

Assessing Causal Linkages to the So-Called “New Peace” in Post-Cold War International Politics.

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There is a growing academic literature (e.g., Zacher 2001, Jervis, 2002, Gleditsch 2008, Goldstein, 2011, Pinker 2011, Horgan 2012, Pinker and Mack 2014, Fettweis 2017) focused on the “New Peace”: a uniquely low level of armed conflict between and within states in international politics since the end of the Cold War. These works, and especially the latest contribution (Fettweis 2017), raise two critical questions. The first is an empirical one: *is* there a uniquely low level of armed conflict in the post-Cold War world? Assuming the answer is “yes”, the second question challenges the knowledge base and the value of the theoretical tools used by scholars of international relations: what accounts for this outcome over the last quarter century?

Fettweis (2017) effectively reviews the literature and empirical findings on the New Peace, offers no fewer than eight different explanations for its occurrence, and then focuses on one: the potential causal path between unipolarity and “hegemony’s” effects on reduced armed conflict. Fettweis concludes that, in contrast to the explanation favored by both U.S. policy makers and many pundits,

The empirical record does not contain strong reasons to believe that unipolarity and the New Peace are related... Researchers will...need to look elsewhere to explain why the world has entered into the most peaceful period in its history (2017:451).

If this assessment regarding the lack of relationship between unipolarity and low conflict is accurate, then it creates serious implications on a variety of fronts. First, it questions the salience of structural theories of international politics. Second, it suggests that Trumpian efforts at withdrawal from the global rules, regulations, and norms America had created and helped to maintain may be relatively unimportant for the future of international politics. Third, if the American unipole is in decline, then the end to unipolarity may have little or no consequence for the future of armed conflict in international politics. Finally, that policy makers in the United States - both neoconservatives and liberals - have consistently misperceived the salience of the United States in impacting on the level of peace and stability in international affairs.

These counterintuitive implications constitute serious consequences both for international relations (IR) scholarship and foreign policy makers. We suggest, however, that as with most

academic work in the field, it is unlikely to be the last word on the subject, and we raise three major caveats in order to further discussion. One is about the evidence regarding the existence and uniqueness of the new peace; the second is about the theoretical and empirical linkages between unipolarity and armed conflict; and the third is about regional variations in armed conflict. Cumulatively these caveats raise issues about the duration of the New Peace, the extent of its uniqueness, the possible misspecification of unipolarity and its consequences, and the need for integrating regional with global dynamics.

Is the post-Cold War New Peace Uniquely Peaceful?

Are we in “a golden age of peace and security” (Fettweis 2017:427) about which “empirical analyses have consistently shown that the incidence and magnitude of warfare—interstate, civil, ethnic, revolutionary, etc.—have declined steady since the end of the Cold War and into the new century” (2017:425)? The world certainly does not feel that way at the moment. The Afghan war has become the longest in U.S. history; Iraqi conflict continues unabated; the Syrian civil war—so costly in terms of civilian casualties—continues with no end in sight; the Saudis and Iranians are fighting a proxy war in Yemen; Russian air forces are buzzing U.S. and NATO aircraft and threatening to eliminate mechanisms of U.S./Russian crisis management; the ferment in eastern Ukraine continues; the Trump administration is publicly floating the possibility of a decapitation strategy toward North Korean elites; internationally inspired terrorist strikes hit the United States and Europe, often with primitive tools of violence (knives, small arms, vehicles), a strategy that no longer requires a viable ISIS state and suggests more of the same as the ISIS caliphate disintegrates yet its Internet footprint fails to be erased. It does not feel like a golden age of peace and security.

Clearly, perception does not equal objective reality. What metric besides our perceptions should we use to gauge whether or not the New Peace constitutes a unique era of limited armed conflict? We suggest that “peace” and armed conflict are complex, multidimensional phenomena, requiring several different specifications: the prevalence of inter-state wars; intra-state or civil wars; militarized interstate disputes (MIDs); and acts of terrorism (both domestic and international). We focus on these four dimensions.

Still, other issues remain in order to determine whether or not the New Peace is a uniquely peaceful era. First, what is the appropriate era or time-frame of comparison? We

compare data across dimensions of armed conflict between the Cold War and post-Cold War eras¹, as Fettweis suggests, although we return to this issue in the following section.

Second, should we control for changes in state system membership across the years being compared? We present the data both ways, although which option is the more appropriate method of estimation is up for debate. Consider as an illustration: there are two very similar worlds of interest to an alien who is contemplating visiting the more peaceful one. World A has a million people and 1,000 homicides annually; World B has 10 million people and 4,000 homicides annually. Which one is more peaceful? If there is a uniquely peaceful New Peace, we should find it both in changes to the rate of armed conflict per state and changes to the absolute level of armed conflict. If the New Peace occurs only due to reductions in the rate of armed conflict due to the birth of additional states, then perhaps this era may be no more peaceful than the previous one but appears to be since it has gained more state actors.

We look first at evidence using the initiation of inter-state wars across time,² utilizing the COW and UCDP data on inter-state wars, measuring separately the frequency of war initiation and the number of ongoing wars annually (Table 1A). As expected, inter-state wars are a rarity across both periods. COW reports substantially less than one war initiated per year; UCDP's estimate, using a far lower threshold for battle casualties (25 versus 1,000) is somewhat higher. Nevertheless, the New Peace prediction appears to hold: inter-state wars become even rarer in the post-Cold War era, and when they do occur, states incur substantially fewer casualties.³ Consistent with the notion of the "Long Peace" (Gaddis 1986), in neither era is there a direct conflict between major powers.⁴

Part B of Table 1 provides estimates from the same two sources on intra-state (civil) wars; on this dimension, however, the differences between the two eras disappear, regardless of

¹ We compare the two time-frames both for convenience (some of the data are most reliably available only after 1945) and since there is an assumption in much of this literature (e.g. Fettweis 2017) that post-Cold War unipolarity is a unique systemic condition, in contrast to the Cold War and other polar structures. However, since many of the underlying global dynamics existing in the post-Cold War era also existed during the Cold War (e.g., globalization, nuclear weapons, increases in states and in democracies, etc.), making comparison between the two eras provides a limited version of a similar systems research design.

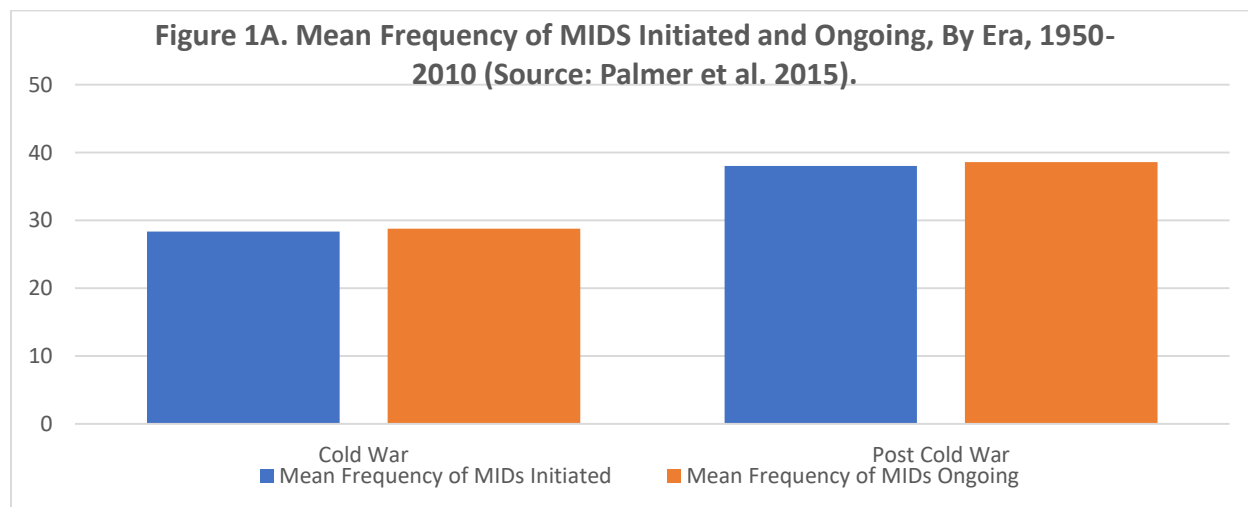
² Data sources on conflicts differ with respect to threshold; COW requires a substantially different threshold for battle deaths than UCDP to classify an event as a war. Thus, we utilize multiple sources when possible.

³ We look as well at COW's listing of "extra-state" wars: wars between a state and an entity that is not recognized as a state. During the 1950-2006 time-frame, COW identifies 39 such cases. Of those, .53 occur per year (21) during the Cold War, and 1.06 annually (18) in the post-Cold War era.

⁴ According to COW's classification of major powers.

whether or not we control for system membership. Both COW and UCDP report a higher frequency of intra-state wars being initiated and ongoing annually during the post-Cold War era. The one exception is battle-related casualties which, according to UCDP, appear to be roughly 67 percent lower on the average per civil war than during the Cold War. Overall, however, on this dimension of armed conflict, there does not appear to be a unique golden age of peace and security.

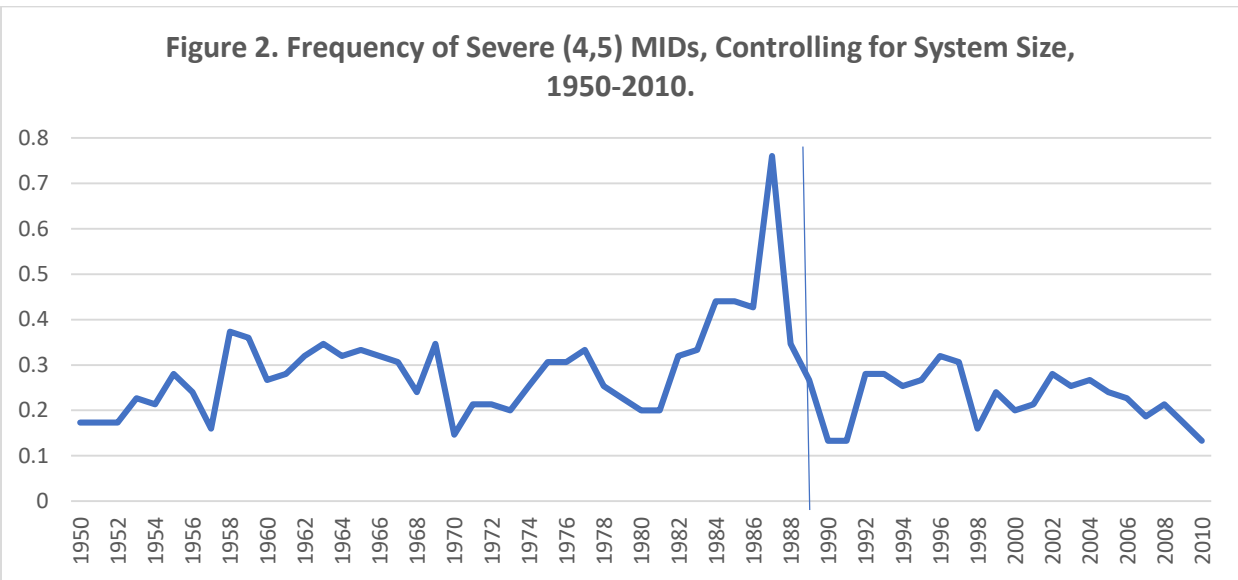
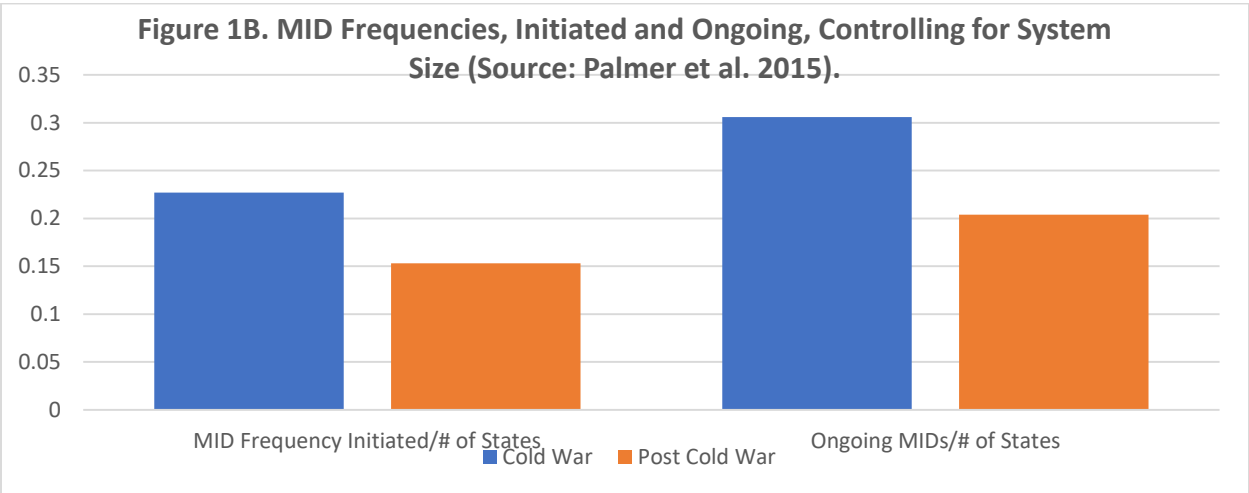
Part C of Table 1 summarizes differences on militarized interstate disputes between states across the two time-frames. The empirics of the MIDs dimension appear to be most vulnerable to controlling for system size. As the table illustrates, the mean number of MIDs annually is virtually the same for the two eras. In fact, as Figure 1A suggests, the patterns for both MID initiation and for ongoing MIDs between states over the 1950-2010 time-span appears to be nearly identical. Introducing controls for number of states, however, shows a substantial reduction for the post-Cold War era, *per country* (Figure 1B).



The trend lines (e.g., see Figure 2), especially for the last decade for which data are available suggest a story that is more in line with the New Peace idea: there is a consistent downward trend in both overall and severe MIDs⁵ during the post-Cold War era, regardless of controls for system size. Thus, we conclude that on this dimension, the post-Cold War era appears more peaceful than its predecessor.⁶

⁵ Not shown in the figure, overall MIDs and severe MIDs appear to move in tandem across the two eras.

⁶ The University of Maryland’s Major Episodes of Political Violence (Center for Systemic Peace 2017) dataset appears to stand in contrast to both UCDP and COW, indicating an overall decrease in intra-state conflict. However, MEPV differs from the other two sources both in terms of the threshold required for the number of



Part D of Table 1 focuses on acts perpetrated by terrorists, both domestic and international, as reported by three different sources (GTD, ITERATE, and RAND). We note the standard cautions: the data differ, depending on the database utilized, even among the three most credible sets of data, as they vary across conceptualization, measurement, and sources.⁷ Moreover, only one of the three focuses solely on international terrorism (ITERATE). Since the New Peace is equated

battle related deaths and the classification of violent events. Nevertheless, an inspection of the MEPV data indicates that a focus on political episodes coded as civil and ethnic violence/war, intra-state conflict, both in frequency of initiation and ongoing annually, remains higher in the post-Cold War period. Controlling for state membership, initiation following the Cold War does show a decrease, but frequency of ongoing conflict remains higher (Cold War era = .171; post-Cold War era = .193 per year, per system member).

⁷ Note the substantial differences in reporting the frequency of terrorism across these sources in Table 1.

with all forms of conflict, we at first concentrate on all forms of terrorism (both domestic and international).

Both GTD and RAND report a substantially greater frequency of terrorist attacks during the post-Cold War era, even when controlling both for the number of years and system membership (controlling for system size, GTD reports roughly a 70 percent increase in the frequency of post-Cold War terrorist attacks; RAND reports an increase of over 150 percent).⁸ According to GTD the casualty rate from these attacks is nearly 80 percent higher in the post-Cold War era.⁹

ITERATE and RAND paint a different picture, however, when focusing solely on what they consider to be international terrorist activity. While RAND projects a roughly similar number of international terrorist attacks per year and a 21 percent reduction per year and per state in the post-Cold War period, ITERATE's numbers suggest a much sharper reduction after 1989 in both the annual frequency of international attacks and the rate of those attacks per state system membership.¹⁰ At best, what we can surmise is that some forms of terrorism (international) have substantially declined while other forms (domestic) may have substantially increased.¹¹

So is there a New Peace in the post-Cold War era unlike any other? We can quarrel about appropriate concepts, conflict dimensions, and measurements for determining the answer. Ours give us more pessimistic estimates than those of Fettweis, and ours suggest that in comparison to the Cold War, how uniquely peaceful and secure the New Peace is depends in large part on the conflict dimension being examined. A charitable conclusion is that since the end of the Cold War only conflicts *across* borders have diminished.

⁸ A possible anomaly may be the over-reporting by RAND on terrorist activity inside Iraq. However, when we eliminate all Iraqi terrorist activity from the database, RAND still reports terrorist frequencies that average roughly twice those during the Cold War.

⁹ Nor is it the case that the New Peace era terrorist activity is concentrated in one geographical area; post-Cold War terrorist acts cover a broader range of countries (averaging 58 states annually after 1989 versus 44 during the Cold War). We are not suggesting that terrorism has increased its reach across the latter period; the point here is that these activities are no more confined to one region than before "unipolarity".

¹⁰ Although given the psychological fear aspect associated with international terrorism, it is unclear if fewer incidents translate into less psychological effect. The terrorist act on September 9, 2001 in New York had an unprecedented effect on Americans and U.S. policy. Recent attacks in the U.K. have led Britain's government to entertain substantial limits on civil liberties, far greater than experienced during the more lethal terrorist events rained on the U.K. during the Cold War.

¹¹ Nor does this mean that increased domestic terrorism is unrelated to eventual increases in international terrorism (e.g. Enders et al. 2011)

Table 1. Armed Conflict Dimensions with Various Sources, 1950-2015.¹²

Dimension	Time Frame		New Peace Prediction ¹³
	Cold War	Post-Cold War	
A) Inter-State War			
(COW)			
Initiated/Year	.69	.53	?
Initiated/Year/State	.006	.003	Correct
Ongoing/Year	1.64	.82	Correct
Ongoing/Year/State	.013	.005	Correct
(UCDP)			
Initiated/Year	1.25	.42	Correct
Initiated/Year/State	.01	.002	Correct
Ongoing/Year	2.28	.96	Correct
Ongoing/Year/State	.017	.005	Correct
Battle-Related Casualties/ ongoing wars/years	1458	315	Correct
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B) Intra-State War			
(COW)			
Initiated/Year	2.6	3.35	Incorrect
Initiated/Year/State	0.02	.018	Incorrect
Ongoing/Year	9.23	14.41	Incorrect
Ongoing/Year/State	.067	.078	Incorrect
(UCDP)			
Initiated/Year	4.1	9.23	Incorrect
Initiated/Year/State	.002	.049	Incorrect
Ongoing/Year	23.63	38.35	Incorrect
Ongoing/Year/State	.174	.203	Incorrect
Battle-related casualties/ ongoing wars/years ^{14, 15}	1828	1217	Correct

¹² Variation in source coverage: COW = 1950-2006; UCDP = 1950-2015; MIDs = 1950-2010; GTD = 1970-2015; RAND = 1968-2008; ITERATE = 1968-2015.

¹³ Since the New Peace is meant to reflect a uniquely peaceful era, we consider as a liberal threshold, any change in the post-Cold War time frame that is equal to or greater than a 30 percent reduction to qualify as an accurate prediction.

¹⁴ Using UCDP's "best estimates". We calculate battle deaths in the following manner: for years 1950-1988: we use Lacina and Gleditsch's PRIO Battle Deaths data set 3.1(1946-2008); for years 2009-2015 we use UCDP's Battle Deaths data set (1989-2015); for years 1989-2008 we averaged the data between the two data sets (Merlander et al. 2016). The UCDP codebook identifies the following for best estimates: "It is important to emphasize that the fatality estimates given by UCDP is based on publicly accessible sources. Due to the lack of available information, it is possible that there are more fatalities than the UCDP high estimate, but it is very unlikely that there is fewer than the UCDP best estimate" (Codebook p. 6). Thus, their estimate consists of the most reliable numbers for all battle-related incidents during a year. If different reports provide different estimates, a judgment is made regarding which source is most reliable. If such distinction cannot be made then, UCDP utilizes the lower figure (Codebook p. 8).

¹⁵ The apparent reduction in battle-related deaths during the Post-Cold War timeframe may not be as straightforward as the numbers initially suggest. Both sources on battle-related deaths attempt to capture *direct*

C) MIDS			
Frequency/Year	28.35	28.81	Incorrect
Frequency/Year/State	.227	.153	Correct
Ongoing/Year	38.05	38.62	Incorrect
Ongoing/Year/State	.306	.204	Correct

D) TERRORISM			
All (GTD)			
Frequency/Year	2158	4482	Incorrect
Frequency/Year/State	13.8	23.5	Incorrect
Casualties/Incident/Year	1.53	2.71	Incorrect
All (RAND)¹⁶			
Frequency/Year	343	1647	Incorrect
Frequency/Year/State	2.23	5.73	Incorrect
International (RAND)			
Frequency/Year	261	250	Incorrect
Frequency/Year/State	1.7	1.34	?
International (ITERATE)			
Frequency/Year	391	218	Correct
Frequency/Year/State	2.56	1.17	Correct

Explanations for the New Peace

But given some decreases in conflict and violence between states since the end of the Cold War, to what should we attribute this apparent change? Fettweis raises two issues about the U.S. role in what he calls the New Peace or the post-Cold War decline in violence. One issue pertains to a list of competing explanations in which U.S. unipolarity is featured as one of eight alternatives with some claim to representing pacifying causes. The other issue relates to interpreting U.S. unipolarity. If polarity is based on power distribution, since when has the

deaths, that is, deaths that result directly from warring parties, which can be directly related back to the combat. The data do not capture overall *war-related deaths* (UCDP Codebook p.6). Deaths resulting from one-sided violence for example, are not included within the estimates provided by either source. Deaths stemming from the Rwandan Genocide in 1994 for instance, are not reflected within the battle-related data, meaning between 500,000 and nearly 1 million deaths are not included in the Post-Cold War estimates. This is not to suggest that one-sided violence is simply a Post-Cold War tactic, however the current data on such violence is primarily available for 1989 on, hindering Cold War/Post-Cold War comparisons.

¹⁶ Rand classifies as domestic terrorism acts perpetrated against military authorities in Iraq after 2003. If we remove those observations from the data, the post-Cold War average is still substantially larger than during the Cold War.

United States been a unipole? While these issues are clearly related, it is best to treat them separately, at least at first.

The eight alternative explanations encompass nuclear weapons, globalization, democratic peace, the regime of international laws and institutions, a rights revolution, aging populations, the idea that conflict is irrational, and U.S. unipolarity. Little is really said about most of the alternatives except that the first seven are at best partial explanations because violence is declining in areas where they least apply. This initial conclusion sets up the attention given to U.S. unipolarity. But there are two features of the first seven that deserve further comment. One is that it seems highly unlikely that trends toward pacification will lend themselves to a univariate explanation. No single variable is likely to be that influential. Therefore, we should be looking for complex, multivariate explanations to account for what are undoubtedly complex changes ongoing in the violence landscape. If so, we should not be too quick to dismiss rival hypotheses as only partial explanations. Partial explanations are what we need.

Yet the second characteristic of the set of eight alternatives dilutes the multivariate admonition somewhat. U.S. agency is confined to one of the eight possible culprits when in actuality it shows up in at least half the lineup, if not more. The United States was the first state to develop nuclear weapons, the only state to have used nuclear weapons to date, and the leading force in combatting nuclear proliferation or challenges to its relative monopoly. For nearly 75 years the United States has outspent all of its rivals and allies and maintained its global reach lead in nuclear weapons. To the extent that nuclear weapons might help explain a post-Cold War decline in violence, the United States cannot be omitted from the equation.

Globalization is not an agent-less juggernaut imposing greater integration and capitalist peace around the globe. The main driving forces have been new technology and multinational corporations, both of which have a very strong U.S. flavor. The U.S. economy first developed the new technology in automobiles, electronics, aerospace, plastics, and chemistry, even if some inventions may have occurred elsewhere. U.S. decision-makers inaugurated the post-World War II push for economic integration by realizing that consumers in Europe and Japan were needed to buy its new products. European and Japanese markets were rebuilt and protected as a consequence. Multinational corporations, initially a U.S. virtual monopoly, were the hand

maidens of this integrative wave linking advanced industrial economies. In time, increasing integration has also spread to less industrial economies as well.

The democratic peace argument is predicated on the apparent improbability of two democracies going to war with each other. The more democracies there are, the more pacific democratic dyads there should be.¹⁷ Several arguments have been advanced that credit the United States with a disproportionate role in the democratization process. As in the nuclear case, the United States can claim to have been the first significant democratic state in the international system, as long as we apply an 18th century version of democracy without women, slaves, and men without property. That the first democratic state survived in a world of resentful monarchies is something of a miracle that is rendered somewhat less miraculous by the existence of two large oceans that were once difficult to cross. While Britain and the United States fought two early wars (or one revolutionary civil war and one interstate war), British interests around the globe and the U.S. distance from multiple British concerns kept these wars from becoming fights to the finish. Subsequently, the British navy helped enforce the Monroe Doctrine and eventually Britain surrendered its attempts to contain U.S. expansion in the Americas. Then too, there is what Narizny (2012) has called the Anglo-Saxon genealogy of democratization in which the combination of early and highly successful British and U.S. democratization has encouraged democratization tendencies elsewhere (at least some times) for the past two centuries in which they have been system leaders. Alternatively, Gunitsky's (2017) hegemonic shock approach has the United States at the inspirational heart of much of the 20th century's democratization spread as autocratic regimes perished in intermittent spikes across time. Modern democratization thus has a strong Anglo-American quality to it as well.

The prevailing regime of international law and organizations owes much to the U.S.-led Bretton Woods initiative in the closing years of World War II which was to usher in a set of rules and major institutions that have become better known by their initials (UN, IMF, IBRD, WB, GATT and so forth). Their initial roles in regulating conflict, investment and trade have morphed into other roles. Maintaining interstate peace by agreeing to stifle any acts of aggression gave way to peace-keeping and then to peace-making. European investment concerns gave way to

¹⁷ Of course, one caveat is that the spread of democratization also expands the number of possibly antagonistic, democratic-autocratic dyads for at least a while.

third world development issues. The rules and institutions have evolved since the end of World War II but they have survived and retain strong U.S. influences, both in terms of funding and whether or not they are allowed to perform their missions.

Thus these first four alternatives are very much about U.S. hegemony or systemic leadership. They share not only a strong U.S. role but also the anticipation that any pacification influences they might have had should have been manifested over a longer period than merely post-Cold War. None of them sprung into action all of a sudden around 1989-91 as long as we ignore the new states that emerged from the former Soviet Union's breakup. So, if they are causal contenders, they should be explaining longer term pacific influences.

Much the same can be said about the next three alternatives in Fettweis' list. If there has been a rights revolution, it is not clear why it would be dated to the past two decades. Perhaps we have become more attentive to rights abuses but it is less clear that more rights are being enjoyed around the world or that an expansion in human rights would necessarily lead quickly to decreased violence. Aging populations, a byproduct of industrialization and the decreased need for large families in a less healthy, agrarian setting are most pronounced in the global North, with the rest of the world slowly catching up. Aging populations could explain less violence in the North but so could many other characteristics of the global North and, again, the demographic changes predated the demise of the Cold War.

The irrationality of interstate conflict has been said to be expanding since World War I, the war to end all wars. World War II did nothing to dispel these sentiments. Nor did the development of nuclear weapons in that war. Interstate war, at least among industrialized states with nuclear weapons, has few, if any attractions. What would or could be gained? But this is not a post-Cold War defined argument either.

That leaves U.S. unipolarity.¹⁸ Alone among the eight, the unipolarity argument is presumably delimited to the post-Cold War era and the reason why the New Peace is compared to armed conflict during the Cold War. The demise of the Soviet Union left the United States as the sole surviving superpower. With only one superpower, the world's power distribution must

¹⁸ Actually, there are other arguments about peace causation that do not make Fettweis' list. The territorial peace (Gibler 2012) is one although Fettweis notes that economic integration has degraded the value of territory. Still other alternatives, however, share the feature of earlier timing than the end of the Cold War.

have become unipolar because bipolarity had evaporated and multipolarity was not yet in evidence. But this unipolarity by default needs to be examined carefully. Fettweis' treatment of unipolarity is initially correct. He notes that it should combine some mixture of military and economic capability. He acknowledges that the distribution of nuclear weapons which had made most of the Cold War period bipolar did not change with the fall of the Soviet Union. He accepts that U.S. economic clout has diminished significantly from its peak in the 1950s and 1960s. Yet, somehow, the post-Cold War era is not only unipolar but remains so today. That conclusion seems odd if one accepts the nuclear and economic caveats and does not insist on polarity being defined exclusively by military capability.

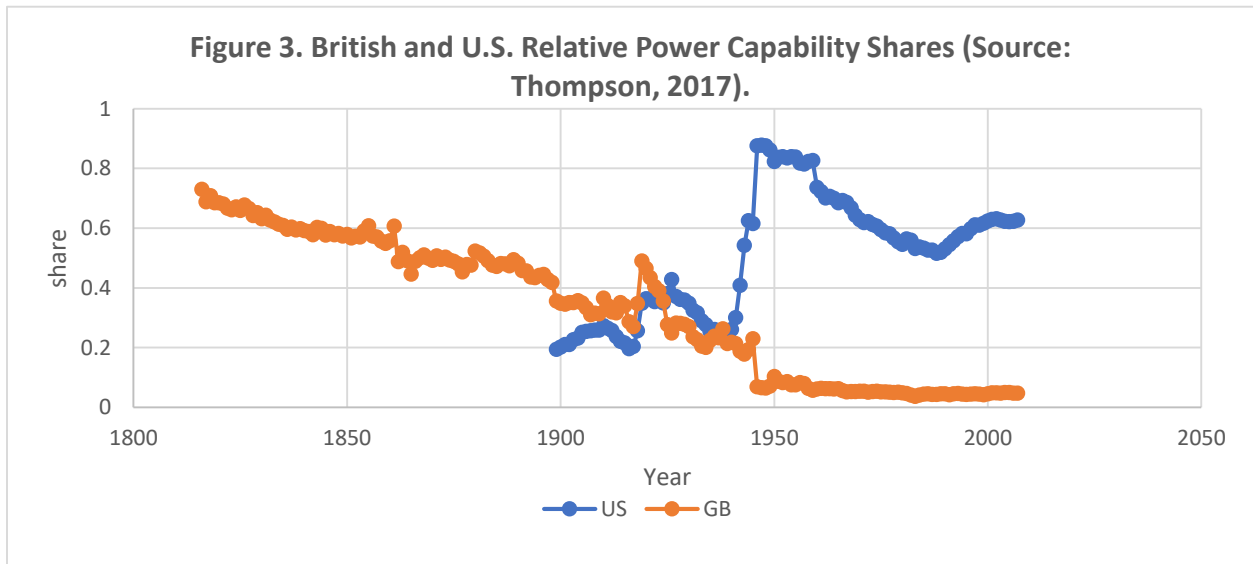
The United States spends much more on its military than any other state and that has been the case at least since 1945 if one adds the costs of nuclear weapons to U.S. military spending. Its monopoly has been the ability to project military power globally – its global reach – in ways that no other state could duplicate. This is a function of its armed services, the resources allocated to military functions, their technology, and U.S. command of the commons. The United States did not have this capability prior to World War II and it may not keep its lead forever but for now it can claim unrivalled global reach. Is that enough to qualify for unipolarity? If it is, there is another timing problem. The United States has possessed and demonstrated this capability, albeit with considerable technological improvement, since World War II in Korea, Vietnam, the Balkans, Afghanistan, and the Middle East. That is not to say that a monopoly on global reach has sufficed to win the day in every outing but then polarity is about power distribution and not how successful the powerful actually prove to be in getting their way.

So, then are both the Cold War and post-Cold War eras different aspects of American unipolarity? We believe that to be the case. Depending on the indicators relied upon, there is an argument for contending that both the Cold War and post-Cold War era were unipolar if one focuses on economic and military capabilities and relies on explicit thresholds of advantage (one state possessing 50% or more = unipolar; two states with 25% or more but less than 50% = bipolar; e.g. Rapkin, Thompson with Christopherson 1979) as opposed to vague pronouncements about how many poles appear to exist at any given time.

Thompson (2017) develops a new index that combines economic and military capabilities. Energy consumption (both absolute and per capita consumption as two separate

sub-components that capture the quantity and quality of economic power), reflecting the industrial revolutions of the late 18th and 19th centuries stand in for economic positioning. A third sub-component assesses military power projection in a way that tries to keep up with the changes in technology. In the 19th century, ships of the line gave way to battleships which, in turn, give way to aircraft carriers, nuclear attack submarines, and nuclear ballistic submarines with variable lethality and accuracy. Land and space equivalents encompass the lethality and accuracy of the land-based nuclear missiles, strategic bombers (from 1916 on) and military satellites.¹⁹

The two energy indices are given the same weight while the power projection shares are doubled in terms of their input so that the resulting index is based half on the two energy shares and half on the power projection shares. Figure 3 focuses solely on the last two global leaders, Britain and the United States. If a 50 percent threshold is applied for unipolarity, Britain qualifies through much of the 19th century while the United States remains above the threshold from the end of World War II on.



Some readers may find this approach too radical given the years of rather ambiguous discussion of polarity in the IR literature. It is also true that the Soviet Union had broken the U.S.

¹⁹ Exactly how these indicators are combined, as well as their sources, are discussed in Hunter and Thompson (2017).

monopoly over nuclear weapons and eventually developed technologies that allowed it to create a formidable assured deterrence posture during the Cold War. Yet, if that is the benchmark for bipolarity, then the post-Cold War world would still be bipolar, given the Russian Federation's substantial nuclear arsenal.

If both the post-1815 and post-1945 periods could be characterized by one state leading in economic and military global reach, then unipolarity is not a unique phenomenon, and its implications for armed conflict should be studied in comparative perspective: comparing not only different epochs of unipolarity in modern international politics, but as well comparing unipolarity conditions with other structural arrangements such as bipolarity and multipolarity. Only then can we assess whether or not unipolar global leadership offers more peace and security, and perhaps the conditions under which it may contribute.

Of course, not all unipolar structural conditions are identical. After the Napoleonic Wars, France, Britain's main rival, was successfully contained for a half century without too much real effort and Britain went virtually unchallenged until the second half of the 19th century. After 1945, one could say that the Soviet Union was contained as well but with considerable effort; the Cold War, instead of being labeled a period of bipolarity, is probably better understood as a condition of *contested* American unipolarity as the United States' leading position was challenged almost immediately even if the main challenger did not really possess the capability to challenge directly. For the most part, surrogates were encouraged to fight the United States on the eastern Eurasian rimland.²⁰

In this context what really changed after the fall of the Soviet Union was not so much the leading U.S. position (albeit declining more in relative economic than in military terms) but rather the absence of a major power challenge to the United States' version of global order. Russia was in disarray in the 1990s and China had decided to pull in its horns and emphasize economic rebuilding until it was in a stronger position to challenge. Of course, from this perspective, the most recent period of unchallenged unipolarity was rather brief. Chinese

²⁰ Some Soviet participation in Korean and Vietnamese fighting is now known but it was carefully concealed at the time.

challenges had begun to re-emerge by 1996 and Russian challenges came later in the latter portion of the first 21st century decade, albeit not nearly at levels existing during the Cold War

If our narrative is correct, then American unipolarity and global leadership existed from World War II to the present. The two phases of the Cold War and post-Cold War eras are ones in which the first phase consists of strong contestation to American leadership, and in the second, contestation is minimal only initially, but the entire era is one of unipolarity. It is not the change from one structural condition to another that is the hallmark of the post-Cold War era as much as the absence of major power challenges to American unipolarity after the Soviet Union disintegrated in its effort to challenge the unipole. Everything else appears to be relatively unchanged.²¹

What does this perspective imply for the relationship between American unipolar leadership and the New Peace? We suggest several consequences. First, assessing unipolarity's effects on the New Peace by comparing changes along various dimensions of armed conflict across the Cold War and post-Cold War eras is inappropriate. It may very well be that some forms of conflict are less manifested in the post-Cold War era, but that outcome is likely to be a function in part of the lack of strong major power contestation to American leadership after 1989 rather than to changes in polarity.²² It is plausible that American unipolarity (or its earlier British cousin) does not produce more peace and security than other structural arrangements, but as we had noted above, making that assessment requires comparisons with other structural conditions (bipolarity, unipolarity).

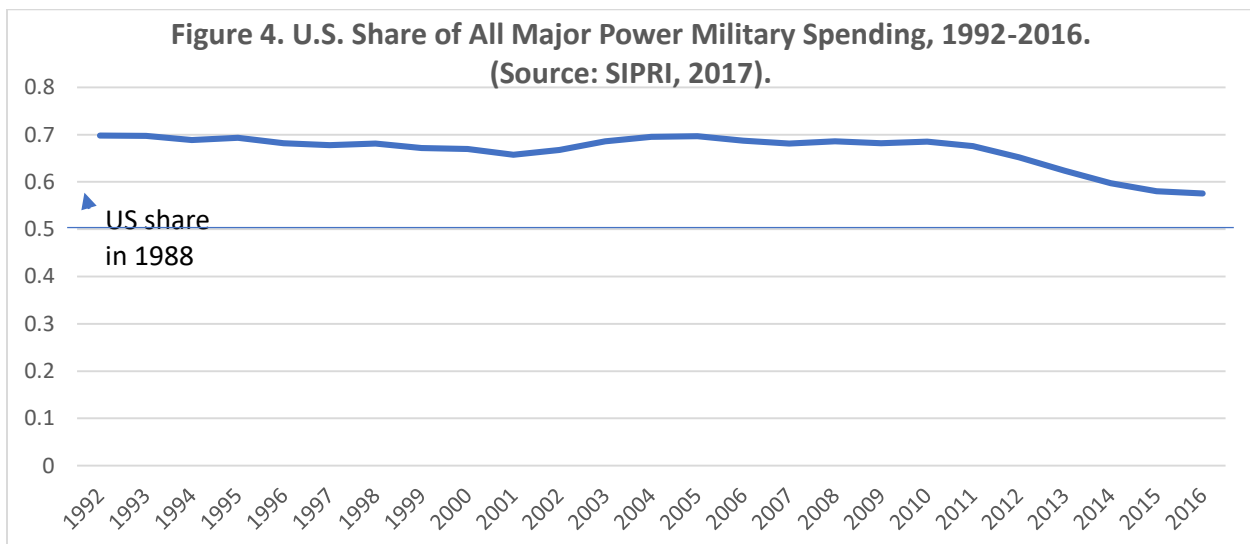
Second, if unipolar global leadership is more than just about economic and military capabilities but also their uses in creating longer patterns of order, then unipolarity's effects should be judged in part by whether or not such mechanisms are in place and working. This is what we had suggested in reference to other "partial" explanations for the New Peace: nuclear

²¹ Of course, the pattern of contestation may be changing again. Russia is now more prepared to challenge the United States on Near Abroad and Middle Eastern issues in the contemporary era even though its economic capability to do so is dubious. China appears to be moving away from its reluctance to challenge the United States while rebuilding in large part because its economic rebuilding seems to be going so well.

²² Contested versus uncontested unipolarity dovetails with our data on fewer interstate conflicts (wars, MIDs per capita, international terrorism) during the era of uncontested unipolarity (post-Cold War). We also suspect that the reduction in international terrorism after 1989 may also be a function of less major power state sponsorship, which was part of the process of contestation during the Cold War.

weapons and nonproliferation norms; active promotion of democratic polities; global economic interdependencies; and the construction of broad regimes and constellations of intergovernmental organizations, to name a few.

In these terms, unipolarity should be judged by its cumulative effect and not just simple changes to levels of military capabilities. Fettweis argues that since U.S. military spending declined after the end of the Cold War, it is difficult to credit U.S. military power with declining violence in general. What is missed in this test is that military spending became even more concentrated after the fall of the Soviet Union and the decline in Russian military spending, and U.S. relative power shares remain substantially above the 50 percent threshold since through the post-Cold War era (Figure 4).²³ There may also be less than a direct link between the U.S. global reach capability and year-to-year military spending. Eventually, declining military spending will lead to diminished capacity but given the extent of the U.S. lead, the lag may be measured in decades, not years.



Third, if unipolarity is in decline, part of that decline could be manifested in the unipole’s changing grand strategies if it is becoming less confident in the mechanisms it had helped to build to maintain order. Fettweis rightfully acknowledges that unipolarity is about more than just raw power and argues that changes to such grand strategies should dovetail with changes in

²³ Major powers are categorized by COW after 1989 as consisting of the U.S., Russian Federation, U.K., France, Japan, and China. Figure 4 begins in 1992 as the first year when SIPRI shows spending estimates for the Russian Federation.

armed conflict if unipolarity matters. Then, he offers as evidence that U.S. grand strategies had varied substantially after the end of the Cold War, while the New Peace continued. We question this historical interpretation if it is meant to indicate that these changes in grand strategies were meant to alter the mechanisms the United States helped to create for global order. It is certainly true that the two Bushes, Clinton, and Obama (let alone Trump) possessed different foreign policy styles. But even the most extreme deviation from the U.S. grand strategy norms prior to the Trump administration, Bush II's unilateralism, eventually receded back to the more usual approach of consulting/enlisting allies. Unless one can make a strong case for the Bush to Obama era's strategic preferences being completely altered from regime to regime, the alternative interpretation that U.S. grand strategy may have changed in preferred tactics but remained roughly constant between 1989 and 2016 is easier to defend. If that is the case, U.S. grand strategies after the Cold War do not rule out some U.S. contribution to declining violence in at least some parts of the world. Only if the Trump grand strategy fails to return to the system leader norm after a number of diplomatic errors, faux pas, and intended slights, will we then have a real test of the U.S. role in fostering pacific trends.

Finally, we need to recognize that even under conditions of unipolarity and globalization the world is not homogeneous. Global leaders will invest more in some regions than in others, and despite their level of interest, some regions will provide different, and perhaps more unsurmountable challenges than others. Variation in international politics based on regions is a long-established principle (e.g. Mackinder 1904). Fettweis recognizes this point but uses it as evidence that unipolarity may be unconnected to the New Peace. He divided regions into four clusters: 1) High unipole interest/high level of violence: Middle East and Southern and Central Asia; 2) High unipole interest/low level of violence: Europe, Pacific Rim, North America; 3) low unipole interest/low level of violence: South America; and 4) low unipole interest/high levels of violence: Africa, FSU. Presumably, the expectation is that high (low) interest should equate to low (high) violence levels if the unipole preferred stability and is thus partially responsible for declining violence. That would mean that the Middle East, Southern and Central Asia, and South America are mis-predicted.²⁴

²⁴ There are no data presented to indicate the level of violence in these regions, nor is there a rationale for the appropriate categorization of these regions (For a discussion of options in regional classification, see Volgy et al 2017).

We are uneasy with the conclusion from this discussion about unipolar interest versus regional conflict suggesting that unipolarity has little to do with armed conflict. We think that both the data and the reasons for armed conflict warrant further consideration, in a comparative, regional perspective. For instance, Central Asia – aside from Afghanistan - does not seem to qualify as a region of high violence. Moreover, some considerable proportion of the violence in the Middle East and Afghanistan after the end of the Cold War is certainly linked to the alleged unipolar power’s attempt to impose its preferred rules of conduct in those areas. Must we also assume that unipoles are always wise in their strategies or efficacious in their policies? South America may be mis-predicted because the unipole had taken a variety of actions *before* the end of the Cold War to minimize armed conflict in that region: these would include the Johnson Doctrine, the square-off with the Soviet Union over Cuba in 1962, the overthrow of the Allende regime in Chile, counterinsurgency warfare in Central and South America, the encouragement of democracy and human rights institutions during the Carter Presidency, and encouraged economic relationships during the Cold War and after.

At the same time, it does not seem illogical that a preponderant state could be credited in varying degrees with contributing to declining violence in some areas while its actions to enforce its rules and preferences are increasing violence in other areas. The assessment could be that the system’s preponderant power’s success is simply uneven – successful in some places and not in others. Thus U.S. concentrated power could be linked to both European and Latin American decreasing violence even though the Middle East and Afghanistan are a different story.

Variation in Armed Conflict across Regions

This brings us to the last major caveat. There is nothing about unipolarity or global leadership that suggests effects that are going to be globally uniform. As Fettweis notes in comparing regions, American unipolar “interest” varies across regions, and as we suggest, so may the unipole’s effectiveness.

How should we expect the leading power to relate to other regions in the world? Historically, we know that leading powers start slowly, often close to home, and gradually expand their orbit. For instance, the United States was initially concerned with its home region, debating whether to conquer Canada and/or Mexico. The Caribbean and selected Pacific islands came next in the 19th and early 20th centuries. But once the United States emerged in the lead

after 1945, its mission had evolved into a responsibility for the functioning of the world economy as its principal global mission, even if only by default. Note that this responsibility did not connote domination or maximal exploitation of the world economy. Rather, the minimal expectation was to keep it functioning and to respond to threats to its continued functioning.

From this perspective, all parts of the world were not equal in significance. Most critical were the core markets (North America, Western Europe, and Japan) of what was to become the advanced industrial world because they produced and consumed most of the world's GDP. As a consequence, the first postwar order of business was to rebuild the core areas that had been devastated as quickly as possible. But economic interaction among the core and its dependency on peripheral resources was and continues to be oriented toward maritime trade. The main trade routes focused on the Atlantic and skirted the Asian Pacific Rim around southern Eurasia to Suez, just as they had for centuries if not millennia via the maritime Silk Road routes. The Atlantic trade routes were relatively easy to police in non-wartime. The regions around the southern Eurasian rim were not easy to police, especially given local insurgencies and interstate wars. Wars in Korea and Vietnam were about which groups of local politicians and economic-political order formulas would be triumphant. Korea was a draw and the Indochinese wars were a loss. The local fighting in South Asia drew in opposing sides to back different contenders. Something similar happened in the petroleum-rich Middle East. All of this is to say that maintaining the world economy proved to be difficult in some places and much more difficult in some places than in others. Major errors were made in different decades. Overall, it proved hard to translate leadership in the world economy into influence in regions adjacent to the eastern and southern Eurasian trade routes. While global leadership regulated warfare among major powers to some considerable extent, the lead position did not always have the same effect in Korea, Vietnam, or the Middle East.

World economy maintenance helps account for differential interests in various regions. Regions most critical to the world economy are apt to receive more attention by the globally leading power. But a global leading position and differentiated interest does not equate to uniform success. Western Europe and Japan could be re-built in part due to the great interest within these regions to accomplish the same goal. North Korea could be stopped from expanding south; North Vietnam could not be stopped in its southern expansion. South Asian

and Middle Eastern quarrels have proven very difficult to shape or curb. Thus, it is wrong to expect the system's leading power to be able to accomplish the same outcomes around the world. What should be expected is a great deal of unevenness predicated on the problems in translating global economic and military clout into local political influence, including over and under-commitments and simply backing the wrong horses. Therefore, we need to augment our global analysis by looking at regional theaters. We should also not be surprised that strong U.S. involvement in some areas increases violence for a time which then recedes along with U.S. involvement.

Part of the difficulty in addressing variation in conflict across regions is due to two vexing issues: one issue pertains to an appropriate delineation of what is a region and the appropriate method of classifying states into regions. For instance, is Afghanistan part of Central Asia (a region that did not seem to exist prior to the breakup of the Soviet Union) or part of South Asia (where it is linked in terms of its political interactions with both Pakistan and India)? Should we treat Africa as one region, as Fettweis implies (2017:437) or as several regions (Lemke 2002, Volgy et al. 2017a) that would include West Africa, Southern Africa, Central Africa, and the Horn of Africa, with each region delineated by the ability of region members to reach each other and by politically interacting with each other in a manner uniquely different than with members of other regions (Volgy et al. 2017b)

The second issue is the absence of strong theories that help us to explain in a comparative perspective conflicts within regions. It is clear that some regions, as Fettweis notes in the case of the Middle East, pose overwhelming problems both for the region's members and for outside powers in seeking to minimize conflict and violence. In other regions this is less the case, and in other regions still, the conditions that induce conflict have changed over time, creating more pacifying conditions.

One comparative theoretical perspective (Volgy et al 2017b) suggests that a combination of four factors (the presence/absence of a regional hierarchy; changing global dynamics; a set of "fault lines"; and a series of pacifying conditions)²⁵ combine to help account for differences in

²⁵ Hierarchy is indicated when a region contains either a regional power or at least one major power; changing global dynamics refer to the presence/absence of global polarization reflected by the absence/presence of the Cold War and defense pacts with outside major powers; fault lines include the following variables: territorial

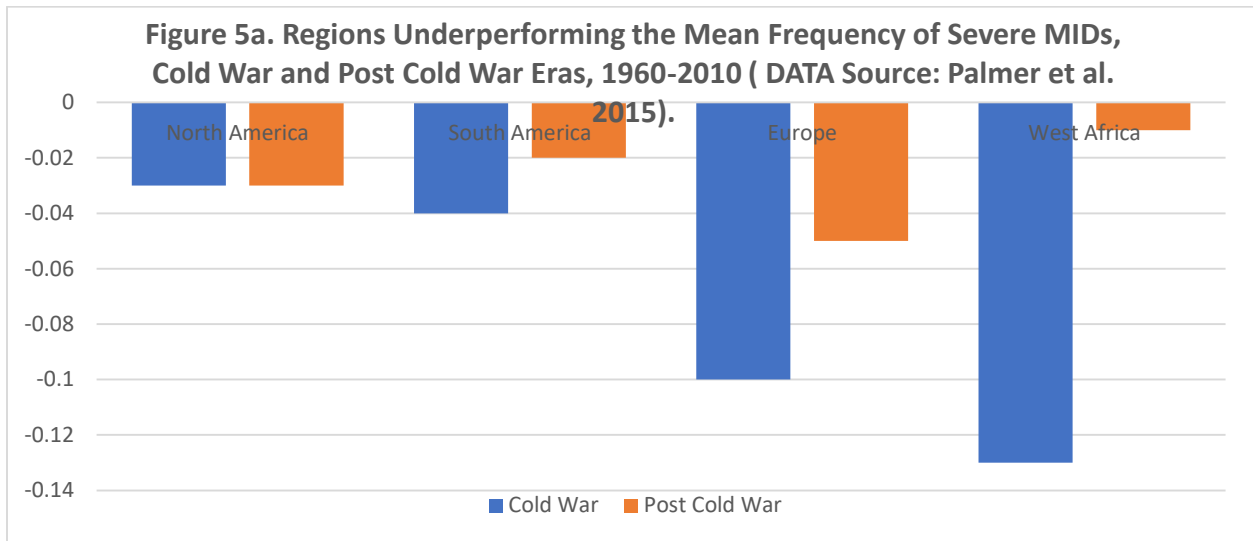
regional inter-state conflict. For instance, regions vary according to the number of rivalries and the rivalry density field that may exist in a region (an important fault line); regions with a very thick rivalry density field are likely to be the most conflict-ridden in international politics. Unsurprisingly, the Middle East is a huge outlier in terms of both the number of rivalries it contains and the thickness of its rivalry density field. It is also the most conflict-ridden region in international politics. Finally, it is almost the last region a major power can walk away from as long as that power's economy is dependent on petroleum, or on a global economy that is dependent on petroleum. When the unipole expresses a strong interest in creating order in the Middle East, it is encountering conditions that simply may not allow it to be very successful, and in fact its involvement may simply exacerbate further conflicts in the region.

Fettweis suggests that if unipolarity is working to dampen conflict, then the unipole's attention should covary with differences in armed conflicts across regions. He claims (Table 1, p.438) that three regions are mis-predicted: the Middle East, "South and Central Asia" and South America (low U.S. attention but low U.S. violence). We have addressed the point about South America earlier: the region became pacified prior to the end of the Cold War, but much of that pacification follows active U.S. involvement in the hemisphere, and there is no reason for the unipole to continue to be actively concerned about the region after Cold War's end. The Middle East remains both the most conflict-ridden of all regions after the Cold War and a focus of U.S. attention, but as we had indicated, also contains conditions that make it the most combustible of all regions, and the place where the unipole is least likely to succeed.

That leaves the third case of "South and Central Asia". Frankly, we do not know what states compose this region. According to both Volgy et al 2017a and Zakhirova 2012, there may have been an actual Central Asian region during the 1990s, but it dissolved again as its member states no longer interacted uniquely enough with each other to constitute a region. Prior to 1990 and the dissolution of the Soviet Union, there did not appear to be a Central Asian region. For partly that reason (but also because that fit corresponds to the nature of its interactions with other South Asian states) we classify Afghanistan as belonging to South Asia.

claims, rivalries, civil wars; pacifying conditions include joint membership in IGOs, regime similarity (democratic polities), and trade interdependencies (Volgy et al 2017b).

Figures 5a through 5c compare regions, both during the Cold War and in the post-Cold War era, on only one dimension of conflict: severe (4,5) MIDs between states. Regional classifications are based on Rhamey 2012, and Volgy et al 2017b.²⁶ Comparisons across regions are based on the extent to which a region, controlling for its size, underperforms or overperforms the global mean on severe MIDs. We focus on under versus overperformance since we are interested in regional variation, regardless of whether or not MIDs are declining overall from one era to the next.



As Figure 5a illustrates, four regions (North America, South America, Europe, and West Africa) underperform the global mean for severe MIDs across both Cold War and post-Cold War eras. All four contain regional hierarchies, as suggested in our earlier discussion, and in three of them, active involvement by the U.S. during the Cold War (and prior in the case of South America).

²⁶ We make two changes to the initial classification scheme in order to make comparisons over time feasible. First, for purposes of comparison, we freeze the latest (the decade of 2001-2010) and apply its membership criteria to the entire time frame; second, we take border states that primarily interact with their closest neighbors and add them to the existing regions. For example, in the last decade there are fourteen states that cluster together in a grouping we call the Middle East. Those remain the same Middle Eastern states across time (unless they are not independent (e.g. Syria during unification with Egypt, UAE prior to its legal existence)).

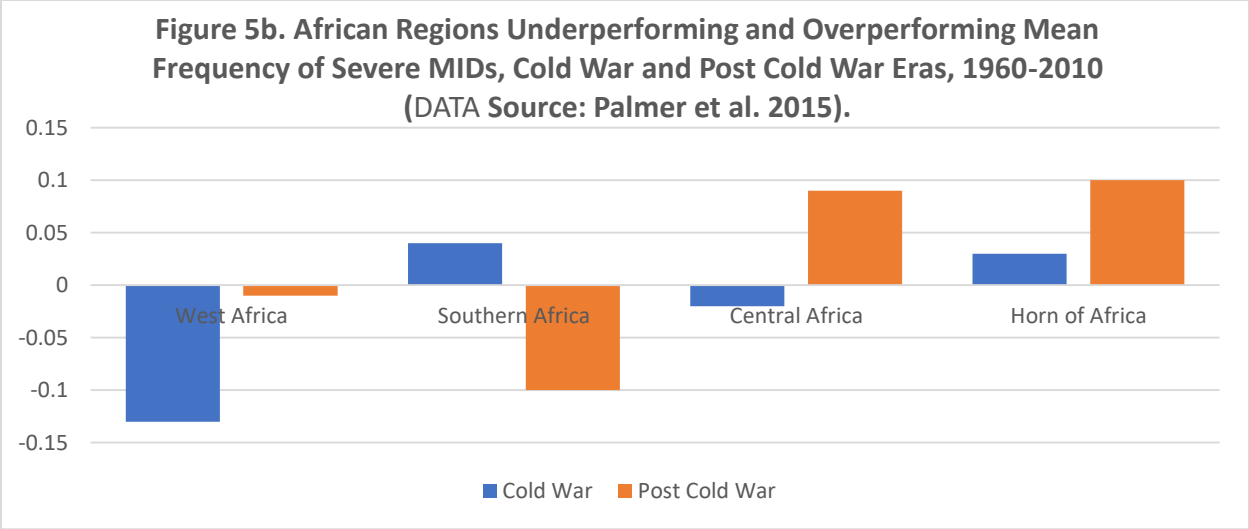
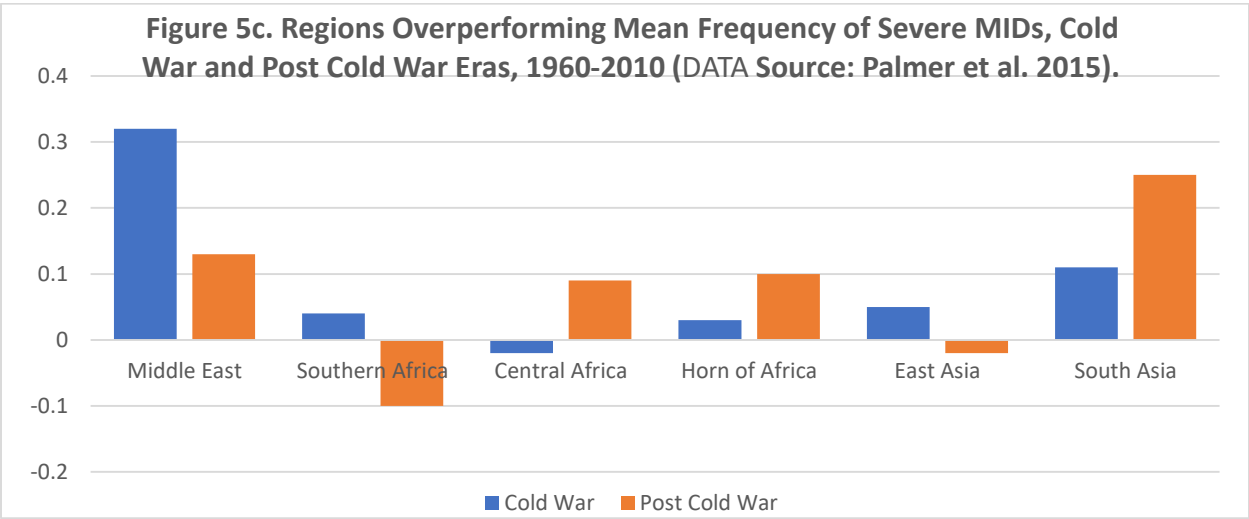


Figure 5b illustrates a view of sub-Saharan Africa disaggregated into specific regions. Fettweis suggests that warfare in Africa between states “is at an all-time low, as is relative US interest outside of counter-terrorism and security assistance” (2017: p. 438). When it comes to severe MID, we see a more nuanced picture. In fact, both Central Africa and the Horn outperform the global mean for MID after the Cold War. Equally important, the two regions containing regional powers (Nigeria for both periods and South Africa in Southern Africa after the Cold War) underperform the global norm, consistent with our comparative theoretical framework. We raise this point in order to underscore our earlier suggestion: probing for the causes of armed conflict requires multivariate explanations, including conditions associated with different regions.



Finally, Figure 5c illustrates regions that have overperformed the global mean on severe MIDs in either or both eras. We note first the regions experiencing major change: Southern Africa moves from overperforming to underperforming as the Republic of South Africa moved from apartheid-based pariah status to becoming a regional power in Southern Africa (Cline et al 2011), a region which now qualifies as having hierarchy in the post-Cold War era. Additionally, East Asia moves from being an overperformer to underperformer as it acquires regional hierarchy in the form of two states with major power status (China and Japan, Volgy et al. 2011). The two African regions without hierarchy overperform the global mean, as does the Middle East. The remaining region – South Asia – represents an interesting case that is also consistent with multivariate explanations. It contains hierarchy in the form of a regional power (India), but one that is involved with both a major rivalry and with territorial disputes (two of the major fault lines in our theoretical approach). It is the only regional power that is involved with both fault lines, presumably reducing its ability to impose order in the region. Adding Afghanistan into that mix, and the inability of either the U.S. or the former Soviet Union to impose their will on that country, shows a region that now actually surpasses the Middle East in severe MIDs during the post-Cold War era.

Thus, interpreting differential regional behavior is very much a matter of expectations. If one does not assume homogeneity, heterogeneity should be anticipated. Moreover, the leading state, challenged or otherwise, should be expected to have regional biases that lead to high involvement in some and low involvement in others. Still, high involvement cannot be equated with a high probability of success. Major powers cannot apply all of their capabilities in distant regions. They also make strategic errors. Finally, high levels of regional violence may reflect attempts to impose order from outside the region just as it may reflect the presence or absence of important local characteristics that work to constrain or encourage conflict.

Conclusions

Two questions are at the core of our examination. Is there good evidence for a post-Cold War Peace and, if so, what might explain it? The answer to the first question is relatively clearcut. It should come as no surprise that the world has not abruptly become a peaceful place but the trend lines for some of the most overt indicators such as inter-state wars, militarized inter-state disputes, and “international” terrorism are moving in a more pacific direction. These

types of conflict tend to be less frequent after the end of the Cold War than before. Other types of conflict such as domestic terrorism, intra-state conflicts in the form of civil wars, conflicts between states and non-state actors, and perhaps some not examined here such as genocide have moved in the opposite direction, with increases in the post-Cold War era.

Whether all of these changes can be attributed to the presence or absence of a Cold War is another matter. We have good reason to think that both inter-state and intra-state conflicts (or any type of conflict) are unlikely to be susceptible to a univariate explanation. There are multiple candidates for peace drivers and it may turn out that many of them are playing some role. While it may be tempting to either embrace or dismiss the almost perfect post-Cold War unipolarity candidate, we need to move cautiously on this variable. A strong case can be made for unipolarity being present through both the Cold War and post-Cold War periods, albeit declining over time. What really changed or varied was whether adversarial major powers challenged U.S. predominance. The Soviet challenge persisted throughout the length of the Cold War. Russian and Chinese challenges were relatively weak or absent in the first decade of the post-Cold War era popularly associated with unipolarity. Now they have re-emerged, but not yet at levels approximating the challenge to the unipole during the Cold War. Still it would be difficult to link the absence of challengers to more peaceful behavior. The two most recent Gulf wars might not have occurred, for instance, if Iraq had had some level of major power protection. Yet the very ubiquity of U.S. predominance as a factor encouraging other sources of more peaceful behavior (democratization, globalization, liberal institutions) works against dismissing predominance/unipolarity too quickly.

In particular, we should also be wary of demanding that the effects of U.S. predominance be uniform throughout the globe. System leaders are not equally interested in all regions all of the time. Threats to the home base and to the continued functioning of the world economy usually rate more highly than distant, land-locked areas that are deemed to be marginal to trade and globalization. Some places are also simply tougher nuts to crack when it comes time to push for pacification. Moreover, repeated interventions can just make the local problems worse.

At the same time, it is important to stress that peace and conflict manifest themselves differently in different regions. Global peace calculations implicitly assume some kind of net regional assessment that is rarely made explicit. Some regions are fairly peaceful while others

are not. Thus, we can contemplate general answers to general trends but in doing so we may be overlooking more local variables (such as the presence of regional hierarchy or the extent of regional rivalries) that are also at work.

Overall, assessing the relative contributions of various factors to more pacific behavior is like health policy. It is more complicated than it seems. None of this should discourage assessment attempts but the strategies employed need to mirror the complexity of the problem at hand. The examination of explicit empirical data is difficult to avoid. Otherwise, the assessment of structural thresholds and behavior are apt to be too casual. Then, too, if no single variable is likely to account for movements toward peace, we need to privilege multivariate assessments over evaluations that concentrate on the possible effects of one variable at a time – especially when that single variable has multiple links to other candidate variables. At the same time, throwing away the salience of unipolarity and global leadership’s dampening effects on conflicts is not a wise strategy without more systematic comparisons to other structural conditions that have existed in modern international politics.

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