin, however, they have, as part of their project, published an extensive data-base on maritime capabilities, and their distribution across major powers for the period 1494-1993. (Modelski and Thompson 1988) They present annual scores for their most important predictor variable, i.e. the concentration of naval assets in the hands of the leading state as measured by its share in the aggregate maritime capabilities. In a recent addition, Thompson has added figures for the strength of armies as indexes for the capabilities of challenging land powers. (Thompson 1991)

2.4. *Criticism* – We tend to give special attention to the work of Modelski

and Thompson, because their work is more empirical than that of the authors discussed above. Three important findings of these scholars in particular should be discussed further. These results may be summarized as follows:

(a) Modelski's requirement for world power status is that a state possesses at least fifty percent of the large warships in the system as a whole. Accordingly, in each of the five global war periods, and only in these periods, one contender indeed succeeds in acquiring predominance in maritime capabilities. Lead states do indeed acquire overwhelming naval preponderance during and right after a global war period. Global leaders are also assumed to command lead economies, based on the superior innovative ability of world powers. This is documented by Thompson in the cases of the United Kingdom and the United States. The economic rise of these World Powers precedes their rise in naval capabilities. After economic decline has started, however, the decline in naval assets lags behind the erosion in economic status.

(b) The status of World Power is not permanent. Only five states acquired preponderance during a global war period and were only superseded by a successor during the next global war period. Spain crossed the 50 percent threshold for a few years during the global war period 1580-1608, but lost that position during the same period. No state acquired naval supremacy during intervals between global war periods.

(c) Right after each global war period, the naval concentration index is high. Subsequently, the share of the superior state is tendentially sloping downward until the next global war period.

These are interesting empirical results, indeed. However, a few critical remarks have to be made.

Firstly, we can not help thinking that global war periods are *defined* by reconcentration of naval power and that leading states are *defined* by their superiority in naval assets acquired during these periods. In that case, the statements that global war results in reconcentration and that World Powers are superior at sea simply cannot be refuted by empirical evidence.

Secondly, by giving functional meaning to global wars, the sociological approach provides an escape from the uneasy feeling that world wars are senseless slaughters. Modelski and Thompson state that no system exists without leadership roles. Additionally, they mention the well-known fact that some states emerge from world wars as extremely powerful and they conclude that some wars have a system-maintaining function. Probably, Modelski and Thompson have projected their leadership interpretation of world politics to earlier time-periods. Consequently, the decline of the United Kingdom (after 1890) and the United

States (since 1941) has, by analogy, been applied to two earlier leaders: Portugal and the Netherlands.

Thirdly, in a separate volume, *Documenting Global Leadership*, George Modelski and Sylvia Modelski (1988) have indeed documented leadership activities of what they define as World Powers. However, they have not compared these activities of hegemonies with declarations, treaties, etc. concluded by other major powers who failed to reach the top-rank.

Modelski and Thompson exclude the Thirty Years' War from their list of 'global war periods'. Consequently, the assumption by France and Sweden of the role of guarantors of the status quo in Central Europe is not considered to be a leadership activity. Moreover, they have not compared the level of system-organizing activities during their global war periods with other instances of intense major power warfare. Neither do they report on leadership activities in the long intervals between their global war periods. We do not know, therefore, whether or not the state that did acquire naval supremacy during a global war period, is indeed distinguishing itself from other contenders with regard to system-organizing activity.

The leadership school is tracing drastic change in the international system to global war periods and to leadership activities of world powers. They have not, however, compared the impact of these sources of change on the international order with the impact of other intense major wars among the major powers or with the effect of any other type of activity. It is remarkable, for example, that whereas many historians consider the Peace Treaties of Münster and Osnabrück to be the 'constitution' of the interstate system, the Thirty Years' War, as mentioned above, is not included in Modelski and Thompson's list of 'global war periods'.

A fourth weakness in their analysis is the assumption that a war must be 'big' in order to have a system-transforming impact. There are, however, good reasons to believe that a war does not need to be 'big' to have a great impact on the rate of change in the international system. One can for example hardly maintain that the international order remained the same after Bismarck had unified the states of Northern Germany, thereby steering Austrian activities to the Balkans and stimulating France and Italy to take colonies. Nevertheless, the Seven Weeks War was relatively 'small'. (Bueno de Mesquita 1990, 28-52) Likewise, the relatively small Russo-Japanese War, followed by the defeat of Russia, did have the effect of putting the Balkans again on the agenda of Russian foreign policy, leading to the resumption of conflict with Austria. There are therefore good reasons indeed to believe that a system transforming war need not be large.

A fifth problem with the structural-functionalist approach concerns the lack of an independent measurement of the pacifying effect of leadership activities on the relations between third states. This is also a problem with the hegemonic stability approach followed by Gilpin. Virtually all researchers involved in long-term quantitative research on war use the data-set of the *Correlates Of War Project* as their principal source. Despite this apparent consensus, there is, however, considerable disagreement among researchers of different schools of thought as to how these wars should be classified as global wars, general wars, and world wars. (Cf. Goldstein 1988, chap. 5 and 6)

It is, for instance, unclear whether or not the severity of a war is indeed a criterion in this debate. There is little consistency in the statements of leadership scholars on this issue. Modelski leaves no doubt that global wars are particularly severe. Consequently, other major power wars should be less severe: "A striking characteristic of global wars is their lethality, that is the loss of life they entail. [...] the five global wars account for close to four-fifths of all battle fatalities". (Modelski 1987, 46-47) Thompson, on the other hand, thinks otherwise: "If [...] the primary theoretical concern centers on wars that are fought over who will lead in the global system or wars that bring about a significant reconcentration of capabilities in the system, the number of battle deaths may not prove to be a good discriminator". (Thompson 1988, 6) Modelski's evidence is solely based on the average number of battle deaths for the whole period of five centuries. This period is, however, completely dominated by the high number of killings during the last of Modelski's global war periods, because in this era both world wars took place. (Cf. Modelski 1987, 46-47 and Thompson 1988, 7)

3. An alternative explanation

3.1. *The dyadic level*—Our alternative explanation of the escalation process starts with the power transition hypothesis, as suggested by Organski. (1968²) According to Organski, the decisive factor in the escalation of wars is the relative loss of power on the part of the status quo power(s) in relation to the state(s) that are prepared, if necessary, to resort to force to change the status quo. Transitions of power, especially changes in the dominant power, are the mechanisms that produce major war.

Using the relative power indicators constructed by Doran and Parsons (1980: 953 ff.), we have tested the power transition hypothesis for the period 1816-1875 (see tables 1 and 2).

The dependent variable is major power warfare, defined as all military struggles in which at least one major power is fighting on each side. These data have been collected by Small and Singer. (1982, 82-95) To avoid bias in the selection of test periods with respect to the timing of war outbreaks, we have simply divided the time period under study into 8 periods of roughly 20 years each (1816-1835; 1836-1855; 1856-1875; 1876-1895; 1896-1914; 1920-1939; 1946-1966; 1966-1975). The number of major powers in each test period determines the number of dyads in which war could break out in that period. Using the capability shares of Doran and Parson, we divided the dyads of test periods into three categories:

(1) *Unequal dyads*. Power distributions between dyad members are considered to be unequal if in any year for which data are available, capability shares differ 20% or more. In order to verify sensitivity to this criterion, we also have checked the relationship between dependent and independent variables at thresholds of 5% and of 10%.

(2) *Equal dyads*. The power distribution between dyad members is considered to be equal if capability shares differ 20% or less; we have also checked the relationship at the 5% and 10% thresholds.

(3) *Dyads with overtaking*. In dyads with overtaking, one dyad member is surpassing the other one during the test period. A state entering into the major power subsystem during a test period with a higher score than other major powers is considered to have overtaken the other ones. (For example: the United States enters in 1900 and China in 1950)

The null-hypothesis is that these 3 groups of dyads have the same probability of war outbreaks. We have made two computations (Houweling and Siccama 1988, chap. 9), one for all major power dyads, resulting in 119 dyadic relationships for all subperiods, and one encompassing the three strongest major powers during a test period. For instance, the three strongest become the four strongest if a fourth major power overtakes one of these three during a test period. The results are given in tables 1 and 2.

The relationship between power transitions and outbreaks of war in dyads of major powers is somewhat stronger in the subset of the 3 (or 4) strongest states than in the set of all major powers. Since we are not analyzing a sample of cases, results of significance tests are simply given for purposes of comparability with results of other researchers in this field.

We have studied the nature and strength of this relationship somewhat further, using Table 3 as our object of analysis. Table 3 has been abstracted from Table 2.

The DRF-index of association between power transition in a dyad and warfare in that dyad is 1 if and only if: (i) all dyadic power transitions are

Table 1: Power distributions and the incidence of war (all major powers), 1816-1975

	Unequal			Equal, no overtaking			Over-taking	
	20%	10%	5%	20%	10%	5%		
No war	58	63	70	14	9	2	14	86
War	17	20	21	4	1	0	12	33
	75	83	91	18	10	2	26	119

	Kendall's TauC	Significance
20%	.15931	.0255
10%	.12796	.0477
5%	.14914	.0167

Table 2: Power distributions and the incidence of war (three or four strongest nations), 1816-1975

	Unequal			Equal, no overtaking			Over-taking	
	20%	10%	5%	20%	10%	5%		
No war	10	12	15	6	4	1	9	25
War	2	3	3	1	0	0	8	11
	12	15	18	7	4	1	17	36

	Kendall's TauC	Significance
20%	.30556	.0327
10%	.27469	.0459
5%	.30247	.0276

followed by outbreaks of war in that dyad; (ii) no dyad fights without a preceding transition. Consequently, the index, being the difference between two ratios, equals $8/17 - 3/19 = .32$.

3.2. *The national level* – Charles Doran (1989) hypothesized that critical points (peaks, lower turning points, and inflection points) in the relative

Table 3: Relationship between power transitions and war in all dyads

		War?		
		yes	no	
Power transition?	yes	8	9	17
	no	3	16	19
		11	25	36

DRF= .32
Q= .65

capability trajectory of nation-states cause the involvement of that nation in war. The results of his research are summarized in Table 4.

Table 4: Relationship between critical points and war involvement in the dyads between the three/four top-ranking nations

		War?		
		yes	no	
Critical point?	yes	11	9	20
	no	0	16	16
		11	25	36

Measures of association:
DRF= .52
Q=1.00

Apparently, the presence of a critical point on a nation's capability trajectory, signifying changes in modernization or decline, is a necessary condition for war: each of the 11 war participations are preceded by a critical point. There are, however, 9 critical point nations which do not fight during the relevant period. The condition at the national level thus is not sufficient.

3.3. *Dyadic war combined with war involvement* – In comparing the effects of power transitions and critical points, it may be of some interest to recall that the dependent variables differ. Power transitions relate to dyadic

warfare, while critical points explain national war involvement against any other major power.

In Table 5 we study the performance of the transition hypothesis in explaining war involvements of dyad members against any major power. (cf. Houweling and Siccama 1991)

Table 5: The relation between power transition in dyads and involvement of its members in war against any top-ranking power

Is a state during a certain period characterized by....

		Involvement in a war?				
		yes	no			
Involvement in a power transition?	yes	1836-1855	France	1816-1835	Russia	20
		1836-1855	Russia	1816-1835	France	
		1856-1875	France	1856-1875	Russia	
		1856-1875	Germany	1966-1975	USA	
		1896-1914	UK	1966-1975	USSR	
		1896-1914	USA	1966-1975	China	
		1896-1914	Germany			
		1896-1914	USSR			
		1920-1939	Germany			
		1920-1939	UK			
		1920-1939	USSR			
		1946-1965	China			
		1946-1965	USA			
		1946-1965	UK			
no	no	1836-1855	UK	1816-1835	UK	8
		1920-1939	USA	1856-1875	UK	
				1876-1895	UK	
				1876-1895	USSR	
				1876-1895	Germany	
				1946-1965	USSR	
		16	12			28

DRF= .45

Q= .75

The two cases in the bottom left cell are the United Kingdom in the 3rd period (1856-1876) and the United States in the 6th period (1914-1939). However, the nations against which they fought (Russia, during the Crimean War, and Germany, in World War II) have experienced a transi-

tion in these periods. If these two cases would be added to the top left cell, only transition states would fight. Accordingly, being involved in a power transition would be a necessary condition of war involvement (in this case the DRF jumps to .73 and Q to 1.00). The six cases in the top right cell prevent involvement in a power transition from being a sufficient condition as well. Of these 6 cases, 2 are allied in the Holy Alliance and three states are involved in nuclear deterrence relationships after World War II. This leaves only one state, Russia, that 'should' have fought against another major power in the time period 1856-1875 - if being involved in a transition were also a sufficient condition of becoming involved in war. However, Russia had just ended a war and became subsequently involved in a period of domestic unrest. The transition hypothesis provides, clearly, a very powerful explanation of war participation.

In the structural approach of leadership, as in the hegemonic stability school, system level forces directly determine lower level behaviour. Consequently, systemic properties, such as the distribution of capabilities, and particularly its degree of concentration, or its direction and rate of change, determine affairs at dyadic and national levels. The alternative approach we prefer is multiple determination. This is the subject matter of contextual analysis. (see Hummell 1972) In contextual analysis the values of dependent variables at the individual level are predicted from the combined impact of individual level predictors and group level predictors.

With regard to the matter under discussion here, and building upon the findings reported above, dyadic capability transitions between two major powers substantially increase the probability of warfare in the transition dyads; likewise, involvement in a transition predicts involvement in national war. In this respect, world wars, or global wars are not different from other major power wars. What is different, however, is the systemic context in which each type of war breaks out. We suggest that dyadic wars spread into world wars and escalate into global war when capabilities become less concentrated and when the concentration index reaches an all-time low value. Indeed, both world wars of this century have originated in dyadic transitions. In the period 1896 - 1914, the United States passes, among others, Germany and Austria-Hungary, while Germany passes the United Kingdom. In the period 1919-1939, Germany passes the United Kingdom as well as the Soviet Union, while Japan passes France. In 1914 as well as in 1939, the British share in the Doran/Parsons-capabilities set is lower than at any point in time since 1816, the first year of observation. At the eve of World War I, with the year 1865 as the sole excep-

tion, naval assets, as measured by Thompson and Modelski, are more evenly spread among the major powers than at any year since 1815, the last year of the previous global war period. When the distribution of capabilities becomes ever more deconcentrated, a barrier against the spread of dyadic warfare is removed. In this respect, world wars evolve from dyadic fights simply because there is no firefighter around to stop the blaze. This is well illustrated by British behaviour in the July crisis of 1914. In contrast to the War in Sight Crisis of 1875, in which both Great Britain and Russia took resolute action, warning Bismarck against further expansion at the cost of France, Britain opted for a wait-and-see policy in the crisis of July 1914. Britain feared, on the one hand, that it would be unable to restrain its allies (France and Russia) if it said it would fight on their side, but, on the other hand, it would be unable to restrain Germany if it said it would not fight on the side of her allies. (Hillgruber 1968) Similarly, at the eve of the Second World War, both Britain and America initially followed a waiting policy. However, the turn in Germany's foreign policy from Bismarck's 'status quo' to the expansionism of his successors, and subsequently even to conquest and mass murders in high tech death factories, is not implicated in the deconcentration of capabilities at the system levels. These are clearly factors working at the national and dyadic levels. System-wide deconcentration opens the door. The things that get through that open door are determined, however, at lower levels of analysis.

4. Two caveats

The conclusion from the previous section is that power transitions in dyads of major powers correlate with outbreaks of war in these dyads. Correlations reveal a pattern, an ongoing practice expressed in state actor behaviours, but they do not explain why things go together.

For this reason, attention should be given to the nature of the linkage between the variables investigated in this paper. Firstly, we might point at the problem of time frames in the design. Capability data are given for half-decades. We have divided the period under study in twenty year-periods the way we did, in order to obtain consistency with our earlier research and to get comparability with research of others. Choices about the time frame have to be made in one way or another, and no general theory is available to help here. In this sense, empirical researchers are still groping in the dark at the same place where grand theorists think they have already entered a brightly sunlit room, thanks to the sun of their

preferred theory. However, choices in research design conceal rather important assumptions about the time nations and dyads need to respond. These choices, therefore, are in need of theoretical justification. If we assume theoretically that the war response is 'immediate' upon 'the moment' of power passing, we have to operationalize the 'immediate' and 'the moment', before we can observe anything. In the research reported here, we have taken 'immediate' to be 'within a time period of 20 years', and 'the moment' to be a period of five years. However, in some cases the war response may well have been delayed or anticipated, requiring more than five years to get consummated. In some other cases repeated exposure to power passing may have been required for the response to show up. In respect to the choice of the time frame of the research reported here, we should emphasize the rather primitive nature of the design that generated the findings reported above. Similar caveats may be in order with respect to the spatial distribution of war activities. In our analysis, we have considered the international system as a whole. It may, however, be worthwhile to differentiate between various regions, for instance, a European sphere and an extra-European sphere in the Far East, where only the United States, the United Kingdom, the Soviet Union, Japan, and China have been active as major powers. (Barraclough 1961)

Our second caveat concerns motivation. If power shifts in dyads do indeed correlate with warfare of its members, what about inserting the will to fight as an intervening variable? To postulate intervening variables, or constructs, is useful in cases in which several dependent variables are correlated with one another and each is correlated with the independent variable. In the case at hand, constructs as Hobbes' preference order, or 'propensity to plunder' (cf. Bauer and Matis 1989, 62; Skocpol 1981), or 'lateral pressure' (cf. Choucri and North 1975, 16 ff.), could all be useful. As a device in simplifying understanding, intervening factors may get some substance if they appear to have some relationship with the actors' expressions of subjective experiences. Indeed, correlations between objective states of affairs, like capability transitions and warfare, do not explain what people are fighting for. However, what people are fighting for is usually only discovered *during* the war. For this reason, Holsti's recent (1991) effort to introduce actor's purposes or goals as a tool in the explanation of war, is most unfortunate. Purposes, or the expression of subjective states of affairs, are just a part of the behaviour to be explained. Unfortunately, however, we are not aware of any study of expressions by transition states of subjective positional experiences during transition periods.

Intervening variables are directly related to the nature of the linkage

between capability transitions and outbreaks of war. Do capability transitions as such bring forward the war response? Or, alternatively, do transitions put nations in a state of readiness to fight, while other events are required to trigger the war response of these nations? In the last situation causes of war are dependent upon being in a state of readiness to fight, capability transitions being but one source of making states ready to go to war.

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