DOMESTIC STRUCTURE AND PREVENTIVE WAR
Are Democracies More Pacific?

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THE development of new democratic regimes that began a decade ago as a trickle in Latin America is now a global tidal wave. Not surprisingly, this increase in the number of democratic states had led to a renewed scholarly interest in the well-known but controversial hypothesis that democratic states are more pacific than nondemocratic states. To date, empirical analyses of this hypothesis have been inconclusive, providing "ammunition to both schools of thought."  

The data-driven nature of much of the literature may explain the lack of consensus among studies on regime type and war. Searching for empirical regularities without the aid of a well-developed theoretical framework to guide the analysis, most of these studies do not (1) hold constant variables other than regime type that may influence war, (2) specify and investigate plausible causal linkages, and (3) disaggregate the dependent variable (external behavior) to specify clearly what is to be explained. Consequently, the research designs may mask significant relationships between domestic structure and war.3

* I am grateful to Thomas J. Christensen, F. Gregory Gause III, Robert Jervis, Edward D. Mansfield, James McAllister, Jon Mercer, Sue Peterson, Jack L. Snyder, Richard J. Stoll, and two anonymous reviewers for comments on various earlier drafts. I also thank the MacArthur Foundation for financial support.


2 Maoz and Abdolali (fn. 1), 31.

3 For an extensive discussion on the inadequacy of many research designs in quantitative international politics, see Benjamin A. Most and Harvey Starr, Inquiry, Logic, and International Politics (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1989), chaps. 3–5. For a similar argument, see Jack S. Levy, "The Diversionary Theory of War: A Critique," in Manus I. Midlarsky, ed., Handbook of War Studies (Boston: Unwin Hyman, 1989), 282–83. It must be pointed out, however, that Levy intentionally limits his critique of the "quantitative empirical literature" to those studies on the relationship between internal and external conflict, which he calls "basically descriptive correlational analyses."

World Politics 44 (January 1992), 235–69
These shortcomings of correlational methodologies applied to highly aggregated data suggest that restricting the analysis to a particular type of war and set of initial conditions may lead to more conclusive findings. This paper therefore focuses on cases involving an ongoing power shift (the initial condition held constant) to discover how domestic structure affects the initiation of preventive war.

The concept of preventive war refers to those wars that are motivated by the fear that one's military power and potential are declining relative to that of a rising adversary. According to this broad definition, states wage preventive wars for either offensive or defensive reasons: to take advantage of a closing window of opportunity or to prevent the opening of a window of vulnerability. Moreover, statesmen may rationally choose preventive war with little or no hope of victory if the expected costs of peace are thought to be even higher, for instance, when war is seen as inevitable and when, due to a declining power gradient, it is better to fight now than later. Japan's decision to initiate a war against the U.S. exemplifies this.

Above all, preventive wars are "wars of anticipation," and therefore their justification, if any is given, can rest only upon the inherently unprovable assumptions of human foresight. As the Abbe Galiani (1728-87) posited: "The misfortunes of mankind derive from foresight . . . the actual cause of wars. Because one foresees that the House of Hapsburg will increase, because the French, a hundred years from now, will do such a thing, we begin to cut one another's throats right now."

The theoretical significance of preventive war derives from a central

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5 The logic of expected-utility theory posits that states go to war simply when they expect to do better than they would by remaining at peace. See Bruce Bueno de Mesquita, "The War Trap Revisited," American Political Science Review 79 (March 1985); idem, "The Contribution of Expected Utility Theory to the Study of International Conflict," Journal of Interdisciplinary History 18 (Spring 1988). Using the logic of expected-utility theory, Scott D. Sagan argues that, contrary to conventional wisdom, the Japanese decision to initiate war against the U.S. was rational. See Sagan, "The Origins of the Pacific War," Journal of Interdisciplinary History 18 (Spring 1988).

6 The Abbe Galiani, as cited in Vagts (fn. 4), 263.
and age-old theme of international politics, that uneven rates of growth are the fundamental cause of both war and change in the international system. In addition, preventive war figures prominently in traditional balance of power theory as an essential means of preserving the delicate and dynamic balance. Indeed, balance among the Great Powers, according to equilibrist theory, results from statesmen’s constant attention to power shifts and from their perpetual readiness to intervene with force, when necessary, to prevent disequilibrium.7

Theorists disagree, however, on the casual links between power shifts and war. Robert Gilpin sees preventive action as “the most attractive response” for a declining dominant power: “When the choice ahead has appeared to be to decline or to fight, statesmen have most generally fought.” Similarly, Jack Levy writes: “Statesmen have often convinced themselves that war will reverse or retard the rising military power of the adversary . . . and history provides few examples of states’ nonviolent acceptance of their national decline.”8 Conversely, A. F. K. Organski and Jacek Kugler appear to rule out preventive action altogether, arguing that recent history shows that rising dissatisfied challengers have initiated wars against leading nations “long before they equaled them in power.”9

Because a power shift is neither a necessary nor a sufficient condition for war and only a necessary condition for preventive war,10 the debate on the identity of the aggressor seems misplaced. Instead, the more im-


10 Levy (fn. 4), 86. Although I will refer to shifts in the actual distribution of power, the perception of a damaging power shift, real or imagined, is more precisely the necessary condition to motivate a preventive war. As William C. Wohlforth points out, “If ‘power’ influences international relations, it must do so through the perceptions of those who act on behalf of states. The quantitative measures of power used in the literature to test various power theories are thus estimators of perceived power.” See Wohlforth, “The Perception of Power: Russia in the Pre-1914 Balance,” World Politics 39 (April 1987), 353.
portant theoretical puzzle is, Why do some power shifts result in preventive war while others do not? The fact that structural theory alone cannot explain this variance suggests that an auxiliary "second-image" hypothesis may be required to make more determinate predictions.

Accordingly, this article bridges factors at the systemic and domestic levels of analysis in an attempt to construct a theory that yields more determinate predictions of power-shift outcomes. It will be shown that only nondemocratic regimes wage preventive wars against rising opponents. Declining democratic states, for a variety of reasons that will be discussed, do not exercise this option. Instead, when the challenger is an authoritarian state, declining democratic leaders attempt to form counterbalancing alliances; when the challenger is another democratic state, they seek accommodation.

The aims of this essay, then, are twofold: (1) to provide a partial but important answer to the question, Are democracies more pacific? and (2) to contribute to our understanding of how states react to a decline in their relative power.

**Domestic Structure and War**

Are liberal states more pacific than nonliberal states? Observing that all nations engage in war, most realists reject this proposition, arguing that differences in domestic structure are overridden by the anarchic international structure in which all states exist. Thus Waltz maintains, "With many sovereign states, with no system of law enforceable among them, with each state judging its grievances and ambitions according to the dictates of its own reason or desire—conflict, sometimes leading to war, is bound to occur."

Yet political theorists as diverse as Kant, Schumpeter, and Woodrow Wilson contend that democracies are less belligerent than autocracies. The fact that no wars have been fought between democratic states since 1789 supports this proposition. Furthermore, during the past two centuries democratic states have never been on opposite sides in any general war involving all or most of the Great Powers. These findings have

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12 Here anarchy means not conflict but rather the absence of a sovereign arbiter to make and enforce agreements.

13 Kenneth N. Waltz, *Man, the State, and War* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1959), 159. For his discussion of the inadequacy of "second image" explanations of war, see pp. 120–23.
prompted one scholar to conclude that "the absence of war between democracies comes as close as anything we have to an empirical law in international relations."\textsuperscript{14}

Nevertheless, few theorists support Rummel's assertion that "in a nutshell, what social science has found is that the more freedom a state has, the less its internal and foreign violence."\textsuperscript{15} To the contrary, most researchers have found no relationship between regime type and war involvement or initiation.\textsuperscript{16} Most notably, Michael Doyle concludes that while a Kantian "pacific union" seems to exist among democratic states, their tacit nonaggression pact has not extended to nondemocratic states: "The very constitutional restraint, shared commercial interests, and international respect for individual rights that promote peace among liberal societies can exacerbate conflicts between liberal and nonliberal societies."\textsuperscript{17}

A recent study by Steve Chan, however, offers some evidence in support of the freedom-promotes-peace proposition. Chan found that the validity of the proposition varies according to how the researcher operationalizes the dependent variable (that is, war, violence, conflict, all wars, interstate wars only, extrasystemic wars, and so forth). When the analysis focuses on dyadic relationships and excludes extrasystemic wars (that is, colonial or imperialist wars), democratic states appear to be more pacific than nondemocratic states, but the finding is not statistically significant.\textsuperscript{18} Nevertheless, though Chan does not raise the issue, his research suggests that while domestic structure may not have an effect on

\textsuperscript{14} Jack S. Levy, "Domestic Politics and War," Journal of Interdisciplinary History 18 (Spring 1988), 662. Maoz and Abdolali (fn. 1) found that "democracies rarely clash with one another, and never fight one another in war" (p. 3). For similar statements, see Michael W. Dolye, "Kant, Liberal Legacies, and Foreign Affairs, Part 1," Philosophy and Public Affairs 12 (Summer 1983), 213–15; Babst (fn. 1), 55; Rummel (fn. 1, July 1983); idem (fn. 1, March 1983), 28–29; Chan (fn. 1). Small and Singer (fn. 1) also find that democracies do not fight against one another, but they do not attribute this to the inherent peacefulness of democracies or to a "pacific union" among them. Instead, they suggest that the dearth of contiguous democratic states since 1816 explains the long liberal peace (p. 67).

\textsuperscript{15} Rummel (fn. 1, July 1983), 34; emphasis in original.


\textsuperscript{17} Michael W. Doyle, "Kant, Liberal Legacies, and Foreign Affairs, Part 2," Philosophy and Public Affairs 12 (Fall 1983), 324–25; emphasis in original. See also idem, "Liberalism and World Politics," American Political Science Review 80 (December 1986). For insightful analysis of Kant's theory of the "Eternal Peace" from a realist perspective, see Kenneth N. Waltz, "Kant, Liberalism, and War," American Political Science Review 56 (June 1962).

\textsuperscript{18} Chan (fn. 1). However, Maoz and Abdolali (fn. 1) find that "as the proportion of democratic-democratic interaction opportunities increased, so did the level of conflict in the system. On the other hand, the correlations between the proportion of autocratic-autocratic interaction opportunities and the same dispute measures were slightly negative, but . . . statistically insignificant" (p. 26).
aggregate war "involvement," perhaps democratic states do not initiate certain types of dyadic interstate wars as easily or as often as nondemocratic states.

DEMOCRACY AND PREVENTIVE WAR

OPERATIONALIZING THE CONCEPT OF DEMOCRACY

Although definitions of democratic regimes vary somewhat throughout the literature, most include the core elements offered by Singer and Small: (1) scheduled elections held periodically with free participation of opposition parties, in which (2) at least 10 percent of the adult population is able to vote for (3) a parliament that either controls or enjoys parity with the executive branch. Doyle's definition of "representative government" raises minimum suffrage, I believe correctly, to at least 30 percent and requires the government to be (4) internally sovereign over military and foreign affairs and (5) stable, that is, in existence for at least three years.19

In addition to political rights, an ideal measure of "liberal" democracy should include economic freedom and civil liberties.20 Thus, I add two more ingredients: (6) private property and a free-enterprise economy and (7) citizens who possess juridical rights.21 Taken together, these seven components approximate our commonsense notion of what constitutes a democratic state.

LIBERAL PUBLIC OPINION AND THE PREVENTIVE MOTIVATION FOR WAR

Kant wrote that despots—for whom war did not require the least sacrifice—may "resolve for war from insignificant reasons, as if it were but a

19 Singer and Small (fn. 1), 55; Doyle (fn. 14), 212. Specifically, Doyle's definition requires male suffrage of at least 30% and female suffrage to be granted within a generation of its initial demand.

20 Weede (fn. 1) disagrees, stating that "economic freedom is usually not part of definitions of democracy" (p. 655). But the current democratization of Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union seems to demonstrate that, in addition to political freedom, a market and private-property economy may be an indispensable ingredient of democracy.

It is important to note, however, that the addition of juridical rights and economic freedom to the definition of democracy has had no effect on the coding (democratic or nondemocratic) of the cases in this study, as all politically free states also contained both of these elements.

21 Rummel defines freedom in the expansive sense as economic freedom plus political freedom (civil liberties plus political rights). See Rummel (fn. 1, March 1983), 30-31. Doyle (fn. 14) refers to the institution of a market and private-property economy in his definition of a "liberal regime" (p. 212). A liberal democracy obviously implies both economic and political freedom.
hunting expedition.”22 But where “the consent of the citizens is required in order to decide whether there should be war or not, nothing is more natural than that those who would have to decide to undergo all the deprivations of war will very much hesitate to start such an evil game.”23

This is not to suggest that democracies never initiate wars; clearly the empirical record indicates they do. The key, as Kant suggests, is the public’s expectation of the costs of war. That is, as I will argue below, a model of liberal democratic domestic structures as determinants of decisions about war and peace must include as model-based features the relative power resources of the states involved.

In wars waged against weak opponents, in which the average citizen expects painless victory, there is no reason to believe that public opinion will make democratic states more pacific than nondemocratic states. As we know, democratic states have on many occasions attacked far weaker opponents, and an impassioned citizenry often promoted and prolonged such wars. Many of these interventions, moreover, though not motivated by the fear of a power transfer, where in response to power shifts: an increase in the relative capability of a small state threatened the interests, imperial or otherwise, of the dominant democratic power(s). Thus, for example, the British attack against Egyptian nationalist forces in 1882 qualifies in a technical sense as a preventive action but not, given the small number of battle deaths, as a preventive war.24 Regarding this case, A. J. P. Taylor comments on French inaction and adds, significantly, “As so often, French public opinion would tolerate the defence of imperial interests only so long as it involved neither expense nor the diversion of forces from Europe.”25

22 Kant, “Eternal Peace,” quoted in Waltz (fn. 17), 333.
24 I am using the definition of war developed by the Correlates of War (cow) Project, which requires at least 1,000 battle deaths to members of the interstate system. Under this definition the cow project has identified 118 international wars for the 1816-1980 period, of which 67 are interstate wars and 51 are extrasystemic wars. See Melvin Small and J. David Singer, Resort to Arms: International and Civil Wars, 1816–1980 (Beverly Hills, Calif.: Sage, 1982). The major empirical studies of warfare differ in their definitions of war, however. For an excellent discussion of how these differences affect the data sets and conclusions of the studies, see Edward D. Mansfield, “The Distribution of Wars over Time,” World Politics 41 (October 1988).
25 Taylor, The Struggle for Mastery in Europe, 1848–1918 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1954), 289. See also Michael W. Doyle, Empires (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1986), 208–18. Doyle draws a clear distinction between imperial control (metropole over empire) and international control (dominant state over weaker state): the former involves extensive control over the sovereignty—the internal/domestic policy and external/foreign policy—of the subordinate periphery, whereas the latter involves only some external control. In short,
Conversely, as Kant suggests, public opinion inhibits democratic state actors from initiating wars expected to be of great risk and cost, that is, wars that require universal conscription, an increased tax burden to support rearmament, conversion to a wartime economy, and the loss of many lives. Added to the high-risk stakes that make wars against a formidable adversary so unpalatable to a democratic public is the peculiar logic of “preventive war”: plunging into an unprovoked war now to avoid the risks of war under worse circumstances later.

Thus, Bernard Brodie remarks, “A policy of preventive war has always been ‘unrealistic’ in the American democracy” because “war is generally unpopular, and the public mood inclines to support really bold action only in response to great anger or great fright. The fright must be something more dramatic than a sudden new rise in [the adversary’s] capability.” Jean-Baptiste Duroselle offers some empirical support, maintaining that “since 1815 [French] public opinion . . . has always exerted power in the direction of caution in foreign affairs . . . In all, between 1815 and 1940 one cannot discern in France a single occasion when public opinion had literally forced the government to adopt a [foreign] policy involving risk.”

In addition, the competitive political environment defining democratic systems (regularly scheduled elections against opposition parties) deters politicians from starting costly wars. As Bruce Bueno de Mesquita and David Lalman assert, “The very need to resort to force suggests a political failure by the national leadership, creating openings for opposition factions.” When the costs of war are expected to be felt throughout society, incumbents will be especially fearful of what Anthony Downs terms a “passionate majority” forming against such action. Hence, prior to risking the high domestic political costs of large-scale war, democratic elites require something more than the assumption of a potential future threat based on the projection of an irreversible decline in relative power. Instead, driven by the necessity of securing enough votes to remain in international politics, the focus of the present study, is quite different from imperialism in terms of the power relationships characterizing the two systems (chap. 1).

28 Bueno de Mesquita and Lalman, “Domestic Opposition and Foreign War,” American Political Science Review 84 (September 1990), 752.
29 Downs, An Economic Theory of Democracy (New York: Harper and Row, 1957), 64–68. This facet of my argument—that democratic public opinion and institutions militate against preventive war directed at strong but not weak opponents—is consistent with Downs’s theory.
office, incumbents insist upon evidence of a clear and present danger and usually require several provocations.

The public's aversion to the high cost of war also contributes to the political exhaustion and isolationism that often afflict democratic states, especially after prolonged conflict. David Hume termed this "a careless and supine complaisance," which he contrasted to the "prudent politics" required of the balance of power. Likewise, Adam Smith lamented that "commerce . . . sinks the courage of mankind, and tends to extinguish the martial spirit. . . . By having their minds constantly employed on the arts of luxury, they grow effeminate and dastardly." Exemplifying this "liberal complaisance," democratic public opinion invariably resists universal and compulsory military service during peacetime and opts instead for a small career army—suitable for policing operations or small wars at the periphery but insufficient for waging preventive war against a strong rising challenger.

Britain, the United States, and France have all exhibited liberal complaisance. The strength of British pacifist public sentiment has been partially responsible for a traditional policy of appeasement, the slow pace of rearmament during the interwar period, and the refusal to use conscripts to fight imperial wars—Britain has often accepted defeat in imperial wars rather than pay the domestic costs of instituting a draft.

Similarly, Americans have always rejected a military system based on universal peacetime conscription. On June 2, 1784, the Continental Congress disbanded the only remaining regular U.S. military force, agreeing with Elbridge Gerry that "standing armies in time of peace are inconsistent with the principles of republican Governments, dangerous to the

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30 Hume, "Of the Balance of Power," in Hume, Essays: Moral, Political, and Literary (1741-1742) (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1963), 346-47. For the "complaisance" of liberal Great Powers, see Doyle (fn. 17, 1983), 323, 337-38. For the internal causes of declining power, see Gilpin (fn. 8), 159-68.


33 For instance, in response to Churchill's accusation that Baldwin had acted irresponsibly by not proposing a greater rearmament effort in 1935, the prime minister responded: "Supposing I had gone to the country and said that Germany was rearming and we must rearm, does anyone think that this pacific democracy would have rallied to that cry at that moment? I cannot think of anything that would have made the loss of the election from my point of view more certain." Prime Minister Stanley Baldwin, speech in the House of Commons, quoted in Gordon A. Craig and Alexander L. George, Force and Statecraft: Diplomatic Problems of Our Time, 2d ed. (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), 64.

liberties of a free people, and generally converted into destructive engines for establishing despotism."35 Even after attaining superpower status (taking on unprecedented global commitments and permanently stationing troops on foreign soil), the United States, unlike its nondemocratic superpower rival, did not institute universal and compulsory peacetime conscription. Changing demographic and economic trends, however, may soon force the U.S. to either reduce its overseas commitments or adopt a peacetime draft.36 Strong public opposition to the draft during the Vietnam War suggests that politicians will no doubt choose retrenchment over compulsory military service.

Surprisingly, geographically vulnerable France, not an insular state like Britain and the U.S., has also suffered from liberal complaisance. After the Austro-Prussian War, the French public thwarted proposed military reforms that called for universal and compulsory service to meet the Prussian challenge. Consequently, as the fateful year of 1870 arrived, French forces were outnumbered by the Prussian Landwehr three to one and were easily defeated in 1871.37 Similarly, during the 1930s France spent far less of its GNP on rearmament than did the Third Reich, and it chose a defensive strategy—retirement behind the safety of the Maginot Line—to offset the projected numerical superiority of German troops. Once again, the French military effort fell victim to the more powerful German land and air forces.

As these cases suggest, liberal complaisance often leaves states militarily unprepared for defensive action, much less large-scale preventive action. In Samuel Huntington's words, "Liberalism does not understand and is hostile to military institutions and the military function."38

In addition, democratic public opinion generates an institutional heritage of openness and division of powers that inhibits the preventive motivation for war. In 1949 George Kennan declared: "[A] democratic society cannot plan a preventive war. Democracy leaves no room for


36 For a discussion of America's military manpower dilemma, see Cohen (fn. 34), 183–89.


38 Huntington (fn. 35), 144.
conspiracy in the great matters of state.”39 Years later he contended that a sharp division of powers rules out “the privacy, the flexibility, and the promptness and incisiveness of decision and action, which have marked the great imperial powers of the past and which are generally considered necessary to the conduct of an effective world policy by the rulers of a great state.”40

Similarly, the separation of powers represented by civilian control of military planning checks the military’s institutional preference for offensive doctrine, which is necessary to fight preventive wars.41 “The problem of the separation of powers as conducive either to peace or war has been much neglected,” observes Alfred Vagts. “Where political and military responsibility have not been clearly separated, the great makers of preventive war—Louis XIV, Frederick the Great, Napoleon I, Hitler—have been able to hold sway.”42

Finally, due to the strength of public opinion, the policies of a democratic state, in contrast to those of an autocracy, must ultimately conform to the moral values of that society.43 Ironically, liberalism’s humanitarian impulse sometimes results in a belligerent public pressuring more cautious leaders into war. During the Crimean War, for example, a hawkish British public clamored for war to liberate the Turks from their Russian oppressors. Similarly, the American public’s great anger and moral outrage over Spanish atrocities against Cubans, the de Lôme letter, and the sinking of the Maine forced McKinley to start “a war which he did not want for a cause in which he did not believe.”44 It is important to note,


41 For the institutional preference of military organizations for offensive doctrines, see Barry R. Posen, Sources of Military Doctrine: France, Britain, and Germany between the World Wars (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1984), 47–50; for the necessity of an offensive doctrine in order to wage a preventive war, see pp. 69–70.

42 Vagts (fn. 4), 264.

43 Although he is inconsistent on this point, even Hans Morgenthau has written that the national interest of a state must be constrained by its own morality. See Morgenthau, In Defense of the National Interest (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1952), 36–37; and idem, “Letter to the editor,” International Affairs 35 (October 1959), 502. See also Kenneth W. Thompson, Political Realism and the Crisis of World Politics (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1960), 167. For a discussion of the skepticism of political realists about international morality, see Charles R. Beitz, Political Theory and International Relations (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979).

44 Ernest R. May, Imperial Democracy: The Emergence of America as a Great Power (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1961), 159. May clearly distinguishes between the humanitarianism that produced the war and the imperialism that grew out of it.
however, that the jingoism of the American Populist-Progressive movement produced—even at its height in the 1890s—"only a small war and a quick victory," in the words of Richard Hofstadter. And afterward "a great many Americans who had responded with enthusiasm to the war against Spain as a crusade to liberate underdogs in Cuba . . . became as ardently anti-imperialist as they had been pro-war."45

What concerns us here, however, is that citizens of governments founded on the enlightenment principles of individual liberty and the pursuit of happiness are naturally repulsed by the unethical and immoral aspects of preventive war, as it implies the unprovoked slaughter of countless soldiers—and, in the nuclear age, millions of innocent civilians—on the mere assumption that future safety requires it.46 And if this moral indignation holds for preventive wars based on "anticipatory self-defense," it is doubly so for offensive preventive wars—those driven by the desire to jump through a closing window of opportunity. Such predatory wars, whose aims are national glory, economic gain, or territorial acquisition, find no basis in liberal principles of morality and justice. Rather, "just wars," according to Rawls, are those waged in self-defense "to preserve and maintain just institutions and the conditions that make them possible."47

To be morally comprehensible, however, even wars undertaken for reasons of anticipatory self-defense must be founded upon what Bacon calls "just fear":

[Regarding the King's] neighbours: there can no general rule be given (the occasions are so variable), save one, which ever holdeth, which is, that princes do keep due sentinel that none of their neighbours do overgrow so


46 For Brodie's discussion of the moral issue of preventive war, see Brodie (fn. 26), 236-37; for his discussion of why preventive war has always been an unrealistic policy for the U.S., see pp. 223-41. Morgenthau also acknowledges that preventive war is "abhorrent to democratic public opinion" and states:

It is especially in the refusal to consider seriously the possibility of preventive war, regardless of its expediency in view of the national interest, that the moral condemnation of war as such has manifested itself in recent times in the Western world. When war comes, it must come as a natural catastrophe or as the evil deed of another nation, not as a foreseen and planned culmination of one's own foreign policy. Only thus might the moral scruples, rising from the violated moral norm that there ought to be no war at all, be stilled, if they can be stilled at all.


(by increase in territory, by embracing trade, by approaches, or the like) as they become more able to annoy them than they were. . . . Neither is the opinion . . . to be received, that a war cannot justly be made, but upon a precedent injury or provocation. For there is no question, but a just fear of an imminent danger, though no blow be given, is a lawful cause of war.\textsuperscript{48}

Since to be afraid is not the same as actually to be threatened, however, Bacon’s formulation raises the question, What constitutes a “just fear”? In what is now regarded as the locus classicus of self-defense, U.S. Secretary of State Daniel Webster argued in the Caroline case of 1842 that “just fear” requires “a necessity of self-defense . . . instant, overwhelming, leaving no choice of means, and no moment for deliberation.”\textsuperscript{49} Webster’s principles of self-defense, adopted by the International Military Tribunal at Nuremberg,\textsuperscript{50} acknowledge the moral legitimacy of preemptive war but not preventive war, as the former requires clear demonstration of the threatening intentions of the adversary and the latter does not.\textsuperscript{51}

Consistent with Webster’s notion of strictly reflex anticipatory self-defense, the twentieth-century version of the classic Christian doctrine of bellum justum does not include preventive war.\textsuperscript{52} Similarly, the United Nations Charter contains an extremely restrictive view of the right to exercise force in self-defense, focusing on actual or imminent boundary crossings. By narrowly defining a victim of aggression such that a threatened state cannot be said to be forced to fight unless the necessity is both obvious and urgent, international law intends to outlaw anticipatory acts of self-defense.\textsuperscript{53}


\textsuperscript{50} The International Military Tribunal at Nuremberg stated: “It must be remembered that preventive action in foreign territory is justified only in case of an ‘instant and overwhelming necessity for self-defense, leaving no choice of means and no moment for deliberation’ (Caroline Case).” Quoted in Bowett (fn. 49), 60.

\textsuperscript{51} The meaning of a preemptive attack is somewhat ambiguous. It sometimes implies that the pre emptor is aware of an imminent enemy attack and thus is compelled to strike the first blow. At other times it refers to an “anticipatory counterattack” waged after the adversary’s attack has been launched but before its impact has been felt. Under both definitions, the existence of an immediate threat and a very short time frame for decision making characterizes a preemptive attack; a preventive attack, by contrast, is motivated by long-term forecasting.

\textsuperscript{52} The classic doctrine of bellum justum did, however, include preventive war. See Osgood and Tucker (fn. 7), 292.

\textsuperscript{53} See Michael Walzer, \textit{Just and Unjust Wars} (New York: Basic Books, 1977), 62. See also Osgood and Tucker (fn. 7), 296–97. The issue of whether preventive war can ever be included in the doctrine of the just war is far more complicated than the schematic treatment I am able to offer here. For a comprehensive discussion of this matter, see Robert W. Tucker, \textit{The Just War: A Study in Contemporary American Doctrine} (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1960),
The reluctance of the public to sanction the use of force for preventive actions has produced, in effect, a gulf between what realpolitik requires of statesmen and what democratic leaders, for domestic reasons, are capable of doing. In part, this disparity emerges from the conflicting ways in which realists and the public conceptualize international politics.

From the realist perspective, the legitimacy of preventive war rests on the notion that international politics is analogous to a Hobbesian state of nature, in which, for reasons of self-preservation, all states have a right to fight.

The public, however, does not think in terms of this analogy. Instead, it conceives international politics as an extension of liberal domestic society: "Public opinion," Bismark complained, "is only too ready to consider political relations and events in the light of those of civil law and private persons generally. . . . [This] shows a complete lack of understanding of political matters."

In summary, the strength of public opinion in democratic states generates a complex of factors that lessens the motivation to enter into preventive war. Unlike their authoritarian counterparts, democratic states lack the large conscript armies, flexibility, decisiveness, and cold logic required to act solely out of considerations of realpolitik. The pacific effect of public opinion is somewhat contingent, however, on the expectation that the war will be costly. Consequently, the argument presented here concerns only power shifts between states of roughly equal strength; it is not relevant to all power shifts, for example, the case of the relative decline of a large state vis-à-vis a much smaller state.

The Hypotheses

I have argued that preventive war is an unrealistic policy for declining democratic leaders. If this is so, the assertion, explicit in Gilpin and implicit in Levy, that preventive war is "the most attractive response" for declining leaders applies only to nondemocratic regimes, and we might expect the following (see Figure 1):

1. A power transition involving a declining democratic leader is both a necessary and a sufficient condition for the absence of preventive war.
   a. When a declining democratic leader confronts a rising democratic challenger, accommodation results.

54 Otto von Bismarck, quoted in Walzer (fn. 53), 63.
b. When a declining democratic leader confronts a rising nondemocratic challenger, the leader tries to form a defensive alliance system to counterbalance the threat.

2. A power transition involving a declining nondemocratic leader is a necessary but not sufficient condition for a preventive war, regardless of the regime type of the challenger.

**DECLINING NONDEMOCRATIC LEADERS**

As shown in Figure 1, the general hypothesis posits that only authoritarian regimes initiate preventive war and that they do so whether the challenger is democratic or authoritarian. From an empirical standpoint, the evidence is overwhelming: every preventive war launched by a Great Power—from Sparta’s response to its fear of the growth in Athenian power to Nazi Germany’s attack against the Soviet Union—has been initiated by a nondemocratic state. The explanation for this, aside from those factors already mentioned, resides in the difference between the state institutions of authoritarian and constitutional regimes.

The compulsory nature of authoritarian rule shapes the institutions of the state in ways conducive to the initiation of preventive war. State in-

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Declining Leader</th>
<th>Democratic</th>
<th>Nondemocratic</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rising Challenger</td>
<td>Leader accommodates to challenger’s rise</td>
<td>Leader wages a preventive war</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Democratic</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nondemocratic</td>
<td>Leader tries to form a defensive alliance system</td>
<td>Leader wages a preventive war</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Figure 1**

55 This is not to say that whenever a nondemocratic state is in the process of being overtaken by a rising challenger it will respond by unleashing a preventive war. In 1866, for example, France did not intervene to prevent either side in the Austro-Prussian War from winning and uniting the loose German confederation under its leadership.
stitutions in such regimes serve as instruments of coercion and domestic intervention to mobilize and extract human and material resources for the purpose of increasing the power of the state. To accomplish this task, a nondemocratic state finds it necessary to build a large military force for internal repression. In addition, it promotes nationalism and ideological conformity, indoctrinating citizens to sacrifice short-term individual gains for the advancement of long-term national goals. Oftentimes, the state justifies the militarization of society and the atmosphere of terror and spying by promising a utopian society for the distant future.56

Barrington Moore observes that authoritarian regimes—in contrast to the dispersion of power characteristic of democratic institutions—emphasize “a strong state to the exclusion of all other social aims and values. Accompanying this is a strictly amoral and technically rational attitude toward political behavior. Anything that strengthens the ruler’s power is good, and that is the end of it.”57

In short, the combination of the militarization of society, glorification of national power, amoral and technically rational approach to politics, and centralized authority characteristic of nondemocratic regimes allows those regimes to fight to maintain their prestige in the international system. Such institutions also arouse fear and suspicion among their neighbors, heightening the security dilemma and the preventive motivation for war, which only an authoritarian state can reasonably contemplate.

Declining Democratic Leaders

democratic leader/democratic challenger

In this situation, the theory predicts accommodation rather than preventive war. Since there has never been a war between democratic states, power shifts between them have not as yet produced a preventive war. Instead, democratic states have formed a “pacific union,” a tacit non-aggression pact among themselves.

One explanation for the liberal peace is that the rules and norms governing the international relations of democratic states reflect the liberal institutions of their domestic societies, not the anarchy of a state of nature. Doyle explains:

The basic postulate of liberal international theory holds that states have the right to be free from foreign intervention. Since morally autonomous citizens hold rights to liberty, the states that democratically represent them have the right to exercise political independence.58

Another explanation for the pacific union is that democratic states, always vastly outnumbered by nondemocratic states in the international system, band together to remain vigilant to the emergence of a nondemocratic state or coalition with hegemonic aspirations. Accordingly, democratic states welcome absolute and relative increases in the military power of other democratic states, as it strengthens the alliance.

Posing no threat to each other, democratic states tend to view their relationships with other democratic states in positive-sum, rather than zero-sum, terms. This is not to say that a faltering democratic hegemon graciously concedes its leadership to a democratic aspirant; rather, it says that preventive war is never seriously considered, because both states realize that their competition can be mutually beneficial as long as it remains peaceful. Hence, despite the eclipse of its relative power, the declining democratic state is satisfied with an increase in its absolute gains through accommodation with the democratic challenger.

DEMOCRATIC LEADER/NONDEMOCRATIC CHALLENGER

When the power shift involves a nondemocratic challenger, the democratic leader is compelled to react: at stake is not just the latter's place in the international hierarchy but also self-preservation. For the reasons given above, however, the declining democratic power will not wage a preventive war and will have difficulty increasing the size of its peacetime forces. The only remaining policy to counter the threat is forming a defensive alliance system.

Since the dominant power is a democracy, however, attempts at external balancing often fail because (1) the most likely allies are other democratic states, which do not have large peacetime forces to contribute and cannot be counted on to go to war simply to preserve the unwarranted prestige of a declining democratic hegemon, and (2) it is difficult to recruit nondemocratic states to defend the status quo, since they are likely to have their own revisionist claims and are thus likely to seek to reorder

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the international system by bandwagoning with, rather than balancing against, the rising challenger.

Yet if a declining democratic power chooses not to rely on the intervention of others but rather to wage a preventive action for reasons of long-term defense, it risks alienating potential democratic allies—as preventive action leaves no doubt about the identity of the initiator and always appears offensive. Given this tension between a preventive-war strategy, on the one hand, and a defensive alliance with other democratic states, on the other, a democratic state will be wary about waging a preventive war if it has any doubts about the outcome (and contests between rising and declining Great Powers are inherently uncertain), since it could find itself a pariah among its erstwhile allies. Hence, coalitions are a deterrent, rather than a stimulus, to preventive war.

**The Evidence**

In Table 1, I have compiled a list of all Great Power preventive wars since 1665. It is impossible to provide an exhaustive list of all dyadic power shifts, but the sample given in Figure 2 is sufficient to demonstrate a historical pattern. Figure 2 is obtained by plotting on Figure 1 the data in Table 1 (all Great Power preventive wars since 1665) along with a sample of prominent power shifts among the Great Powers that did not result in preventive war.

The good fit of the empirical data and the posited hypotheses, as reflected in Figure 2, suggests strong confirmation of the model’s predictions: (1) only nondemocratic regimes have waged preventive wars, and they have done so regardless of the nature of the opponent; (2) declining democratic leaders have accommodated democratic challengers; and (3) declining democratic leaders have attempted to counterbalance rising authoritarian challengers through the formation of defensive alliance systems.

**Case Studies**

The cases of France and Germany (1933–36) and the U.S. and the USSR (1947–55) are prototypes of the democratic leader confronted by quickly rising and demonstrably threatening nondemocratic challengers. In such cases, realpolitik counsels preventive action to destroy the adversary before it is able to do likewise. In both instances, however, the democratic power ruled out preventive war. These cases may thus be seen as offering strong confirmation of the hypothesis that democratic states are less
likely to initiate preventive wars than are nondemocratic states. One should ask, Would an authoritarian state facing a similar challenge have done the same?

Although the data presented here have not dealt with small states, I will also examine Israel as a potential outlier case. It will be shown that it is an exception that nonetheless supports the theoretical basis of the model; that is, the unique systemic pressure exerted on Israel explains its deviant foreign policy and military behavior.

The Prototypical Cases

French Reaction to the Nazi Challenge, 1933–36

On March 7, 1936, German troops entered the demilitarized zone of the Rhineland, violating Articles 42 and 43 of the Treaty of Versailles and Articles 1 and 2 of the Treaty of Locarno. France offered no resistance, which allowed Germany, at one stroke, to transform the strategic balance and nullify the last remaining assurance of the 1919 settlement that the next war would be fought on German, not French, soil. In addition, the German move destroyed France’s entire East Central European policy, namely, to wage an offensive through the Rhineland to counter a German attack against members of the Little Entente. 59

According to conventional historiography and the popular impression, the Rhineland crisis marks the turning point in the foreign policy of the interwar period; 60 that is, German remilitarization of the Rhineland offered France its last chance to react forcibly and unilaterally to arrest


### Table 1

**Great Power Preventive Wars, 1665–1990**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Warsa</th>
<th>Dates</th>
<th>Preventer and Regime Typeb</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Anglo-Dutch Naval War</td>
<td>1665–67</td>
<td>Britain/nondemocratic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Devolutionary War</td>
<td>1667–68</td>
<td>France/nondemocratic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Dutch War of Louis XIV</td>
<td>1672–78</td>
<td>France/nondemocratic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Franco-Spanish War</td>
<td>1683–84</td>
<td>France/nondemocratic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. War of the League of Augsburg</td>
<td>1688–97</td>
<td>France/nondemocratic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. War of the Spanish Succession</td>
<td>1701–13</td>
<td>France/nondemocratic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. War of the Quadruple Alliance</td>
<td>1718–20</td>
<td>Britain/nondemocratic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. War of the Polish Succession</td>
<td>1733–38</td>
<td>France/nondemocratic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Seven Years' War</td>
<td>1755–63</td>
<td>Prussia/nondemocratic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. War of the American Revolution</td>
<td>1778–84</td>
<td>France/nondemocratic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. French Revolutionary Wars</td>
<td>1792–1802</td>
<td>France/nondemocraticc</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. Austro-Prussian War</td>
<td>1866</td>
<td>Prussia/nondemocratic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15. Franco-Prussian War</td>
<td>1870–71</td>
<td>Prussia/nondemocratic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16. World War I</td>
<td>1914–18</td>
<td>Germany/nondemocraticd</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17. Battle of France</td>
<td>1940</td>
<td>Germany/nondemocraticc</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18. Battle of Britain</td>
<td>1940–41</td>
<td>Germany/nondemocraticc</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19. German-USSR War</td>
<td>1941–45</td>
<td>Germany/nondemocraticc</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20. The Pacific War</td>
<td>1941–45</td>
<td>Japan/nondemocratic</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


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* Wars were coded “preventive” if the decision to wage war for either offensive or defensive reasons was based on elites’ perception, real or imagined, of an unfavorable power shift.

* Regime types of states were coded according to the above-mentioned criteria: democratic states have (1) elections with opposition parties, in which (2) at least 30% of the adult population is able to vote for (3) a parliament that either controls or enjoys parity with the executive branch. The government is (4) stable (in existence for at least three years) and (5) internally sovereign over military and foreign affairs. Citizens possess (6) economic freedom and (7) juridical rights. These criteria yield the same list provided in Doyle (fn. 14), 209–12, except for the French case below.

* Though Doyle codes the French Republic (1790–95) a liberal regime, France was not a democracy on April 20, 1792, when it declared a preventive war against Austria. Lefebvre argues instead that the second revolution of August 10, 1792, “usher[ed] in universal suffrage and, in effect, a republic,” with the suspension of King Louis XVI, the destruction of the authority of the Legislative Assembly, and the introduction of the Convention. But the creation of the Convention did not produce political democracy either, as “the masses . . . had not voted” and “by law and by fact [the Convention] was invested with dictatorial powers.” Rather, the August 10 revolution unleashed the Terror, which lasted until 1795. Macaulay aptly describes France as having gone from Bourbon absolutism to *revolutionary anarchy*, only to be followed by Napoleonic despotism. In short, the French government of April 1792 was neither stable (that is, having been in existence at least three years) nor representative—requirements listed above for a democracy. Georges Lefebvre, *The French Revolution: From Its Origins to 1793* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1962), 241, 265; Thomas B. Macaulay, *Napoleon and the Restoration of the Bourbons*, ed. Joseph Hamburger (New York: Columbia University Press, 1977), 12–14, 46–48.
**DOMESTIC STRUCTURE & PREVENTIVE WAR**

For the most forceful argument that Germany went to war in 1914 to exploit a window of opportunity, see Fritz Fischer, *War of Illusions: German Policies from 1911 to 1914* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1975). Others have argued that German elites wanted a preventive war for defensive reasons: to strike before Russia completed its “Great Program” and the modernization of its railroad system.

For the coding of Hitler's wars against France, Britain, and the Soviet Union as preventive, see Norman Rich, *Hitler's War Aims: Ideology, the Nazi State, and the Course of Expansion* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1973), esp. chaps. 9, 14, 15, 18. Hitler's wars were preventive in that he believed that war was (1) inevitable and (2) better sooner rather than later for Germany (i.e., the balance of power was shifting against Germany because of the progress of the French, British, and Soviet rearmament programs, especially production of British planes and air defense and Soviet tanks).

Hitler's ambitions. France, of course, muffed the opportunity and would pay heavily for it in 1940.61

Why did France not wage a preventive war in response to this specific crisis or to other, earlier German violations? Certainly it was not because French policymakers underestimated the value of the Rhine or the danger posed by Germany. French foreign policy after the Great War had fixated on the inevitability of a future attack by its vanquished opponent. At Versailles, French elites attempted to forestall a power shift that would reestablish Germany as the dominant power on the Continent, citing Germany's economic and military potenti de guerre as justification for French claims for relatively greater armaments and for military control of German territory. As for the Rhine, the French military resolutely argued at the Paris Peace Conference that it constituted the only natural barrier to another German invasion. "If we hold the Rhine solidly, France can set its mind at ease," Marshal Foch declared. "If [France] doesn't hold the Rhine, ... anything offered or given in exchange is mere illusion, appearance, and vanity."62

But even before the adjournment of the Versailles conference, France found itself deserted by its former allies: the U.S. turned its back on the Old World, refusing to ratify the treaty or to join the League; the Soviet Union, treated as an outcast by the West, drew closer to Germany; Italy and Japan left the conference so dissatisfied they could not be expected to protect the New Order. And though there remained a superficial semblance of allied solidarity with Britain throughout the interwar period, Anglo-French disagreement centered on the crux of the matter for France: the need to enforce the peace settlement upon Germany.

Most historians see London as playing a winning hand in its dispute.

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62 Marshal Foch, as quoted in Schuker (fn. 60), 302. For the strategic significance of the Rhineland, see Jere Clemens King, *Foch versus Clemenceau: France and German Dismemberment, 1918–1919* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1960).
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Declining Leader</th>
<th>Democratic</th>
<th>Nondemocratic</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Outcome:</strong> accommodation</td>
<td>Britain-U.S. (1880–1900)&lt;sup&gt;a&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>Outcome:** preventive war</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Britain-France (1919–33)&lt;sup&gt;a&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Germany-France (1925–31)&lt;sup&gt;a&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>USSR-Germany (1990s)&lt;sup&gt;b&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>U.S.-Japan (21st century?)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Outcome:</strong> leader tries to form defensive alliances</td>
<td>Britain-Germany (1899–1914)&lt;sup&gt;a&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>Outcome:** preventive war</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>France-Germany (1872–1914)&lt;sup&gt;a&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>France-Germany (1933–36)&lt;sup&gt;a&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Britain-Germany (1933–38)&lt;sup&gt;a&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Figure 2**

* In each of these cases, the data sets that follow indicate a dramatic power transition, in which, at the beginning of the time period, the state listed second possessed far fewer capabilities than did the state listed first; by the end of the time period, the challenger had surpassed the leading state in terms of power capabilities. The sources for these cases are William B. Moul, “Power Capability Percentage Shares: European Great Powers, 1816–1938,” in Moul, “Measuring the ‘Balance of Power’: A Look at Some Numbers,” *Review of International Studies* 15 (April 1989), 119–21; Correlates of War Project, University of Michigan, “The Capability Data Set Printout,” December 1987. See also “Percentage Distribution of the cow Index among the Major Powers,” in Jacek Kugler and Marina Arbetman, “Choosing among Measures of Power: A Review of the Empirical Record,” in Richard J. Stoll and Michael D. Ward, eds., *Power in World Politics* (Boulder, Colo.: Lynne Rienner, 1989), 75.

* Accommodation depends upon the USSR continuing along the path of economic and political liberalization (see Conclusions to this essay).
with Paris, since France—possessing half the industry and less than two-thirds the population of Germany—could only defeat its stronger neighbor with the help of powerful allies. Consequently, they argue, Paris could not afford to arouse British ire by unilaterally punishing German transgressions. Dependent on its “English governess,” the French government had little choice but to be carried along a course of appeasement of Germany.63

In fact, however, France was not dependent on Britain. By any measure, up until 1936 France was far stronger militarily than Germany, but domestic constraints rendered it incapable of waging preventive war. German dominance was therefore inevitable and a British alliance indispensable. Able but unwilling to prevent the rise in German power, Paris could not afford to enact foreign policy without British consent, for in the long run a firm Anglo-French coalition would be necessary to deter or defeat a revitalized Germany.

The French Right had learned this lesson in 1923, when Poincaré used a German reparations default to justify military occupation of the Ruhr. The French military action infuriated Downing Street and the British and French electorates—clearly demonstrating the extent to which liberal moral values and internationalism had triumphed over realpolitik and unilateral national solutions. The French public, outraged by the offensive nature of the Ruhr policy, repudiated Poincaré and his right-wing party. This led, in turn, to the dominance of the Liberal factions in France and Britain and to the development of strong ties between them. France never again contemplated unilateral offensive action against Germany. The Treaty of Locarno (1925), by which Britain and Italy guaranteed the demilitarization of the Rhineland, served as much to prevent any repetition of the Ruhr adventure as it did to protect France against a future German attack.

Thereafter, French politicians, even hard-liners, rejected preventive war. In a speech delivered in November 1933 denouncing Germany’s secret armaments and advocating a policy of firmness toward Germany, Georges Mandel dismissed any suggestion of a preventive war to counter German power. Similarly, Henry Lemery declared: “Preventive war, no one thinks of it and the very word fills us with horror.”64

Furthermore, the majority of French public opinion supported a pol-


icy of appeasement and surely would not have consented to a preventive war. Indeed, idealism and the complaisance of the public ensured a defensive strategy. In the 1920s the French projected a shortage in manpower between 1934 and 1939 (when the drop in the birthrate during the First World War was expected to reduce the annual class of conscripts by half). Yet pacifism among the French electorate forced parliamentary leaders in 1923 to reduce military service to eighteen months and in 1928 to one year. As a result of the public's myopic response to the manpower problems, the construction of the Maginot Line and the adoption of a strictly defensive posture became a military necessity. The financial stringency of a succession of war ministers between 1932 and 1934 further complicated matters; General Weygand was asked to prepare for the decrease in the number of recruits "without increasing either the term of service or armament procurement."66

In 1932 a pacifist French public elected a leftist coalition under Edouard Herriot, who reduced the military estimates for 1933 and accepted the principle of arms equality with Germany at the Geneva Disarmament Conference.67 Similarly, in May 1936, two months after the Rhineland crisis, the electorate voted in the Popular Front, which ran on a "defense of peace" slogan, meaning support for the League of Nations, disarmament, and the principles of collective security.68

Against this backdrop, a full formal cabinet meeting took place on March 8, 1936, at the Élysée. Until then it had appeared that France might respond with force to push back the German advance. But the meeting confirmed that France had no such offensive plans. Instead, an official follow-up communiqué announced that the ministers had decided France would simply refer the issue to the League and consult with the other Locarno signatories.

As if to confirm that France would act only in conjunction with its allies, the minister for war later issued a statement that troop movements would be limited to soldiers needed to man the eastern fortifications. And after representatives of the Locarno powers met in Paris on March 10, the French government declared, "We will put all our forces, material and moral, at the disposal of the League of Nations . . . on the one

66 Schuker (fn. 60), 318.
condition that we shall be accompanied in the fight for peace by those who clearly bound themselves to do so by the Rhineland pact.  

Yet French insistence on allied action was nothing more than an attempt to blame its allies for its own reluctance to push a forward policy. At no time did Paris expect offers of concrete assistance from any of the Locarno powers. Belgium had essentially allowed its military accord with France to lapse in 1931, so French elites surely realized that Belgian support would not be forthcoming. Similarly, Italian assistance had been lost as a result of the Anglo-French response to the Abyssinian crisis. Mussolini had plainly stated that Italy would not honor its Locarno pledge so long as it faced economic sanctions.

As for British support, notwithstanding Stanley Baldwin’s histrionic remark in 1934 that Britain’s frontier now lay on the Rhine, Lieutenant General Pownall’s comments on March 30, 1936, accurately captured British opinion on the matter:

It’s high time the French were “told where they got off.” They would make a pact or an alliance or something like that on our terms if we had the guts to put it to them squarely. It’s time we ceased being tied to their apron-strings, and a rare lot of people in this country think so.

With analogous disdain, the League of Nations representative in London, H. R. Cummings, told his secretary-general, Joseph Avenol, “The central point of British opinion is that experience doesn’t encourage the use of nonmilitary sanctions against Germany, and Germany’s breach is not sufficiently grave to justify the tremendous responsibility of a preventive war.”

Even without allied support, France had the strength to act unilaterally to resist the German advance. But pacifist public opinion at home effectively bridled French ministers from entertaining any serious ideas of military counteraction. Anthony Eden states in his memoirs:

What I now believe to be true is that the French and Belgian governments did not at the time have sufficient support in their public opinions to allow them to use effective force and that, being democracies, they could not have acted without it, even if they had wished to do so.

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69 French declaration, March 10, 1936, as quoted in Parker (fn. 60), 358.
71 Cummings (head of the League Information Section) to Avenol, March 9, 1936, quoted in Schuker (fn. 60), 336.
72 Eden, Facing the Dictators (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1962), 397. Eden also wrote:

Academically speaking, there is little dispute that Hitler should have been called to order, if need be forcibly, at his first breach of an accepted international engagement. But nobody was prepared to do it, in this country literally nobody. Even the most war-like proclaimed that the League Council must be called, which would not have endorsed the use of force. (p. 412)
When Gamelin and Maurin told the Council of Ministers that a military riposte in response to Germany's reoccupation of the Rhineland carried a risk of war, for which full mobilization would be required, Chautemps replied, "But no one here wants to make war," to which there was no dissent. Paul-Boncour added that to request general mobilization was needlessly to terrorize the Council of Ministers and public opinion.73

The machinery and institutions of democracy in France also prevented an effective response to the specific German move and, more generally, to the growth in German power. Thomson argues that the inertia of interwar French policy resulted from the representativeness of French democracy during the divisive last years of the Third Republic:

If the function of democratic government is to be a mirror or a photographic negative—reflecting or reproducing accurately the conflicts of social and political forces—the Republic worked well enough. If the function of democratic government is something more positive than this; if it be to serve the good life and the general well-being of most citizens, to act as a "hinderer of hindrances" to national prosperity and security, it worked less well.74

The intense political instability of the Third Republic (twenty-four changes of ministry in the period 1930–40) meant that France was almost wholly distracted by internal troubles while Germany rearmed.75 Characteristically, when German troops reoccupied the Rhineland, the French government was being run by the caretaker administration of Albert Sarraut. Having taken office in January 1936, he was content simply to keep things in order until the May elections.76

Hence, faced by a threatening rise in German power, France responded, Thomson remarks, with

her old débrouillage—her bad habit of hand-to-mouth half-measures which introduced so much ineffectiveness and frustration into her national response to the "modern challenge." Half a Marinot Line was not necessarily better than no Line: nor "non-intervention" and "appeasement" an adequate substitute for aeroplanes and tanks.77

73 Parker (fn. 60), 364.
74 Thomson (fn. 68), 171.
75 In addition, the Third Republic's history of political scandals, most notably the Stavisky affair of 1934, had entirely discredited the parliamentary system. One French officer exclaimed, "Literally I have never met a single one of my poilus who has not expressed his disgust for the parliamentary regime"; comments of a French officer, June 1940, quoted in Anthony Adamthwaite, France and the Coming of the Second World War, 1936–1939 (London: Frank Cass, 1977), 12.
76 Laval had resigned in response to the public's denunciation of the Hoare-Laval proposals, which sought to appease Italy through territorial concessions at the expense of Ethiopia.
77 Thomson (fn. 68), 200.
Moreover, with each increase in German and Italian military power there seemed to be a corresponding weakening of the French defensive alliance system, as France’s allies defected and Paris failed to honor its alliance commitments.

THE UNITED STATES AND THE SOVIET CHALLENGE, 1947-55

During the first four years of the cold war, the United States enjoyed an absolute monopoly of nuclear weapons; and the Soviets—even after exploding an atomic weapon in 1949—lacked until 1955 a sufficient delivery capability to launch a preventive strike against the U.S. nuclear arsenal. Despite the knowledge that its nuclear monopoly was a wasting asset, however, the U.S. did not launch a preventive nuclear war when it could have done so with impunity against the rising Soviet challenger.

Some might argue that the unique character of nuclear weapons explains U.S. restraint. Hiroshima and Nagasaki had made such an awesome impact on world opinion, so the argument goes, that the profound moral and political implications of nuclear weapons were enough to self-deter subsequent U.S. presidents. Indeed, on several occasions Truman clearly distinguished nuclear weapons from all other military weapons. As he stated in 1948, “I don’t think we ought to use this thing unless we absolutely have to. . . . [T]his isn’t a military weapon”; and in 1949, “When [people] think this is just another bomb, they are making a very serious mistake.” Significantly, Truman added, “But I know the Russians would use it on us if they had it.”

On closer inspection, however, the proposition about the uniqueness of nuclear weapons does not hold up, even for the Truman administration. Instead, the U.S. deemed unacceptable any strategy of preventive war, whether conventional or nuclear. NSC-68 of April 1950, for instance, retained the option of a preemptive nuclear strike in response to an imminent Soviet attack but explicitly ruled out preventive war:

It goes without saying that the idea of “preventive war”—in the sense of a military attack not provoked by a military attack on us or our allies—is generally unacceptable to Americans. . . . [A] surprise attack upon the Soviet Union, despite the provocativeness of recent Soviet behavior, would be repugnant to many Americans. Although the American people would probably rally in support of the war effort, the shock of responsibility for a surprise attack would be morally corrosive. Many would doubt that it

was a "just war" and that all reasonable possibilities for a peaceful settlement had been explored in good faith.79

Moreover, Truman declared in 1948 that the U.S. would never initiate a nuclear attack but would also not hesitate to use nuclear weapons in response to a Soviet conventional or nuclear attack.80

And while Truman considered atomic weapons a last resort, Eisenhower viewed the nuclear option as an integral part of the U.S. military arsenal and, one could argue, as a first resort. Eisenhower's national security policy, as elaborated in NSC-162/2, established the policy that nuclear weapons would be "as available for use as other munitions" to be employed in limited and general war.81 In addition, the New Look and the doctrine of massive retaliation relied on the credibility of a policy of "first use" and the strength of American air power, giving highest priority to the strategic power of SAC. Like Truman, however, Eisenhower ruled out preventive war on both moral and political grounds.

Anxiety over the Soviet test of a thermonuclear bomb in August 195382 led to the only serious discussion of preventive war by high-level Eisenhower foreign policy advisers, the Advance Study Group of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and the air force and air staff.83 Eisenhower himself pondered the value of preventive war as an alternative to a costly and continuous arms race with the Soviet Union that "would either drive us to war—or into some form of dictatorial government. In such circumstances, we would be forced to consider whether or not our duty to future generations did not require us to initiate war at the most propitious moment we could designate."84

80 Lebow (fn. 4, 1984), 172. Addressing the American public, Truman said, "We do not believe in aggression or preventive war. Such a war is the weapon of dictators, not of free democratic countries like the United States." Quoted in Russell D. Buhite and William Christopher Hamel, "War for Peace: The Question of an American Preventive War against the Soviet Union, 1945-1955," Diplomatic History 14 (Summer 1990), 382. Truman's disdain for preventive war was evidenced by his dismissal in 1950 of Major General Orvil Anderson as commandant of the Air War College following Anderson's public remarks in favor of preventive war. See Brodie (fn. 26), 229.
82 The Soviet test in 1953 was not of a superbomb, as Soviet historians have claimed, but rather was of a type of thermonuclear weapon. It was not until November 1955 that the Soviets successfully tested a superbomb with a yield of 1.6 megatons. See David Holloway, The Soviet Union and the Arms Race (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983), 24.
83 Rosenberg (fn. 81), 44.
84 Memorandum, Dwight Eisenhower to John Foster Dulles, September 8, 1953, DDE Diary, August-September 1953, folder 2, box 3, ACWF-EPP, Dwight D. Eisenhower Library; cited in Rosenberg (fn. 81), 44; and Lebow (fn. 4, 1984), 173.
The option of preventive war was quickly dropped, however, when two of Eisenhower's most trusted advisers, Bedell Smith, under secretary of state, and Robert Cutler, special assistant to the president for national security affairs, rejected the proposal. In May 1954 Eisenhower dismissed a recommendation from the Advance Study Group of the JCS that the U.S. give careful thought to "deliberately precipitating war with the USSR in the near future" before the Soviet's thermonuclear capability presented a "real menace" to American security. Consequently, in the fall of 1954 the Basic National Security Policy paper firmly stated that "the United States and its allies must reject the concept of preventive war or acts intended to provoke war." 

In addition to the effects of liberal moral values and domestic and world public opinion, American political and military exhaustion after the Second World War worked against a preventive war. Dean Acheson, referring to Korea, urged NATO members at the Lisbon meeting to resist complaisance, noting that a "vacuum of weakness" provides a "fatal temptation to autocracies determined to expand." Significantly, Acheson continued: "For this reason, we seek to build forces adequate to deter aggression or to meet it. We do not seek to create greater strength than we need for this purpose, we do not desire military forces great enough to launch a preventive war." 

Nevertheless, the public's dissatisfaction with the drawn-out Korean War—what might be called a limited preventive war by proxy, as was Vietnam—testified to the complaisance and exhaustion of the majority of American citizens, which made any thought of a general preventive war against the Soviet Union purely academic. Indeed, Eisenhower's New Look placed more reliance on deterrent power and less dependence on local defensive power, thereby reflecting the public's desire to maintain a strong military posture with defense economy and—most important of all—without the use of American ground forces. Eisenhower explained that the idea had been "to develop within the various areas and regions of the free world indigenous forces for the maintenance of order,

87 Rosenberg (fn. 86), 34.
the safeguarding of frontiers, and the provision of the bulk of ground capability.” Asked whether the policy was to have other countries bear the brunt of future fighting, Eisenhower responded that “that was the kernel of the whole thing.”

Consistent with the proposed hypothesis about declining democratic leaders confronted by rising authoritarian challengers, both the Truman and Eisenhower administrations, having ruled out preventive war, attempted to contain Soviet power through an extensive worldwide defensive alliance system. By the time Truman left office, the U.S. had signed formal alliances with forty-one countries through the Rio Treaty, the North Atlantic Treaty, the ANZUS Treaty, and the Philippine and Japanese security treaties. Eisenhower, whose secretary of state was often accused of “pactomania,” gave additional security commitments to Thailand and Pakistan through the SEATO Treaty, and to Korea and Taiwan in bilateral treaties. The U.S. also pledged assistance in the defense of Turkey, Pakistan, and Iran in separate bilateral executive agreements.

The U.S. emphasis on defensive alliances after 1945 may be seen as strong confirmation of the theory, for it is one of the great ironies of history that America finally accepted entangling alliances and the logic of balance of power politics at a time when Soviet transcontinental striking power drastically diminished their importance for U.S. security.

**The Deviant Case**

**Israel and the Arab Threat, 1947–Present**

Until recently, Israel had not launched a preventive war. The Suez campaign of 1956 came in the wake of a terrorist campaign by the fedayeen, accompanied by a blockade of Israeli shipping in the Gulf of Aqaba and the Suez Canal. The Israeli surprise attack that opened the Six-Day War on June 5, 1967, was a preemptive move in response to the forma-

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90 Gaddis (fn. 39), 152.

91 For a discussion of this irony and the incoherence of American defense policy, see Warner Schilling, “The H-Bomb Decision: How to Decide without Actually Choosing,” *Political Science Quarterly* 76 (March 1961), 25–27.

tion on June 3 of an Arab coalition headed by Egypt; and the October War began with a combined attack by Syria and Egypt against Israel.

On June 7, 1981, however, Israel executed a preventive strike against Iraq, destroying the Osiraq nuclear reactor.93 One year later Prime Minister Begin justified Israel's invasion of Lebanon in preventive terms: to eliminate the long-term threat posed by the military and political presence of the PLO in Lebanon. Both of these preventive actions, however, carried little (if any) military risks. Indeed, given the lopsided military balance of the Lebanon War, Israel could not escape being portrayed as "Goliath" swatting down the far weaker military forces of the "David-like" PLO.94

Nevertheless, these two preventive actions make Israel the most likely candidate to become the first democracy to initiate a preventive war against a serious military threat. Indeed, some would argue that Israeli military doctrine, which is based on preemption and reprisal, offers strong support for the realist proposition that the anarchic structure of the international system overrides variations in domestic structure.

This assertion, however, obscures the fact that Israel faces extreme systemic constraints: it is a small state, geographically isolated from other democracies, that is continuously fighting to survive. Michael Handel comments: "The basic assumption underlying Israeli political-military doctrine is the understanding that the central aim of Arab countries is to destroy the state of Israel whenever they feel able to do so, while doing everything to harass and disturb peaceful life."95

Israel is the only state in history to be surrounded by hostile countries that do not recognize its legitimacy as a sovereign state and that possess far greater demographic and material resources. Moreover, Israel does not belong to any formal military alliance, since such an agreement would automatically alienate Arab countries from any state that signed it. This situation has prevented Israel from forming a regional defensive alliance system, the hypothesized response of a declining democratic leader to counterbalance a rising authoritarian challenger(s). Consequently, Israeli policymakers fully recognize that Israel must "rely com-

94 For the preventive aspects of the Lebanon War, see Yehoshafat Harkabi, The Bar Kokhba Syndrome: Risk and Realism in International Politics (Chappaqua, N.Y.: Rossel Books, 1983), 183ff.; Peleg (fn. 93), chap. 5.
95 Michael I. Handel, Israel's Political-Military Doctrine (Cambridge: Center for International Affairs, Harvard University, 1973), 64.
pletely on its own power in case of emergency.'”\(^96\) Moreover, encircled by four hostile Arab states and threatened by naval blockade during war, “Israel’s geographic position until 1967 was,” in the words of Michael Brecher, “a strategist’s nightmare.”\(^97\) From a military perspective, Israel is a state under siege.

Given this overwhelming pressure exerted by the international system, the strategic military doctrine of the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) stresses speed, maintaining the initiative, and the iron law of fighting on—or quickly transferring the fighting to—the opponent’s territory. To meet these requirements, the IDF will not hesitate to launch a preemptive attack if the security of the state is endangered; it is an offensive doctrine motivated by self-defense.

In adopting an offensive military doctrine with preventive aspects, Israel has succeeded where other democracies have failed. One reason is that Israelis, living under constant threat, well understand the self-help nature of the international system; that is, they do not liken its functioning to domestic society—a common mistake made by citizens of other democracies. As a result, Israelis accept the militarization of their society and the attendant limitations on their freedoms that the hostile state system requires: universal and compulsory military service and military expenditures that approach 50 percent of the national budget.\(^98\) The public’s willingness to sacrifice for the defense of the state is reflected in the narrow margins of debate among the political parties over security matters. Handel remarks:

This is only natural for a nation under a constant state of siege and in which all citizens serve in the army and have a first-hand knowledge of military affairs and matters of security. This point must be especially appreciated when one considers the otherwise highly fragmented and divided Israeli political system. . . . Generally, matters of security are above party politics and in this regard could be considered suprapolitical.\(^99\)

In part, this consensus is explained by the huge impact that the historical experiences of the Jewish people has had on the state of mind of Israeli leaders and citizens, especially the older generation. The historical


\(^98\) In the years 1966–75 Israel’s military expenditure averaged 49.8% of the national budget. See Milton Leitenberg and Nicole Ball, “The Military Expenditures of Less Developed Nations as a Proportion of Their State Budgets,” in Asbjorn Eide and Marek Thee, eds., Problems of Contemporary Militarism (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1980), 289.

\(^99\) Handel (fn. 95), 9.
memory of the Jewish people—the recent Holocaust, the many wars for survival with the Arab states since 1947, and the similar hostility encountered by the Jewish states of antiquity, Judah and Ephraim, culminating in the destruction of the Temple in a.d. 70 by Titus—finds expression in a siege mentality that is both reflected and crystallized in the atavistic institutions and ideas of contemporary Israel.100 And given the inherent "stickiness" of mindsets and institutions, change in Israeli military doctrine will be a slow, evolutionary process that will not develop in tandem with improvements in the external environment.

In short, continuous, intense systemic pressure and the tragic historical experiences of the Jewish people have shaped Israel's domestic structures in ways characteristic of authoritarian regimes, which explains why Israel has retained a preventive-war option unavailable to other democratic states.101 In particular, Israeli leaders have not had their foreign policy options constrained by those elements that have ruled out preventive war for other democracies—liberal moral values, party politics, pacifist public opinion, and liberal complaisance.

Conclusions

The model delineated in this article integrates four outcomes associated with an impending decline in relative power: accommodation, internal balancing, alliance formation, and preventive war. Although all of these policies are consistent with and widely discussed in the structural-realistic literature, systemic factors alone cannot predict which response will be taken by a declining leader. To account for this variance, it is necessary to abandon the structural-realistic assumption that all states react similarly to external pressures (the billiard-ball model of state behavior). Instead, an auxiliary second-image hypothesis that specifies the type of regime (democratic or nondemocratic) and the type of leader and challenger provides more determinate predictions of the outcomes of power shifts.

Specifically, it has been shown that (1) accommodation results when both leader and challenger are democratic states; (2) preventive war as a

100 It is worth noting that the Israelites under David's leadership waged two preventive wars, first against the Philistines and then against Damascus. For a good discussion on the similarities between the ancient Jewish states and contemporary Israel and on how the history of the ancient Israelites affects Israeli foreign policy decision making, see Roberts (fn. 96), chap. 1.

solution is exclusive to declining nondemocratic states; (3) defensive alliances are sought by declining democratic leaders confronting rising nondemocratic challengers; and (4) internal balancing is problematic for democratic states unless they possess an option, such as nuclear weapons, that is relatively inexpensive in terms of human and material resources.

Preliminary empirical findings seem to support the reliability of the predictions of the model. Democratic states have not gone to war against one another, though they have experienced power shifts. Conversely, declining authoritarian regimes have often exercised the preventive option, regardless of the regime type of the rising challenger.

The case studies also support the propositions of the model. Democratic forces prohibited policymakers in interwar France and after 1945 in the U.S. from entertaining strategies of preventive war. Instead, both states attempted to create extensive systems of defensive alliances to counterbalance the rise of an authoritarian adversary. The deviant Israeli case shows that when characteristics associated with authoritarian regimes are present in an otherwise democratic state, elites are able to respond to power shifts in the manner of nondemocratic states: with preventive action.

The significance of these tentative findings has been heightened by the current ascendance of liberal democratic values throughout the world and the rise of a multipolar system in Europe as a result of the end of the cold war. Although major power shifts are currently under way and will continue to unfold, the proposed model predicts peaceful change: the instability often associated with uneven rates of growth is neutralized by the increase in the number of democratic states.

Of particular importance, the model predicts that as long as the Soviet Union continues along the path of democratization and economic liberalization, it will not wage a preventive war against a reunified Germany, even if Bonn eventually decides to develop a strong independent nuclear force. Democratic forces have already played a major role in the Soviet Union’s peaceful reestablishment from Central and Eastern Europe, conceding the reestablishment of German dominance over Europe. Mirac-


ulously, we are witnessing a major power shift involving Germany and the Soviet Union without, as yet, any serious threat of war. In addition, Germany's democratic allies to the west and smaller neighbors to the east, with the possible exception of Poland, have not expressed great alarm over the anticipated rise in German power and influence. On a sobering note, however, the model suggests that uninterrupted peaceful change depends on the continued health of still-fragile democratization processes in the Soviet Union and elsewhere.