
Back to the Future: Predicting the International System

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The future is endlessly fascinating. It becomes particularly compelling in times of crisis such as the end of the Cold War for which some—including President Clinton—even express nostalgia precisely because it seems in retrospect to have been so predictable.¹ Paradoxically, understanding the future seems more desirable as it looks more difficult.

Unlike prophecy, prediction begins with some construction of the past which is then projected into the future. The present schema suggests a cyclical model of the international system since its beginning in the late fifteenth century. It situates the present in this series and then extends the pattern as a source of insights into the future.

The future is by definition hypothetical until it happens. Then it is no longer future but history. These predictions must therefore remain tentative and are meant less as a rigid recipe for the future than a framework for inquiry, another perspective on this eternal enigma.

Cycles of War

The European international system can be envisaged as a series of periods that recur in a repetitive pattern within the system since the end of the fifteenth century. The history of the state system is generally written in terms of conventional periods which the present analysis accepts. In doing so, it focuses on the phenomena of war/change and peace/continuity. When the periods are compared in these

terms, they seem to be characterized by probing, adjusting, or hegemonic wars. Probing wars test but leave intact the existing state system. During periods of adjusting wars the international system is accommodated to changes in power but not jeopardized. Hegemonic wars threaten the system of independent states with the possible domination by one. These periods are relatively constant, each lasting about a generation. They likewise repeat themselves in a notably consistent pattern since the generally accepted beginning of the modern European states system in the late fifteenth century: probing-adjusting-probing-hegemonic-probing-adjusting, etc. Periods characterized by probing wars recur every generation, those dominated by adjusting and hegemonic wars roughly every century.²

This conceptualization is rooted in a cluster of widely accepted and unexceptional assumptions. European state relations operated as a system with external limits and internal patterns of conduct. Independent states behaved in increasingly codified ways, their purpose being to survive by protecting and ideally expanding their power. They did so if possible by peace but if necessary by war which was an accepted tool of policy and the ultimate measure of power. There developed a balance of power, that is, an awareness of shared interest in resisting domination by one member and thus destruction of the system. The system was defined by a shifting and expanding geography beginning in central and western Europe, then incorporating eastern Europe and overseas colonies.

A number of criticisms can be leveled at such a model. Some argue that periodization is fraught with difficulties and ultimately unjustified, even misleading. This problem must be acknowledged: history is undeniably complex, and it is hard enough to understand one short span let alone compare periods. Nonetheless, periodization remains a basic historical tool without which the past would be even murkier than it is. Furthermore some contend that comparison and analogy are impractical because of history's uniqueness. While this uniqueness is undeniable, comparison and analogy are essential if history is ever to be more than mere chronology. Unless it is possible to group similar events such as wars and revolutions, we can never impose historical order or even construct a historical vocabulary. Thus the specific claims for periods and repetitions should be closely scrutinized, but the basic assumptions are fundamental to the historical enterprise. It can also be argued that the schema is western or Eurocentric. This, however, is unavoidable, since the system is power-driven and western power has dominated the system. Finally, it can be claimed that technology has fundamentally altered war. But since the pattern has survived both industrialism and nuclear weapons, it is reasonable to assume that it may persist in future.

Although it is possible to perceive such a pattern without trying to explain it, one is tempted to speculate. Like that of most societies, the history of Europe can be understood as a contest between forces of change and institutions of continuity. Society would be in constant turmoil if institutions did not successfully resist change, but it would stagnate if the forces of change did not periodically

succeed. Thus pressure builds, violent change occurs—about every generation, in my view—and the system is either adjusted to moderate changes in the distribution of power or threatened by major ones. The analogy of the earthquake is perhaps instructive: pressure is continual, is resisted, builds, moderate quakes occur, a new equilibrium is created, new pressure builds, occasionally big quakes occur, etc. Like the earth's crust, international relations can be seen as a system which exhibits rough patterns.

Hegemonic Periods: 1789–1815 and 1914–1945

If one accepts this cyclical construct as a valid starting point for comprehending the past international system, it becomes necessary to situate the present within it. For this purpose the recent past is most relevant. According to the schema, the French Revolutionary and Napoleonic hegemonic wars (1789–1815) were succeeded by probing wars (1815–48), then by adjusting wars (1848–71), then by new probing wars (1871–1914), then by the hegemonic World Wars (1914–45), and finally by the probing wars of the Cold War (1945–89). The schema suggests that the period after 1989 corresponds with the adjusting wars of 1848–71. To secure this point, it must be demonstrated that the hegemonic world wars (1914–45) correspond with the French Revolutionary/Napoleonic wars (1789–1815) and that the probing Cold War (1945–89) resembles 1815–48.

The French revolutionary and Napoleonic wars and the world wars are characterized as hegemonic eras because they threatened the existence of the international system. The critical issue during both periods was formation of alliances against the hegemonic power. As long as the opponents of Revolutionary/Napoleonic France failed to take the threat seriously, it was able to divide and conquer; so in World War I the Germans sought to shatter the Triple Entente and in World War II succeeded until the Grand Alliance was formed against them. The hegemonic states succeeded because of superior power—France's population, Germany's industrial development, and the mass mobilization of both through state discipline. Both succeeded initially because of the sporadic participation of their opponents: in the French wars Britain and Russia did not always join, in World War I Russia dropped out and the United States came in late, while in World War II Russia, Japan and the United States entered tardily. Both sets of wars evolved from relatively limited, professional warfare toward total, mass, industrialized warfare. Both began with the assumption of short, inexpensive wars but produced long, exhausting conflicts. Both were directed by charismatic, able leaders who understood how to consolidate and manipulate power.

Both eras involved the building and unbuilding of states: in the French wars the dissolution of the Holy Roman Empire, the re-constitution of the Low Countries, Switzerland and Italy, the near-extinction of Prussia, and the final partition of Poland; in the German wars the dissolution of the Ottoman and

Habsburg Empires, then the establishment of successor states to both. Both eras spawned revolutionary ideologies and dictatorial responses: during the first radical French democracy and then Napoleonic militarism and traditional authoritarianism, in the second Bolshevism and Fascism/ Nazism. Both likewise aroused defensive patriotism and ethnic fervor. These two European "civil wars" jeopardized European imperialism: each era began with European control which was contested and then reduced during the following generation. The similarities are consequently striking and would seem to justify the claim that the two periods are validly characterized as hegemonic.

Periods of Probing Wars: 1815–1848 and 1945–1989

The periods which follow each of them likewise evidence remarkable commonalities. Both are characterized by probing wars, i.e., conflicts which test but ultimately confirm the prevailing international system. In contrast with the hegemonic eras immediately before them, these are relatively stable both internationally and internally. Both are comprehensible in terms of the systems established to contain the previous hegemonic power—Vienna to resist France, Versailles-Yalta-Tokyo to restrain Germany and Japan—and international organizations were established to maintain the arrangement—first the Concert of Europe and then the League of Nations and the United Nations. The threatening states were occupied—France briefly, Japan and Germany somewhat longer—and the boundaries established in both cases survived largely intact during the period. Since rivalries amongst the victors threatened their cooperation—in both periods the westerners feared a Russian threat to Europe—1815–48 deserves the sobriquet "cold war" almost as much as the later period. This tension notwithstanding, during both eras the dominant powers managed to cooperate well enough to maintain an advantageous status quo. The role of the military in the two periods varies: in the earlier the large military establishments of the Napoleonic wars were built down, whereas in the Cold War they were maintained and budgets skyrocketed. Despite high cost and tension, however, the net effect of atomic weapons may have been to deter great power war and confirm the existing power structure.

During both periods crises involving the powers occurred but all were settled without conflict between great powers. In contrast to the periods before and after when all the powers went to war, during the period 1815–48 none did. The powers became involved in wars during the 1945–89 period but all were against surrogates or colonial groups and none in the heartland of Europe or with each other, except for Korea after the entry of China. All these conflicts in the end confirmed the distribution of power. In both periods there were notable statesmen—for example, Metternich, Mao, Stalin, and Churchill—whose major accomplishment was precisely their avoidance of direct conflict.

In both periods new states were established, most notably on the periphery of Europe—for example, Greek and Serbian independence from the Ottoman Empire—and the colonial world in South America from 1815–48 and in Africa and Asia from 1945–89. States were also unbuilt, most notably Belgium/Holland during the first, and the partitioning of Korea, China, Germany and Vietnam—the latter two then reunited—during the second. Even those which escaped great power control—Vietnam and Afghanistan—demonstrated the system's stability.

Both periods involved ideology though in less threatening form than during the revolutionary periods before them. From 1815–48 liberal democracy, identified with Britain and France, confronted revived authoritarianism—Austria, Prussia and Russia, the so-called Holy Alliance—while from 1945–89 democratic capitalism in the West contested with the authoritarian communism of the Soviet Union and the People's Republic of China. But, however much these ideologies were espoused and even believed, in neither case did their exponents pursue them to the point of great power conflict. The ideology of nationalism in the sense of national self-determination also was a factor in both eras. In the first it was regarded as a threat to the system and indeed internally by the eastern conservative powers of Austria, Prussia and Russia but less by the western states of Britain and France. During the Cold War Soviet communism resisted eastern European national self-determination while fomenting revolts in the capitalist Third World. Most notable in both periods is the contrast between failed European national self-determination and successful colonial national liberation.

In fact, modern Europe has never had fewer extra-European colonies than it did by the end of these two periods. The breakaway of the South American colonies and exclusion of foreign influence from the Western Hemisphere according to Monroe Doctrine from 1815–48 is echoed by the virtual dissolution of the European empires during the Cold War. Thus the copious similarities seem to justify characterizing both as eras of probing wars.

Periods of Adjusting Wars: 1848–1871 and 1989–2020

If these comparisons are persuasive, they suggest that 1848 may correspond with 1989 and that the adjusting wars of 1848–71 could provide some clues about the immediate future, even 1989–2020.

During the period 1848–1871 a series of great power wars adjusted the system to new relations, above all, to the shift of power from the dominant Vienna powers of Austria, Russia, and England to a united Germany. All the great powers fought at least one war with another and all, except Britain, lost at least one. These wars were more momentous than the probing wars of the previous generation but not as ominous to the system as had been the Revolutionary/ Napoleonic wars. These events may offer hints for the period 1989–2020. However difficult it may be to imagine today's powers fighting each other, after 1989 the

victorious states of 1945—the United States, Russia, England and France—may have to resist pressure from Japan, Germany and China, the rising defeated states of 1945. Crises within the old powers or in the international market place could cause them to become desperate. In short, the analogy with the period 1848–1871 suggests a conflict-ridden generation ahead.

The nature of these possible future conflicts may be suggested by a closer look at the 1848–71 wars. Facing down the Prussians and defeating the Italians and Hungarians during the Revolutions of 1848–9, Austria and Russia preserved the Vienna system. It would, however, be undone by 1871, the two victors of 1848–9, Russia and Austria, defeated and isolated from each other, and the defeated of 1848–9, Piedmont, Prussia and Hungary, victorious by 1871. These events evidence some revealing similarities and differences with events since 1989. Like Austria of 1848–71, Russia after 1989 lost its eastern European satellites and some sub-nationalities but the loss occurred rapidly and without violence.

Russian defeat in the Crimean War (1854–6) marked not only the end of its cooperation with Austria and Prussia in preserving the Vienna Settlement but also the frustration of Russian aspirations in the Balkans/Mediterranean. Like Russia after the Crimean War, the Soviet Union is generally regarded as the big loser in the Cold War, a consequence—as in the Crimean War—of internal breakdown and loss of will though—unlike the Crimean War—without military defeat. Future Russian military defeat is not out of the question, however, in such areas as the Balkans, Chechnya, or central Asia as a result of extreme Russian nationalism.

Shaken by the Crimean War, the Vienna Settlement was further eroded when an isolated Austria was defeated by France, whose Emperor Napoleon III facilitated the unification of Italy and thereby sought to become the patron of all central European nationalism. If we see the Soviet Union of 1989 as the Austria of 1859, then the demise of Soviet influence in eastern Europe becomes comparable with Austria's in Italy and then Germany. Likewise Germany since 1989 can be seen as the France of 1859, the former defeated power now playing mentor to emerging east European nationalities but—like the France of 1859—anxious not to establish domination by force.

The Vienna Settlement was finally dismantled when Prussia expelled Austria from Germany in the Austro-Prussian War (1866) and became the major continental military power by defeating France and uniting Germany (1870–1). The reunification of Germany in 1990 echoes these events except that it was achieved neither by war nor by Prussia. Nonetheless, while German aggression seems unlikely since 1989, it is not impossible since its present power is reminiscent of nothing so much as Germany after 1871. The defeats of Russia, Austria and France between 1856 and 1871 evoke the collapse of Russia since the Cold War and the decline of France and England. European union is not an airtight solu-

tion: designed in part to domesticate German power, it may prove the vehicle for expanding it. However much Kohl subscribes to Bismarck's assertion that Germany was satiated, his successors may not.

What these wars were not was as important as what they were. Mostly bilateral, limited conflicts, they did not escalate into hegemonic wars threatening the system. Napoleon III discontinued his support of Piedmont against Austria before Austria was completely defeated, as did Bismarck in his victories over Austria and France which

might otherwise have caused Russia and England to form a grand coalition against Prussia. Both were testimony to the finite though significant goal of the

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period's dominant statesmen to adjust but not revolutionize the system. These events suggest possible precedents for 1989–2020. Regarding the use of nuclear weapons unlikely in limited conflicts but possible in revolutionary ones, revisionist states such as Germany, Japan, China, and Russia might risk adjusting wars but avoid hegemonic ones.

Marking a sharp change of diplomacy, the conservative Vienna Concert of 1815–48 was succeeded during 1848–71 by the revisionist Realpolitik of Bismarck, Cavour and Napoleon III, who for the first time since Napoleon I plotted wars. Whatever their faults, these statesmen are remarkable for their ambitions and abilities compared with their cautious and conservative predecessors. Although notable statesmen—for example, Gorbachev and Kohl—have already left their mark on the post-1989 stage, future tumultuous adjustments may yet produce their Bismarck, Cavour and Napoleon III.

The pattern of alliances altered during the period 1848–71. Since Vienna the powers had been roughly grouped in eastern Holy and western liberal alliances. But during this period they shifted radically and quickly, reflecting the period's jostling events. The generation after 1989 may experience similar realignments. Cold War bipolarity has ended, the Warsaw Pact dissolved and NATO—without its Siamese twin—seems disoriented. Already old allies conflict and old enemies cooperate. The period 1848–71 reminds us that alliances are not forever.

In the realm of state-unbuilding/building there may also be some previews. There was some unbuilding during the period 1848–71: Austria lost its Italian provinces and was reconstructed by the Compromise of 1867 into the Austro-Hungarian Dual Monarchy, while France lost Alsace-Lorraine to Prussia after its

defeat in 1871. More notable was the state building, most importantly the unification of Italy and Germany, as the United States risked unbuilding but then reimposed union after the Civil War. Centralization occurred widely, from the American North's domination over its south, Prussian and Piedmontese incorporation of theirs, Napoleon III's centralization of Second Empire France, centralization within Austria and Hungary, and even Japan's reinstitution of Meiji rule. There are some echoes since 1989. While the unbuilding of the Soviet Union is the most notable instance, Yugoslavia and Czechoslovakia provide others and it is conceivable that some of the Soviet successor states like Ukraine and Georgia might deconstruct. These might be joined by such divergent societies as Belgium, Canada, African tribally fractious states such as Rwanda, or many of the 90 percent of the world's states which have significant ethnic minorities. There are at the same time cases of state building, notably Germany, which could be replicated by Korea and China.

Ideology played a contradictory role during 1848–71. Although the revolutions of 1848 seemed to lend credibility to Marx's spectre haunting Europe, by 1871 a considerable portion of the masses were incorporated at least officially into the body politic. Since 1989 democracy has haunted eastern Europe but generally been adapted to the existing states and not infrequently even coopted by former communists. An apparently more threatening spectre during 1848–71 was Metternich's other phobia, nationalism, but it too was harnessed by statesmen to the business of national unification. Since 1989 ethnic strife has reached epidemic proportions with all indications that it will increase. The present ideology for which there was little precedent during the 1848–71 period is fundamentalist religion.

There are what may prove to be revealing hints during 1848–71 of the West's future relations with the Third World. Although largely focused at home during the years 1848–71, the Europeans and Americans slightly expanded their influence. While maintaining their old possessions, the British asserted greater control over India and the French built the Suez canal and began to contest British influence in southeast Asia. In the Crimean War Russia sought to expand its influence in the Ottoman Empire but ended by incorporating it into the European state system. A series of successful wars extended western influence in China, the Americans "opened" Japan, and the Russians pushed to the Pacific. European expansion during this period was notable by comparison to the de-colonization of the generation before 1848 but minimal compared to the generation after 1871. If we see this as a precedent for the future, it suggests that the West may seek to preserve its influence where it exists and to extend it by indirect means, pressure to "open" other societies like Japan and even intervention when it seems necessary—for example, in Iraq, Haiti, Panama, and Somalia. Despite the economic imbalance between developed and non-developed world, however, for the moment the less developed world may be able to resist imposition of neo-

colonialism.

Periods of Probing Wars: 1871–1914 and 2020–2060

If it is hazardous to speculate on the near future, it is even more risky to plot distant events, but the scheme's continuity invites speculation. As the adjusting wars of 1848–1871 were followed by the probing wars of 1871–1914, so the predicted adjusting wars of 1989–2020 are projected to be succeeded by probing wars of 2020–60. The salient characteristics of the period 1871–1914 can thus give us a very general guide to the events of 2020–60.

The most striking feature of 1871–1914 was the international system's stability. It was a period of probing wars, more often non-violent diplomatic crises, which tested but confirmed the borders and distribution of power as of 1871. There was no war between European powers and only two—Russia and Britain—fought a war at all during the period. It proved feasible to accommodate the ubiquitous shift of power, most notably Germany, within the European system and the United States and Japan outside it. Notwithstanding defeats during the previous period, the established powers—Britain, France, Russia and Austria-Hungary—grew and continued to play the traditional great power role. Taking these general features as a model, the period 2020–60 might also be one of non-violent probing amongst the powers confirming the status quo of 2020.

The crises of 1871–1914 involved three basic issues: the European core, the Balkan periphery and the colonial world. The European status quo was tested but confirmed in the early years immediately after 1871 and remained secure until the eve of World War I. The Balkan balance was probed during the 1870s and 1880s but proved stable and then "put on ice" for a generation. More recurrent during the late nineteenth century were Anglo-French and Anglo-Russian colonial frictions which were then transformed by German colonial ambitions, British difficulties with the Boers and Russian defeat by Japan; all combined to produce an Anglo-Russian-French colonial detente during the first decade of the 20th century. Although dramatic, neither this imperial contest nor the revived Austro-Russian Balkan rivalry caused World War I, which broke out in 1914 only when the great powers' existence and the state system were threatened. Similar patterns can be projected for the period 2020–60. After the adjustments of 1989–2020, the preponderance of power would confirm the new status quo at the center and allow the powers the luxury of dominating the Third World. During the era 2020–60 change would, however, unavoidably continue, possibly causing old powers such as France, England, Italy, and Russia to decline and new powers, such as Germany, Japan, China, the United States, and the Asian "tigers," to become more powerful. Since what would seem normal expansion to one could appear encroachment to another, a new series of hegemonic wars could erupt around 2060.

Although less outstanding than the 1848–71 war leaders, a cluster of able statesmen emerged during 1871–90, shared a conservative agenda, and was presided over by Bismarck, the former revisionist now turned conservative. But their successors during 1890–1914 were at once less able and confronted with more intractable problems. The character of alliances also evolved from conservative during the early years to more unsettling on the eve of war. The role of military strength likewise evolved from deterrence to threat, an unstable barometer of shifting state power. A similar series of events can be imagined for the period 2020–60. Conservative, able statesmen during the early years may be succeeded by less conservative or capable leaders facing the increasingly insoluble problems of ominous alliances and growing military power as 2060 approaches.

In contrast with 1848–71, there was little state-building or unbuilding during 1871–1914. Austria-Hungary and the Balkan states gained territory at Ottoman expense, but a revolt of Habsburg and Romanov sub-nationalities failed to materialize. There was, however, considerable state centralization as governments sought to coopt the masses by compulsory education and military service. Likewise after the major adjustments of 1989–2020, little state-building or unbuilding might occur during 2020–60. Despite the growth of state power and efforts to incorporate the masses during 2020–60, widespread regionalism, ethnicity, poverty and illiteracy could persist, leaving many—especially the poor in developed countries and the Third World masses—only partially integrated.

The ideologies which emerged during 1848–71—nationalism and democracy/revolution—persisted during 1871–1914 but in altered forms. Nationalism as self-determination continued in central Europe, the Balkans and Russia but was less powerful because it was not fostered by the great powers system as Prussia and Piedmont had been and great power conservatism after 1871 operated against such changes. More important were great power governmental efforts to fabricate state nationalism through compulsory military service, education, patriotic campaigns and cultural assimilation. At the same time democratic revolutionary impulses were domesticated by a combination of official resistance, incorporation (extended suffrage), and amelioration (social welfare) which by the turn of the century coopted even the majority of socialists. What is perhaps most notable is that there was only one revolution in a great power—Russia—and that more because of military weakness than revolutionary strength. On the eve of World War I pressure for reform was mounting but the forces of resistance were still strong and might have survived for an indefinite period without war. These precedents may suggest that, despite their present widespread and violent character, ethnic and democratic pressures will be contained during the era 2020–60 until reinforced by the discontent resulting from the possible hegemonic wars after 2060.

Along with peace and prosperity, the most notable characteristic of 1871–

1914 was Europe's establishment of imperial control over virtually all available areas in the eastern hemisphere—the partition of Africa, dominion over the Mediterranean and Middle East, division of southern Asia and penetration of China. Indeed not only were colonial empires a function of peace between and within the European powers but also expansion reinforced European peace by distracting attention from European domestic and diplomatic problems. Since colonial empires rapidly became associated with great power status, it was appropriate that rising powers—Germany, Japan and the United States—should seek their places in the imperial sun, just as it was that the British and French would resist them, especially Germany. Although before 1914 rebellion by the indigenous peoples was almost non-existent, European vulnerability was heralded by Boer resistance to England and Japanese defeat of Russia. The anomaly of this neo-imperialism was that it was at once a symbol of the age and the occasion of most international crises during the period but critical neither to the system's existence nor a fundamental cause of World War I. When the European "civil wars" of 1914–45 weakened not only the powers but emboldened the colonial peoples to resist, imperialism's days were numbered. A similar scenario could be enacted 2020–60. In 1995, only a generation after the former colonies gained their independence, it is jarring to imagine the re-imposition of European rule. Yet the preconditions already exist—internal chaos in countries like Rwanda, Somalia, and Liberia and a growing economic gap between the First and Third World—which could produce a non-western longing for both the order and prosperity implied by western administration. Likewise, as in the nineteenth century, the great powers could be motivated by protection of economic interests, the desire for closed markets, and the trappings of great power status. Indeed it is not difficult to postulate empires growing out of present spheres of influence: a Western Hemispheric empire under the United States, a European empire including Russia and the Near East under Germany, Anglo-French dominion over Black Africa, and a Japanese and/or Chinese empire including southeast Asia and the Indian sub-continent. As in 1871–1914, this new neo-colonialism during 2020–60 would presuppose prosperity and peace among the great powers lasting until their balance of power might be upset around 2060.

Evaluation

One can judge the thesis propounded here from a number of perspectives. It can be seen strictly as a prediction and tested on the basis of its accuracy. To the extent that it proves valid, it can then even be viewed as exposing a mechanism inherent in the state system. Conversely invalidation by events can justify its dismissal. Needless to say, the distinct disadvantage of this standard is that we must suspend judgment until the predictions are either confirmed or confounded by events.

The schema can be considered for its utility to policymakers who must make guesses about the future, like it or not. What is presented here is a potential map indicating shoals and smooth sailing, a hint at the border between the likely and the impossible. When Bismarck spoke of hearing the rustle of God's garment, he was using such a map. Informed choice requires knowing its limits.

The model may be evaluated on the more humble but nonetheless suggestive basis of comparative history, in this case across time. In the process it may offer insights into features not previously noticed or emphasized. Conversely, it may be seen to reveal the limits of comparative history and reinforce the contention that history is a series of essentially incomparable events.

The thesis will be received differently by each generation. For those alive today, the prospect of adjusting wars 1989–2020 may be rejected not so much as unlikely but as undesirable. On the other hand, the relative stability of 2020–60 may make it more acceptable to the next generation. The prospect of recurrent hegemonic wars in the late twenty-first century is not a happy one but better than now. Whatever else it may be, the future is likely to be as inequitable as the past, dealing out kinder and crueler fortunes without regard for justice.

The construct has profound implications for the conceptualization of history. Predicting the future assumes that it is both fixed and comprehensible, that is, renounces the premise of free choice. While this assumption is rejected by those who prefer to view the future as open, doing so requires its own assumptions. An unpredictable future assumes either that it is fixed but incomprehensible—in which case freedom is not choice but merely ignorance—or truly open and governed by chance. Neither of these prospects is inherently more reassuring and both make policymaking and history-writing more tenuous.

In the last resort the thesis may be judged more mundanely as yet another provocation to an interminable conversation. What is proposed here may well be seen as wrong-headed but is not necessarily useless. As Francis Bacon observed, truth may arise more readily from error than confusion. ❧

Notes

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1. "We look back to that era now, and we long for a—I even made a crack the other day. I said, 'Gosh, I miss the cold war.' It was a joke, I mean, I don't really miss it, but you get the joke. ... We had an intellectually coherent thing. ... The American people knew what the rules were." Interview with Clinton in *The Washington Post*, October 15, 1993.

2. L. L. Farrar Jr., "Cycles of War," in *International Interactions*, vol 3(2) (1979), pp. 161–180. For an alternate cyclical model, see George Modelski, *Long Cycles in World Politics* (Seattle, 1987).