

# Why Was the Second Half of the Twentieth Century Less Prone to War Than the First?

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## Abstract

Since the end of World War II in 1945, there has been no direct warfare between great powers. Instead, there have been regional conflicts, ideological wars, tariff wars and so on. Why is the post-1945 era relatively peaceful than the first half of the 20th century? This article summarizes the different school scholars' analysis of the reasons, and based on these, rearranges the two most significant factors: the limited existence of nuclear weapons and the trade globalization that satisfies certain conditions. On the one hand, limited possession of atomic weapons would increase the cost of war between states and the capability of punitive feedback, making the risk of escalation extremely serious. On the other hand, when global trade meets the three conditions of Free Trade System, Capital Mobility and Peace Efficiency, it will effectively reduce the willingness of policymakers to choose war. This article would elaborate on the above viewpoints in the hope of summarizing and promoting the future research in the field of international security.

## Keywords

Peace; Post-1945; Nuclear Weapons; Economic Globalization; Trade; Global Institution.

## 1. Introduction

The discussion of war and peace has always been one of the most significant focuses of international security studies: What caused the war? What factors promoted peace? If we go back in history, during the first half of the 20th century, the two World Wars caused more than 120 million casualties globally. In the second half of the 20th century, if we consider the Cold War to be "a time of peace," so far there has been no direct, large-scale military conflict between superpowers. Of course, this article would not deny that after the Second World War, there were a series of small-scale conflicts, including the India-Pakistan conflict, the Vietnam War, the Iraq War, and so on. Some of these were between rising states, and some were between superpower and rising power. Admittedly, these wars deserve scholars' attention as well. However, due to limited space, this article would only focus on the reasons why wars between major powers that could influence the global pattern did not break out after the end of World War II. In other words, what makes the period after 1945 more peaceful than the period before 1945?

In the past, many scholars have tried to attribute this long peace to a synergetic effort of combined reasons. For example, Wohlforth pointed out the structural stability of unipolarity and predicted that the unipolar system would exist over the next decades [1]. In addition, the stable position of the U.S. Dollar as the international reserve currency also makes the whole system more stable. From the perspective of national power, both the decline of Russia (post-Cold War) and the rise of China (post-World War II) are ongoing processes; thus their national capabilities cannot support a head-on conflict between superpowers.

Based on previous research, this article would address the two factors that contribute the most to peace: nuclear weapons and economic globalization. For the former, nuclear weapon is a

military factor. It was used at the end of WWII and is still used by a handful of countries as the most effective deterrent. The existence of nuclear weapons shows its potential enemies a simple truth: war means unbearable costs. This makes it less likely that one nuclear state will succeed in taking over another through war. Looking at the latter, the globalization mentioned in this article would focus mainly on the economic level. Liberal scholars in the past have often made a simple connection between "trade" and "peace," but this article will point out that trade can promote peace only if it meets the three prerequisites brought by globalization: free trade, capital mobility, and efficiency for growth. The point of globalization, unlike nuclear weapons, is not to reduce the opportunity of war, but to reduce the willingness of leaders to wage war. This will be addressed later. Therefore, this article argues nuclear weapons and economic globalization as two significant factors would have a positive synergetic effect on global peacekeeping, and these two factors could explain the reason for the long peace among superpowers after 1945.

This article would be mainly divided into two sections: the nuclear section and globalization section, each with their own literature review and conclusion. In the nuclear section, this article would first discuss why nuclear arsenals could prevent big wars between nuclear states, secondly, admit that nukes could stimulate regional wars among small countries, but ultimately it would point out that small conflicts would do little harm to the overall global peace. In the globalization section, this article would begin with rebuttals to previous literature, then analyze the three conditions in which trade would promote peace, and finally, the role of institutions in supporting economic globalization would be elaborated. Last, an overall conclusion with policy implication would be addressed in the end.

## 2. Nuclear Weapons

In this section, this article will evaluate the role of nuclear weapons in the long peace. This section will be split into three areas. This article would first establish the background of nuclear weapons, ever since their development in the mid-20th century up to the current state of them. Next, it will discuss how the spread of nuclear weapons tends to prevent major conflicts between states with nuclear weapons. Finally, it would examine how nuclear weapons have still enabled small-scale conflict.

### 2.1. Nuclear Background and Literature Review

Starting in 1945, there have been nine countries that have developed nuclear weapons. These countries are the United States, the United Kingdom, France, Russia, China, India, Pakistan, Israel, and North Korea. Since the end of the second world war, none of these states have fought any major wars with each other. There have, however, been small-scale conflicts between these nuclear states (states with nuclear weapons) and those without, such as Israel's strike on Iraq in 1981 that attempted to rid them of nuclear capabilities, or proxy wars in places like Vietnam, Korea, and Syria that have been supported by nuclear powers.

In terms of the literature, this debate of whether nuclear weapons are a force for peace or a force for conflict has a few main arguments for either side. For those that believe it promotes peace, they argue that nuclear weapons vastly increase the cost of war and that the threat of destruction for either side means that it is unlikely for them to go to war with each other. For those that believe otherwise, they believe nuclear weapons embolden actors that have nuclear advantages, and that even with nuclear symmetry, low-level conflicts can still happen.

Taking into consideration both of these perspectives, the following two parts of this section aim to show that on the one hand, major conflicts have been deterred among states with nuclear weapons, but that simultaneously, nuclear weapons have potentially encouraged, if not enabled, low-level conflict. The conclusion, though, is that, on net, the benefits of nuclear weapons in

preventing major conflicts between those with nuclear weapons are much greater than the marginal harms of small-scale conflict.

## **2.2. Preventing Conflict Among States with Nuclear Weapons**

To evaluate the potential of nuclear weapons in preventing conflict among states with nuclear weapons, this essay will examine three arguments and rebut a common counterargument. First, that the costs of war are increased when nuclear weapons are introduced into the equation. Second, that nuclear weapons ensure easier retaliation against the aggressor. Third, that once a state develops nuclear capabilities and can launch their nuclear warheads, it becomes nearly impossible to negate those weapons. The counterargument it would address is one that claims nuclear weapons enable countries to use them as leverage. This section will utilize a comparison between the logic of a state with only conventional weapons (such as the situation for most states before the end of WWII) and a state with nuclear weapons.

### **2.2.1. Increased Costs of War**

First, the costs of war are greatly increased when nuclear weapons exist on both sides. To understand this, we need to first establish a general rule of thumb as to when states initiate wars. Waltz argues in his piece *The Spread of Nuclear Weapons: More May Be Better* that this tends to happen on a political calculus of what a state believes they stand to gain compared to what they believe the costs of the war to be [2]. If the former outweighs the latter, then they may initiate a war. This makes intuitive sense—if a state stands to gain more than it stands to lose from a certain choice, then they would likely pursue that choice.

If a state does not have nuclear weapons, it is much easier to initiate such wars. Waltz, in the same aforementioned piece, poses a few possible scenarios that illustrate the likelihood of war. For instance, it is easy for a stronger state to view a growingly powerful, but presently weak state with hostility, and in an attempt to prevent it from becoming a threat in the future, invade. Another example would be a state with an intent to invade for either conquest—such as Germany's dominant military strategy in World War II—or security—such as the Schlieffen Plan of Germany in World War I.

However, when a defending state has nuclear weapons, while the gains don't change, the cost to potential aggressors in waging a war increases, as nuclear weapons hold massive destructive capability. In fact, as many top scholars would put it, nuclear weapons do not necessarily even need to be used—they simply need to “appear to have the ability to impose sufficiently high costs” on the other side, something easily granted with nuclear weapons [3]. The leaders of countries, provided they are functionally rational, will realize that any major conflict will lead to a rain of devastation upon their country. Hence, given the immense costs that are very probable, the barriers for a country seeking to initiate conflict increase as well. Waltz puts this elegantly—in a conventional world, countries can sensibly attack if it believes that “success is probable,” but in our nuclear world, countries would only attack if “success is assured” [2]. Thus, given the impossibly high barrier that it takes to start a war—either finding something more important than the survival of one's own country, or finding a way to eliminate for certain the threat of nuclear weapons—wars between nuclear states are very unlikely.

### **2.2.2. Increased Punitive Capabilities**

Second, upon developing nuclear weapons, states have a larger capacity to introduce punitive measures in retaliation against attacks. In this part, a simple comparison between conventional warfare and warfare with nuclear weapons will suffice.

With conventional weapons, a retaliatory attack requires surviving the initial attack by the aggressor. Before the development of nuclear weapons, the military itself was in charge of both repelling attacks and executing punishment. An aggressor needed only to eliminate the military power of the defender, and it would no longer need to fear retaliation because there would be

no force capable of retaliating [3]. As such, states would need to invest a considerable sum into their military if they wish to guarantee a chance of retaliation, which would presumably be necessary if they wished to deter attacks through imposing costs on the other side. The essence of this is that with conventional armies, a state's ability to defend and retaliate are conflated, and the absence of the former necessitates an absence of the latter.

When nuclear weapons are introduced, the state's punitive and defensive measures seem more clearly separated [3]. The essence of a punitive measure lies in the ability to impose costs on the side that is being punished, and nuclear weapons themselves fulfill that without the military. That is, the military no longer needs to be the punitive arm of the state. As long as the aggressor cannot guarantee a first-strike—a strike that would eliminate all nuclear weapons in one strike such that the attacked cannot launch those weapons in retaliation—which, as aforementioned is hard to accomplish because only the perception of threat needs to exist and it is difficult to remove all chance of nuclear launch, the attacked state can still retaliate and impose high costs on the other side. To make this link clear, understand that one does not need to survive the attack in order to launch their nuclear weapons, as the launch of these weapons can be initiated by nuclear submarines or undetected nuclear launch sites. Thus, given that nuclear weapons separate a state's punitive and defensive measures and allow them to function independently, it is much easier for states to institute punitive measures if attacked, and hence deters attackers that fear for their own wellbeing.

### 2.2.3. Near-impossibility of Negation of Nuclear Weapons

Third, once nuclear weapons are developed, it would be nearly impossible to negate the effectiveness of those weapons. By “negate the effectiveness of,” this article means a state's ability to render the other side's nuclear weapons functionally useless. Common types of negation include offensive forms such as initiating a first strike, as well as defensive forms such as interception techniques that seek to destroy a nuclear missile in mid-flight. The following two paragraphs will discuss in depth why neither of the aforementioned methods of negation would be effective.

In terms of offensive measures, the issue lies in the absence of certainty that all nuclear weapons have been eliminated. Nuclear weapons are “easy to move, easy to hide, and easy to deliver in a variety of ways” [4]. Even for a technologically superior state like the United States, they cannot guarantee knowledge of where an adversary is keeping their nuclear weapons. Nuclear submarines, far-off launch sites—these are all possibilities that would be hard to rule out. As such, if any country attempts to launch the first strike, there is a risk that it wouldn't completely disarm their target. As mentioned above, this probability is itself sufficient to deter attacks, as only a small possibility of high damage is necessary.

For defensive measures, there lies similarly many issues. On the one hand, it is simply not within our technological grasp currently to set up defenses that can strike down all nuclear weapons after they have been launched with enough accuracy and without creating devastating consequences. On the other, Waltz encourages us to imagine a world where such defenses do exist. If these defenses do work, it only provokes the aggressors and encourages them to develop weapons that are harder to detect or shoot down, or they may send more nuclear weapons over at a single time, making it harder to defend against them [4]. At best, it would require the constant renewal of defenses, and it would similarly call for the constant improvement in the destructiveness of a nuclear weapon. However, there is a more chilling likelihood. In the moments of vulnerability—that is, during the moments where the defenses aren't sufficient and need to be upgraded to render nuclear weapons useless—countries might seek to exploit this temporary advantage, as they may never have this chance again in the future. This further increases the chances of launch, counterintuitive to the point of defense.

#### 2.2.4. A Counter-argument of Nuclear Threat

Last, let us address a common argument against the peacemaking power of nuclear weapons. Many leading scholars in the field believe that, when a state has nuclear superiority over another state, that state would be able to use their military advantage to compel other states to make sacrifices that they otherwise would not have. To respond to this, Sechser and Fuhrmann have two main responses. One, that nuclear weapons are not an effective bargaining tool when it comes to seizing disputed objects. Two, that nuclear weapons, if used offensively, would force the aggressor to incur greater costs [5].

To understand these responses, this article will use a simple example. If country A wishes to seize part X of country B, they may wish to threaten country B with force. Under normal circumstances, one might assume that when the potential costs that country A could impose on country B rise, country B would be more likely to cede part X. With this logic, it may seem that nuclear weapons can act as a force for compellence. However, Sescher and Fuhrmann provide an additional criterion for compellence—the costs to the aggressor for threatening must not be too high as to outweigh the benefits [5]. With this, the analogy would show that nuclear weapons may not be as effective. With conventional weapons, a state could threaten to invade part X and control the area. With nuclear weapons, a state cannot threaten to destroy part X, as that would result in neither side gaining what they wish. As such, nuclear weapons are ineffective when it comes to threatening states for disputed territories.

A caveat to the above argument would be that country A could potentially threaten other valuable possessions of country B, such as perhaps part Y. This is where the second response comes in—the costs of offensive usage of nuclear weapons are higher than any potential benefit a state could incur. The backlash and economic sanctions from the international community combined with a rise in support for nuclearization by one's adversaries are all likely consequences. With defense being the only internationally acceptable purpose of nuclear weapons, an offensive attack with them would result in a label as a rogue nation, alienation, and adversaries that—out of fear that they would be the next target—seek to build their own nuclear weapons. In sum, nuclear weapons would not be an effective tool in compelling other states.

### 2.3. Enable Small Conflicts

Although nuclear weapons maintain that no major wars break out between the nine states that possess them, it nonetheless could be one of the contributing factors of small conflicts, regardless of the countries' relative nuclear arsenals size. This article will examine this issue within three different circumstances: when one country has nuclear superiority over the other, when two countries are in nuclear symmetry, and when two countries are in nuclear asymmetry.

#### 2.3.1. Nuclear Superiority Encourage Risk Taking

First, in a nuclear crisis where both countries possess nuclear weapons, the countries who have nuclear superiority, meaning having more nuclear weapons, will have a greater chance of winning. To begin with, in a nuclear crisis, as Kroenig described, "a state exerts coercive pressure on its adversary by raising the risk of nuclear war until one of the participating states prefers to capitulate rather than run any additional risk of catastrophe" [6]. A state brings nuclear war to the highest threshold possible to test the limits of their opponent's willingness to escalate. Ultimately, the one who is willing to show the resolution of pushing their state closer to a nuclear war wins in this crisis and the other sacrifices the benefit they could gain in this crisis for the safety of their own country, because of the risk of all-out nuclear war.

The theory of nuclear brinkmanship is thus established on the nature of nuclear crises under four criteria: First, states' leaders want to avoid nuclear war at all cost, but they don't want to



concede to their opponents on this issue. Second, states don't have complete information on their opponents' level of determination. Third, political stakes determine the risk that a state is willing to take. And fourth, relative nuclear superiority does not matter, as long as they possess a second-strike ability, that is, fully destroying their opponents via nuclear weapons even after the first wave of nuclear strike.

Criteria three and four, however, are not necessarily true due to two main reasons: First, the devastating effects of nuclear war are not necessarily the same in every circumstance. For example, if the devastating effect caused by country A only requires 50 years for country B to recover to the prewar levels, and country A needs 80 years to recover from country B's strike, the country that recovers sooner may not feel deterred and will be more prone to risk-taking in a nuclear crisis. And how many years it takes for a country to recover from the devastation is determined by the other state's number of nuclear weapons.

Second, nuclear superiority provides a country with a counterforce advantage, that is, having more ability to destroy opponents' nuclear weapons. If a country is able to destroy most nuclear weapons of their opponent in a first strike, it could limit the costs that the other side may impose. Combining the two reasons, nuclear superiority still plays a role in winning the nuclear crisis, because these two factors increase a country's willingness to take risks.

Moreover, we can observe the findings of empirical studies: "Of the twenty nuclear crises, 55 percent were won by the country with the most weapons in the crisis, only 20 percent were won by the country that did not have the most warheads, and 35 percent did not produce a clear winner" [6]. As such, most crises were won by states that possessed more nuclear weapons. Thus, in a nuclear crisis where one country possesses more nuclear weapons than the other, the country with nuclear superiority is more likely to win, because they are willing to take more risk.

### 2.3.2. Nuclear Symmetry Allows Conflicts

The second situation to examine is in nuclear crises where two states or entities are in nuclear symmetry or have around the same amount of nukes. In these instances, small scale conflicts are allowed. In the following part, this essay will examine two conflicting strategies that states might take regarding the issue of small wars when in nuclear symmetry: Assured Destruction (AD) and Flexible Response (FR). The finding suggests that the strategy flexible response is more applicable in such circumstances and allows small conflicts more.

Assured destruction (AD) suggests that every nuclear war will be an all-out war, and thus, nuclear war is not likely. AD advocates believe that the size of conventional armies and the number of nuclear weapons doesn't matter due to the complete destruction nature of every nuclear weapon. However, in the previous section, it has already disproven such an idea by stating that each devastating effect still varies. Thus the size of conventional military and relative nuclear superiority still plays a role.

Flexible response (FR) theory suggests that, since the balance on the level of all-out nuclear war is so stable, that each side is relatively free to engage in military actions at lower levels. Advocates of FR believe that the "common interest in avoiding a mutually disastrous outcome can be used as a level to extract competitive concessions" [7]. Their idea shows that they inherently follow the nuclear brinkmanship theory, but only partially--they still believe nuclear superiority plays a role. Moreover, they state that relative advantage in conventional armaments at every escalation level needs to be taken into consideration. As Secretary of Defense Brown argues, "We now recognize that the strategic nuclear forces can deter only a relatively narrow range of contingencies" [8], and "only if we have the capability to respond realistically and effectively to an attack at a variety of levels can we... have the confidence necessary to a credible deterrent" [8]. Proponents of AD will argue against such a belief, claiming it justifies that any challenges to opponents interests could result in escalation,

because no state is willing to take the risk when their cities are in hostage. Thus conventional military power doesn't matter. However, since nuclear superiority has been proven to encourage a country's willingness to take risks, the relative size of their conventional military matters because it symbolizes the level of aggression or risk a country is able to impose on the other. If nuclear weapons enable risk-taking, conventional military power would be the means to demonstrate their resolve on risk-taking to other countries.

FR advocates thereby suggest that states must still prepare themselves for conventional wars. NATO, for example, needs the ability to defend Europe with conventional weapons because of the fear of the Soviet Union launching a large-scale conventional attack. The U.S. also needs to prepare for such a war. Having a relative advantage in conventional military power still matters because states have to gain an advantage at every escalation level.

Thus, when two countries are in nuclear asymmetry, conflicts are nonetheless generated on each escalation level, and a country who wants to win needs to have more conventional military power.

### 2.3.3. Nuclear Asymmetry Enables Conflicts

Third of all, conflicts are also enabled when in nuclear asymmetry. Nuclear asymmetry is when one country has nuclear weapons while the other does not. The field of nuclear studies typically lacks empirical investigation conducted on conflicts regarding situations of nuclear asymmetry. The existing disputes in the field are debates among theories of military strategies, especially regarding nuclear proliferation. This article will examine two conflicting arguments proposed by Waltz and Sagan on nuclear rational deterrence theory, and focus specifically on the part of nuclear proliferation since it's examining the conflicts between a state that has nuclear weapons and a state that does not. Moreover, utilizing every possible historical evidence on this issue, this article discovers that conflicts of conventional armies and threats in nuclear strikes typically exist in the context provided.

Rational deterrence theory argues that the proliferation of nuclear weapons is good for maintaining peace globally because nuclear weapons deter war and conflicts. Scott Sagan, in his *The Perils of Proliferation*, suggested that rational deterrence, in order to succeed, must be predicated on no preventive wars during a transition period, that is, one country who has nukes should not stop other countries from acquiring them by launching a nuclear strike [9]. However, in his study, he concludes that there is a high risk of preventive nuclear war due to organization theory; And that preventive conventional war, that is, using conventional military power to threaten and deter opponents, seems unavoidable.

Proponents of rational deterrence believe striking a state when it is still developing its nuclear weapons is unlikely to happen because it would not be in a state's long-term interests. Rebuttals against this argument stem mainly from four reasons under organization theory: First, military leaders are more likely to have a "better now than later" logic. Second, they are "trained to focus on pure military logic, instead of taking diplomatic means." Third, they "favor offensive doctrines and decisive operations," meaning they pursue taking control of the situation and force the opponents to act in their way. And fourth, they "plan for immediate plans for war but not for the postwar world" [9]. Given these four reasons, the military power or organization of a state is more likely to launch a preventive war strike, even when the majority of civilians do not support such an act.

Past historical evidence proves this to be empirically true. After Chinese intervention in the Korean War, the predominant advocates in the US government were advocating for a preventive war. In the initial phase of the Cold War, the US had a thorough plan of preventive war on the USSR, but was ultimately stopped by Truman and Eisenhower's moral and political objections. More recently, Pakistan threatened to launch a preventive war against India, and Ukraine is also facing prospects of preventive war from Russia. Russia once also reportedly

avored launching a preventive attack against China, despite the existence of their small nuclear arsenal.

In all these studies of conflicts, though no preventive nuclear war happened, all military organizations showed a strong variation between their opinion in launching a preventive war and their civilians' opinion on launching a preventive war. Most military organizations supported preventive war, even when civilian activist groups suggested that there were other more peaceful options. Moreover, in almost all occasions, threats of preventive war were declared, and conventional military intervention had happened. In sum, conflicts and threats are widely seen between a state that has nuclear weapons and a state that does not. This also implies that, although nuclear weapons promote peace in a larger perspective, the possession of it needs to be limited to the nine countries in the status quo. Any action of nuclear proliferation will increase the chance of preventive nuclear war, and directly causing conventional military conflicts. Moreover, the establishment of a new nuclear state will also introduce uncertainty into the now balanced nine countries system, causing more instability.

#### **2.4. Conclusion of Nuclear Section**

Nuclear weapons allow small conflicts on a smaller escalation level, but deter major nuclear war between all nuclear states. Taking a cost-benefit analysis approach, this essay weighs the impact of nuclear weapons from two aspects: First, from a military aspect: Nuclear weapons prevent another major world war, which prevents millions of casualties, death and destruction. Around 20 million people were killed in World War I and around 85 million people were killed in World War II. The existence of nuclear weapons deters all incentives to initiate such a great war and protects peace. The positive aspect of nuclear weapons on peace clearly outweighs its negative aspect of allowing for smaller conflicts such as the Afghanistan war, in which the number of casualties are limited on a ten-thousands level.

Second, from a political aspect: Although nuclear superiority may encourage more risk taking in conventional crises, nuclear weapons still force all political entities to further ruminate before taking actions due to the fear of escalation, generating more apparent harmony in international relationships.

Thus, on net, the benefits of nuclear weapons for peace in both military and political aspects outweigh its harms on conflict and aggression. As such, it could be concluded that nuclear weapons promote peace, and it should be considered as a main contributing factor of the Long Peace.

If nuclear weapons reduce the "opportunity" of war on the military level, globalization could then be described as reducing the "willingness" of policymakers to wage war. It must be recognized that policymakers are not always rational. In other words, there is no guarantee that leaders would be acutely aware of the disparity in military power, and blind optimism on the gains of war may still lead them to choose war [10]. This is because the "deterrence" of nuclear weapons has not yet been translated into the cost of war before it begins; even if war were to begin, nuclear weapons would still not necessarily be used. This article argues that policymakers need more immediate reasons to prevent them from choosing war. This is what economic globalization does: everyone is experiencing the benefits and convenience of global trade. If war breaks out, or even if there is only a dangerous signal that it might, these vested interests would be wiped out.

### **3. Economic Globalization**

In the following section of globalization, this article will first review previous literatures and point out their deficiencies, then analyze three factors that enable trade to promote peace, and finally, discuss the supporting role of global institutions in these three factors.



### 3.1. Globalization Background and Literature Review

Historically, after 1945, global trade began to recover and accelerated its development after the 1970s. This process has been described by some scholars as "the third wave of globalization" [11]. Compared to the rise of ultra-nationalism and protectionism during the second wave of globalization [12], the tariff barriers among countries began to gradually break down in the early stages of the third wave; international aid systems were being established, and countries with similar long-term interests have constructed international conference platforms or supranational organizations on trade and the economy. The most typical example was the Marshall Plan: it was introduced in 1947, and, after three years of financial aid, significantly lowered trade barriers between Western European countries, laying the foundation for the development of a free trade system. After 1970, economic globalization was significantly accelerated. It was mainly driven by two historical factors: firstly, the oil crisis in 1973 increased the global circulation of financial capital; secondly, the collapse of Bretton Woods system led to the rapid rise of neoliberalism [13]. Today, despite a much slower pace than before, free trade between countries still remains an integral part of the international system. It must be admitted that the growth of trade globalization has coexisted with the long peace since the end of WWII.

In fact, there have been numerous previous discussions among scholars about the relationship between trade and peace. Most of them fell into two schools, liberalism and realism. Liberals, for the most part, hold the idea that "trade promotes peace". One of its main arguments, for example, is the opportunity cost and adjustment cost of breaking trade ties [14]. As Keohane and Nye have pointed out, there is a high price to pay if countries choose to break trade ties [15]. Richardson examined the nature of the trade itself. He believed that a country could make up the cost of imported goods with the profits from exported goods, which made war a secondary choice compared with peace [16]. Also, liberals argued that a country had no more to gain from war than from trade. As Norman Angell noted in his book, despite the German victory in the Franco-Prussian War, the German economy didn't dominate the European landscape after this [17]. Realists, by contrast, prefer "trade stimulate conflicts". Waltz pointed out that the close interdependence also means higher probability in "occasional conflicts" [18]. He also argues that the anarchic nature of the state forces them to try to control what they depend on, or to reduce the extent of their dependence [19]. Moreover, in the face of the possibility of cooperation for shared benefits, weak countries would be more concerned about how the benefits would be distributed [20]. This leads them to consider not the benefit itself, but who would benefit more, making states more prone to conflict.

However, this article argues that neither of the above theories could accurately explain the historical fact. Here this essay would use the outbreak of World War I and World War II as examples. First, liberal arguments fail to explain why WWI took place with the backdrop of booming trade. Before 1914, the first wave of globalization had taken advantage of the industrial revolution to greatly promote foreign trade, and the existence of multinational companies had become increasingly important [21]. Assuming that liberal logic was correct, these factors should have prevented the outbreak of World War I. On the other hand, the realist view did not succeed in explaining the outbreak of the Second World War. Since the peak of trade before the Second World War was in the 1920s, if trade does stimulate conflict, that does not explain why war broke out not in the 1920s but in the late 1930s.

### 3.2. Trade as A Force for Peace

This article would put forward the following viewpoints: Trade would promote peace when it meets three conditions: 1) Free Trade, 2) Capital Mobility, 3) Efficiency for Growth. It is worth mentioning that trade does not directly lead to peace, but has a positive effect on promoting

peace to a certain extent. The more conditions are met, the more positive trade will be for peace. This article will now analyze these conditions in the above order.

### 3.2.1. First Condition: Free Trade

To begin with, the first condition that trade needs to be able to promote peace is "Free trade". In other words, in a trading system where barriers and protectionism are extremely weakened, there would be less chance of wars between countries. For this argument, many scholars could criticize it on the perspective of the opportunity cost hypothesis: trade and free trade have no difference in total trade volume and trade demand, so the opportunity cost caused by cutting off trade ties though warfare would also remain unchanged. Since the cost to one country is equal in both cases, free trade does not promote peace any more than common trade. However, this article argues that the difference between free trade and trade lies not in the cost after interrupting trade ties, but in a different domestic profit distribution model brought by the free trade system. As Patrick J. McDonald argued, free trade could facilitate peace "by removing an important foundation of domestic privilege" [22]. It must be admitted that one of the major natures of war is that the upper echelon of the state shifts the cost of war to the lower classes who are not interested in war, including physical casualties and economic burdens. While the free trade system weakens trade barriers, it also redefines the distribution mode of domestic interest. Citizens at the bottom of societies could gain more trade benefits by competing with the previous monopoly industries, and thus gain greater social power to prevent the shift of costs of war.

Moreover, based on the in-depth analysis of social forces, it is not difficult to find that non-competitive industries in many countries are often protected by the state, such as oil, electricity, aviation, and weapons manufacturing, etc. This is particularly common in authoritarian countries. These industries tend to support more aggressive foreign policy and stronger protectionism made by policy makers in order to build stronger trade barriers against possible competitions. On the other hand, competitive industries, or those that depend heavily on imports and exports, tend to favor open trade policies and moderate diplomacy -- aggressive foreign policy could hurt their economic interests. Of course, this article believes that there could be a certain level of tendency towards protectionism in any country. However, it is not difficult to conclude that the higher a country's acceptance of free trade system is, the weaker its social power will be represented by non-competitive industries that rely on protectionism and strong diplomatic strategies, while competitive industries that prefer moderate diplomatic means and open trade policies would have a relatively strong social power. This makes sense for both democracies and authoritarian states: democracies need votes in general elections, and authoritarian states need to maintain social stability. Once this specific relative political balance is formed under the influence of the free trade system, policy makers would be under considerable pressure and more inclined to choose peace. Therefore, it could be concluded that free trade has the capability to change the domestic distribution pattern, which could provide the citizens at the bottom class and the competitive industries that depend on import and export more social power to pressure the policy makers and, thus, make the country more inclined to peace.

### 3.2.2. Second Condition: Capital Mobility

After discussing "Free Trade", the second condition we need to focus on is "Capital Mobility". As mentioned earlier, the barriers to capital have been largely weakened in the third wave of globalization. This article argues that the freer international capital flows are, the more difficult it is to break out wars between states. On the one hand, signalling theory suggests that free-flowing global capital could send out warning signals before the war. Generally, there is a two-way signal between the government and the market. When the policymaker announces a new decision, the capital in the market would respond through the inflow (investment) or outflow

(risk aversion). After receiving the feedback, the policymaker would revise the previous decision and choose to modify or extend it. In a scenario where policymakers resort to escalating retaliation against external pressures, foreign capital in this country would receive a dangerous signal, and flee in search of a safe haven. This would therefore force policymakers to choose between aggressive political goals and stable economic gains. It is worth mentioning that the assumption above could only happen between countries where capital mobility is guaranteed. If countries set high barriers to capital flow, such as currency conversion quotas, relocation costs, or administrative statements, capital would be hard to promote peace between states.

On the other hand, capital mobility could offset the asymmetry of information to a great extent. This interesting view was also expounded by Gartzke and Li in their article. They believed that in the past, there was information asymmetry in the interaction between countries, and the only "arbiter" to eliminate that information asymmetry was a war [23]. In other words, when country A wants to escalate retaliation against country B, policymakers of country A cannot know the status quo and purpose of country B, nor could they predict the impact of their behavior on country B due to the existence of information asymmetry. Therefore, in this case, A can only resolve even a small conflict by means of war. However, under the influence of trade globalization, country A and country B can obtain each other's information more easily than the above situation. Because unlike the information itself, the integrated capital is transparent and could be easily quantified. A country's foreign capital reserves, total imports and exports, total foreign direct investment, as well as capital inflow and outflow trend, could all reflect the situation of a country and the expectation on its future made by global capital. Suppose in this case, that country A wants to impose some kind of sanction on country B; it could then better understand the situation of B and evaluate the effect of its own sanction. It would not rely on war as the only means of conflict resolution. Thus, in an environment of trade globalization, capital mobility would reduce the dependence of sovereign states on warfare as a means to obtain its national interests.

### 3.2.3. Third Condition: Efficiency for Growth

Finally, the third condition of enabling trade to promote peace is "Efficiency for Growth". In other words, a state would not choose to wage war when the benefits brought by trade are more efficient to its growth than those brought by war. Monteiro and Debs discussed economic factors that lead to war in their article. They pointed out that because hegemonic states fear the growth of rising powers, it is likely that "Powerful states can condition others' ability to access resources they need in order to invest their own resource endowments efficiently" [24]. During this process, policymakers of the rising countries would evaluate the constraints from the developed countries, and if they expect that maintaining peace would be less effective for the country's growth than waging war, then the rising countries would be more likely to declare war on the developed countries even if they were still developing. Copeland had a similar argument on this point. For any expected value of war, it could be predicted that the lower the expectations of trade, the more likely war would happen [25]. For example, during World War II, Japan's national strength was much weaker than that of the United States. But after the United States cut off the oil supply to Japan, Japan would not be able to maintain its massive military logistics, and the attack on Pearl Harbor would be the only option left.

However, to put it another way, if the oppression and constraint from the developed countries to the rising countries were to be reduced, peace would be more effective for rising powers' development than war, and policymakers would therefore be more inclined to choose peaceful development. This article believes that economic globalization can accomplish this goal. As trade between countries gradually shifts from bilateral to multilateral, one country's restrictions on another's resources and technology would become increasingly difficult to achieve. Because uniting all other countries together is an extremely difficult task. In addition,

trade expectations are not directly related to the current extent of trade, but the predicted tendency to do so in the future. Expectation could be positive even if the current trade is low. Even if a rising country is constrained by trade, as long as it could find alternatives quickly, its expectations of future trade would be high, and it will be more inclined to choose peace. Finally, in the current environment, with the gradual deepening of trade globalization, the establishment of international organizations and treaties further restricts the trade sanctions imposed by superpowers on rising countries, which makes constraining the development of rising powers more difficult. This would be further illustrated in the following discussion of global institutions. In short, globalization makes it harder for rising countries to be constrained by developed countries, thus making trade in a peaceful state more efficient for their growth than war, and thus avoids pushing them to choose to wage war.

### **3.3. Prevent Conflicts Among States with Global Economic Institutions**

As discussed above, trade can help to promote peace if three conditions are met— free trade, capital mobility, and efficiency for growth. This essay claims that some conditions are made more stable by institutions promoting trade. In this section, this article will mainly discuss how institutions help to promote peace by offering a platform for free trade and constraining the hegemonic states from preventing the developments of rising states.

Before the 1940s, there was free trade in the world, and even a small boom during World War I. However, compared to the later degree of free trade, it was just to a slight degree. This article believes this difference is caused partly because the postwar era involved the creation of many large international institutions, especially economic institutions, like the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the Generalized Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT).

There has been a debate over whether international institutions will help to promote peace. One of the most famous articles opposing the use of institutions is *The False Promise of International Institutions* written by John Mearsheimer. He mainly argues that institutions have little influence in affecting states' behavior and thus have almost no use in preventing war from states through pointing out that three main theories of institutionalism— liberal institutionalism, collective security, and critical theory— are all logically flawed and lack empirical support [26]. However, his arguments ignore the fact that large economic institutions— like IMF and GATT mentioned above and later the World Trade Organization (WTO)— can help to facilitate free trade and capital mobility and constraining hegemonic states by lowering barriers for trade, helping rising country with their economic developments, overseeing potential risks of conflicts, automatically punishing states that break the agreements, etc.. For example, by assisting Vietnam with their economic development, the IMF enables Vietnam to have relatively larger bargaining power in consulting with other countries and thus in part lower the risk of conflicts [27]. Therefore, institutions can indirectly have a positive influence on peace. Now, we will turn to two ways in which international institutions, and in particular, economic institutions, promote peace, mainly by providing a platform for free trade and constraining hegemonic states.

#### **3.3.1. Provide Platforms for A Unified Liberal Economic System**

This section will mainly examine the role of institutions in promoting peace by encouraging free trade. It will include a background overview and two case studies. This essay will begin this section with a historical background of the evolution of free trade in the United States and institutions' assistance during the 1940s. Then, it will discuss how institutions promote peace by assisting international free trade. It would end this section with analysis of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the Generalized Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) to further demonstrate institutions' role in peace.

In 1930, because of the general trend of the United States' economic policy that aimed to protect the northern manufacturing industries, President Hoover signed the Smoot-Hawley Tariff Act



of 1930, which posted an extremely high tariff on exportation and importation [28]. Then, to liberalize the United States' trade policy and the world, President Roosevelt signed the Reciprocal Tariff Act of 1934, offering him the power to negotiate a bilateral reciprocal trade agreement [29]. By the 1940s, multilateral GATT appeared and it largely decreased the tariff rate and reduced the non-tariff barriers.

To facilitate free trade, David Bearce and Sawa Omori argue that the commercial institutions help to raise states' economic opportunity cost of war, and therefore largely reduce the possibility of military conflicts. Commercial institutions help to facilitate international trade and investment, so certain people and states would earn profit through this process. For them, military conflicts will simply disturb them from gaining profits [30]. They offered a neoclassical theory from the north which states that: 1) For the autonomous states to maintain their position of power, they need to obtain revenue, mainly through taxing the economic output; 2) Aiming to maximize their social profit, they want to maximize the economic output; 3) International trade is the main way of earning money and increasing economic profit; 4) States will not collect heavy taxes on exportation and importation and instead seek to expand their international commerce, which serve as a means of increasing commercial wealth and the social wealth without forcing the states to make an "unpopular decision" [30]. This essay will now analyze the examples of the IMF and the GATT to demonstrate this further.

The first institution is the International Monetary Fund (IMF), which offers a relatively stable platform for trade by giving weak states assistance while it oversees potential financial crises. Established in 1944, the IMF aimed to stabilize the international monetary system and to balance the growth of international trade mainly in three ways: 1) Keeping track of the world economy and its member countries' economies; 2) Lending money to countries with balance of payments difficulties; 3) Giving possible practical assistance to its member countries. Overseeing the possibility of economic surveillance, the IMF will highlight those potential risks and offer some useful advice. In the global system, the IMF provides a relatively stable platform, and it effectively helps countries like Vietnam and Ireland to develop their economies without being constrained much by superpowers [27]. As such, they are able to have a larger bargaining power in the global system, and it becomes possible for more countries to participate in international free trade. Thus, it minimizes the possibility of war due to the increasing opportunity costs for all states.

The second institution is the Generalized Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT), which helps to restrain states who break the agreements. Established in 1947, the GATT is the predecessor of the World Trade Organization (WTO), with its primary goal is being to promote free trade through reducing trade barriers like tariffs and quotas as much as possible, and to eliminate "discriminatory treatment of international commerce" [31]. It should be noted that because there are a large number of member states in large international institutions like the WTO, punitive procedures in those institutions are more automatic and independent, and thus less manipulated by individual states [32]. Therefore, institutions are, to some degree, less affected by great powers and can partly constrain them, so states have less of an incentive to break the commitment, and the WTO can offer a relatively stable platform for states to make the trade. According to George Downs, David Roche and Peter Barsoom, "the demands of domestic interest groups and the significant political benefits are often associated with protection" [32]. This leads to the next section about how institutions prevent hegemonies from constraining the development of rising states.

### 3.3.2. Constrain Hegemony States

In this section, this article will mainly analyze the role of institutions in preventing hegemonic states from disadvantaging smaller states. It will begin with the argument given by John Ikenberry that hegemony states choose to establish international institutions because



institutions ensure their long-term benefits and dominant status in the world. Then, the function of the treaty would be analyzed—to separate states and thus put political pressure on those who share different standpoints—and how it constrains leading countries (Downs, Rocke, and Barsoom). Finally, it will examine how international institutions can prevent states from going to war through increasing transparency of each others' military capabilities and increasing trust among high-level leaders, arguments given by David Bearce, and Sawa Omori. For the sake of long-term benefits and a more stable, dominant role in the world order, hegemonic states choose to participate in global institutions at the cost of their bargaining power. In the current international system, both hegemonic rising states want to use global institutions as a significant diplomatic platform to consult. On one hand, the existence of institutions would constrain the influence and power of the leading states—before institutions appeared, the bargaining between states depended largely on states' military power, of which hegemonic states would have a large advantage in. On the other hand, the establishment of institutions could bring strategic restraint to the great powers, but they still choose to create those institutions for long-term power gains. Strategic restraint is composed mainly of two parts: 1) opening oneself up, which means to make its policy more transparent to its member states to calm other states and provide a way for other states to attempt to influence the policy; and 2) binding strategies, which means that institutional agreements can embody formal, legal, or organizational procedures, giving continuity to certain state policies and commitments, ultimately becoming an organizing media for wider political activities and institutions. Because strategic restraint can conserve leading states' power by lowering enforcement costs to maintain the order, dominant states will be in favor of this. They will soon realize that their dominant role will not last forever, and institutions are a way of investment to ensure their long-term gain and to stabilize the world order to make sure they still hold the dominant role. On the other hand, weaker states also choose to participate in international institutions mainly because they realize that without such settlement, bargaining power will simply depend on the military power, which would put them at a disadvantage [33]. In general, both strong states and weak states choose to establish institutions because institutions can constrain the leading states when they are initially stronger, and subordinate states when they develop to become stronger. But how specifically can institutions constrain great powers? There are mainly two ways: showing states' standpoints through treaties to let other countries put political pressure on them, and increasing transparency of military capabilities and increasing trust among high-level leaders.

According to George W. Downs, David M. Rocke, and Peter N. Barsoom, international institutions usually come with treaties, but its function is not to directly constrain states but to make states' standpoint transparent to every other state, and therefore constrain the hegemonic states from constraining weaker states. Treaties signed through international institutions will not always change the action of states because states prefer treaties that don't need them to change and those that are easy for them to comply with [32]. This means that if country A wants to develop its own nuclear weapons, it will not sign the treaty which aims to restrain the number of nuclear weapons held by each state, because the treaty requires itself to undergo changes. How then can those treaties help to constrain hegemony states? The answer is that it makes a country's standpoint clear. Here is another hypothetical scenario. Say country X is a leading state who wants to invade a weak developing country, say country Y, and there is a treaty which says every country should not participate in war, and they especially should not start a war with country Y. Because country X does not want to change its own status quo, it will not sign the treaty. Other great powers will know that country X wants to start a war with country Y and thus can put political and economic pressure on country X to prevent it from invading country Y. Through the indirect way of showing countries' standpoints, international

institutions and treaties can prevent hegemonies from constraining the development of rising states.

Another way of constraining great power is to increase the transparency of knowledge of each countries' military capabilities and trust among high-level states' leaders. These are two other functions of commercial institutions that help to promote peace given by David Bearce and Sawa Omori. Here is the basic logic: because of commercial cooperation, there will be a higher chance for member states to conduct military cooperation; this will potentially reveal member states' military capabilities and thus add bargaining power to each state and let countries know better about the likely outcome of war. An example given is that of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS). There were border disputes among those countries, even while they signed a treaty of a non-aggression pact and mutual defense. After knowing the existence of GATT, however, they began to conduct military exercises together [30]. This is a process of making private information public. Even though neither side knows all things about others' capabilities, the existence of institutions and cooperation can add many more details to their own database and thus predict with higher accuracy the likely outcome. If the great power knows other countries' military power, they might hesitate on whether to start the war; similarly, if a weak country has more details about hegemony states' military power, it has more bargaining power.

The second function of institutions offered by David Bearce and Sawa Omori is increasing trust among high-level leaders. It should be clarified that this does not mean that leaders will completely trust others, but rather that the existence of institutions and potential cooperation will make leaders more willing to negotiate with other leaders for peace. Here, "trust" is defined as "having positive present expectations about the other actor's future behavior", and a lack of interaction will increase the possibility of mutual distrust [30]. Even though the occasional regular meetings of high-level leaders might not solve an important problem, it increases the chance of solving some relatively small problems and future bigger problems. It should also be noted that this will work only if that person is a high-level leader because most others don't have the same level of power. As previously discussed, states will not go to war if they think the benefits they gain from trade and cooperation are more than the benefits they gain from war. When high-level leaders have regular meetings and know each other's intentions and conditions better, they will have a higher chance of accurately predicting the likely benefits of peace and the potential gains from war. This means that if a high-level leader from a hegemony states, say country A, has regular contact with a high-level leader from a rising country, say country B, due to the existence of institutions, then the leader from country B may conclude from their meeting that country A does not want to constrain their developments and that they can actually gain more benefit from peace than from wars, so it is less likely for country B to start a war with country A. In general, the increasing transparency of military power and trust among leaders can enable states to predict likely benefits more precisely and therefore helps to promote peace.

### **3.4. Conclusion for Economic Globalization**

This article claims that trade can insert a positive effect on promoting peace if three conditions are met: free trade, capital mobility, and efficiency for growth. Free trade can change domestic distribution patterns and provide lower-class citizens and competitive industries more social power to exert pressure on policy makers to make the states more inclined to peace; when capital mobility is ensured, the capital in the market can reflect decisions made by policymakers who would later revise their decisions based on feedback given by the market, and reduce leading states' dependence on war as a way to achieve their national interest; efficiency for growth allows states to weigh the benefits from peace and war respectively and see which condition gives them more gains, therefore making decisions about initiating wars based on

proper measurement. These requirements are more likely to exist in international economic institutions, as institutions can offer a platform for free trade and capital mobility through lowering opportunity costs and automatically punishing states who break the agreements. At the same time, they constrain hegemonic states from restricting the development of the rising states through treaties, and can increase the transparency of military capabilities and trust among high-level leaders. In these ways, institutions act as a vehicle for economic globalization to promote peace.

#### 4. Conclusion and Implication for the Whole Article

The reasons for the long peace are many, and it would be naïve to claim that it was the result of only one factor. In evaluating the two factors as mentioned above—nuclear weapons and economic globalization—I believe that these factors work in tandem with each other to promote the long peace. On the one hand, nuclear weapons prevent states from having the ability to launch any major conflicts for fear of the immense costs. On the other hand, economic globalization prevents states from having the willingness to initiate conflicts with each other because both parties stand to benefit from peace. Without nuclear weapons, a large enough disturbance in the economic world order could launch the world into a third world war. Without economic globalization, states may attempt a game of one-upmanship, picking conflicts constantly to gain victories over each other. We are fortunate to live in a world with both of these factors, and in a world where states neither have the interest nor the capability of fighting major wars with each other.

In general, nuclear weapons can prevent conflicts among states with nuclear power, because the costs of war would be high when both sides have nuclear power, and states would also have the capability to introduce punitive measures in retaliation against attack. In addition, the existence of nuclear weapons is hard to negate, and so it would be nearly impossible to mitigate the aforementioned costs if nuclear war occurred. At the same time, however, nuclear weapons could potentially enable low-level regional conflicts because countries with nuclear power have a higher chance of winning during a crisis, because nuclear superiority offers states counterforce advantage, and because conflicts are enabled when in nuclear asymmetry. For economic globalization, the main argument is that trade could insert a positive effect on promoting peace when three conditions are met: free trade (a system which changed domestic distribution patterns), capital mobility (free-flow capital would send warning signals for wars), and efficiency for growth (states would not go to war if the benefits brought by trade are greater than the gains from war). These conditions are made more stable by the existence of international institutions, especially economic institutions, as they offer a platform for a unified liberal economic system and prevent hegemonic states from constraining the development of rising states.

For the sake of continuing the long peace, trade and nuclear powers could not be considered separately, for trade creates more immediate reasons to prevent policymakers from choosing war, reduces the motive of starting war, and bonds countries together, while nuclear weapons prevent these countries from engaging in wars due to the insurmountable costs. This article examines the implication of the finding via three different means: First, through military strategies in the nuclear weapon era; second, through policies regarding globalization; third, through the role of international trade institutions.

First, the nine nuclear states shall continue maintaining their nuclear weapons, since the mere existence of nuclear weapons symbolizes a deterrence on other countries' willingness to start a war. Also, policies and advocates of nuclear proliferation for the sake of benefiting the states that do not have nuclear weapons should also be discouraged, because it will introduce more instability into the system, and give states with nuclear weapons a huge motive to initiate a

preventive war, causing more conflicts. It is for the same reason that the Treaty on Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons is signed: to prevent new states gaining nuclear weapons, interrupting the balance among the original nine states, and to eliminate the possibility of nuclear strike for the purpose of preventive war. This is the best way to move forward in the nuclear age.

Second, countries should remain cautious on the destabilizing effect that protectionism or isolationism brings. Undermining globalization loosens the tie of trade between countries, and gives countries more opportunities and reasons to become aggressive and wage conflicts. For example, the U.S. withdrawal from the Trans-Pacific Partnership, which unties the trade bond of it and the other 11 countries, is an act of deglobalization and should be discouraged. The U.K.'s action of withdrawing from the European Union is an act of similar nature, and therefore should also be discouraged because it not only hurts the overall economy but also generates more reasons for small conflicts to escalate without the restraint of trade.

Third, International trade institutions should continuously promote free trade, capital mobility, and efficiency for growth, reducing factors that would potentially cause conflicts through satisfying the interests of every country. The World Trade Organization (WTO) is an international trade institution that deals with the rules of trade between nations. Through settling trade disputes and supporting the needs of developing countries, the WTO aims to ensure the free flow of trade, provide legal ground for negotiation, and avoid preferential trade agreements. Through these sets of rules, WTO ensures the fairness of competition and economic development among its members, thereby promoting peace among them, reducing their aggressiveness toward each other.

Finally, the path forward ought to be one where we tread carefully. Another misstep would be one too many.

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