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"In the hour of its greatest achievement, the state is driven onto unexpected paths by the bounds of the system." Sudden, unexpected shifts in the trend of relative power underlie both the transformation of the international system and the massive warfare historically associated with it. In *Systems in crisis: new imperatives of high politics at century's end*, Professor Doran develops a theory of the power cycle that reveals the structural bounds on statecraft and the trauma of adjusting to these shifting tides of history.

In a bold and wide-ranging analysis, Doran considers the rise and fall in relative power of the major states from 1815 to the present. Demonstrating the conflicting messages in absolute and relative power change, and the unique international political perspective of statecraft that emerges, he comes to very different conclusions from Paul Kennedy's *The rise and fall of the great powers*. The dynamic conception of relative power invokes a paradigm shift in international political thought. Power cycle theory offers new insights into the causes of major war, explaining why confrontation led to one world war in 1914 and appeasement to another in 1939.

Systems change can, however, be peaceful. The priority of statecraft today is to find peaceful solutions to the shifting trends in relative power and role involving the U.S.A., the Soviet Union, China, Japan, and Europe. Doran proposes a managed solution to peaceful change, presenting a guide to avoiding the pitfalls that might make war more likely. Thus power cycle theory is a foundation upon which to build a cumulative conception of world politics.

Systems in crisis: new imperatives of high politics at century's end presents a broad and original analysis of one of the most important questions in world politics today. Charles Doran addresses problems of economics and history as well as of international relations, and this book will be essential reading for students and specialists in these fields as well as for policy analysts.

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New imperatives of high politics at century's end

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PREFACE

Uncertainty is the watchword of contemporary world politics. In the last decade of the century as in the first, the international system confronts transformation. During bipolarity and the Cold War, the markers for strategic policy were clear, containment worked, and Soviet expansion turned inward upon itself, feeding reform. But what are the guides for policy now? What is the threat? Is the Soviet Union acquiescing in decline with diminished foreign policy ambitions? Or is the Kremlin merely throwing out ballast in preparation for a new surge of growth in power and influence? Is Japan perhaps growing too fast, threatening its own, as well as the system's, ability to adjust when its ebullience suddenly bumps against the limits to relative power growth? How are China's awkward surges to be explained and to be assimilated? How far and how fast will Europe coalesce under the strains of structural adjustment occurring inside and outside West and East? Might the Cold War return? Clearly, the uncertainties of systems transformation are not the ordinary kind, but monumental structural uncertainties that reach deep into the core of cherished ideological preferences and domestic policy.

With systems change comes new hope but also new fear. The eagerness of some to accommodate domestic economic change and long-suppressed freedom is met with increased rigidities and opposition to social change by others. As bipolarity yields in the coming decades to some as yet undetermined new international system, world order and the other imperatives of high politics will increasingly have to face this uncertainty and its psychological and behavioral underpinnings. The inescapable reality of systems transformation is that statesmen must navigate these unexplored waters. But if statesmen are to succeed where those of previous systems transformations have fared so poorly, a new chart is needed. Power cycle analysis is a map that may help cross difficult passages.

What causes systems transformation and the massive war historically associated with it? That is the question which drives this study.

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The study does not pretend to examine all war, but only a subset of major war, including the massive confrontations that have periodically fractured the international system. Such war is thankfully a rare event, and, according to power cycle analysis, it is tied to an equally rare occurrence in the history of a major power and of the system. These wars are associated with existential moments in the international political development of the state known as "critical points" where foreign policy expectations suddenly are proven wrong. When several leading states undergo critical change at about the same time, everything in foreign policy terms seems to have changed. Long-standing contradictions in the system are exposed, and equilibrium among states may be on the verge of snapping as a backlog of adjustments between interests and power suddenly demand resolution. It is a system in crisis.

History records these existential moments when governments discover that their foreign policy expectations are no longer valid. The policy maker does not come to know these changes by some sophisticated set of charts and tables or calculation of growth rates. The strategist may not even be aware of the overall power cycle dynamic. Such calculations and awareness are not assumed, and their absence only verifies the shock of discovery for the unsuspecting government and society. But, at some point in the nation's history, the policy maker finds that past assumptions about long-term security and status no longer make sense. Power cycle analysis puts into meaningful international political terms how these troubling discontinuities of foreign policy perception occur, and how and why governments have reacted to them in ways that all too often have been violent.

The analysis fuses three substantive and analytic foci of international relations scholarship: analysis of normative options and choices in foreign policy behavior; analysis of major war and its causes; analysis of the system's structure and relative power. Underlying the first two foci was the conviction that only by understanding the causes of major war can idealists and realists alike hope to channel their "intense revulsion against war" (Howard 1984, p. 21) into effective policies to prevent it. Underlying the third focus was the equally strong conviction that the concept of relative power is central to the understanding of statecraft, that the structure of the international system uniquely affects the opportunity, constraints, and behavior of the statesman. There was the sense that, just as the more encompassing perspective of macroeconomics revolutionized understanding of the economy, so might systemic structural (relative power) analysis provide a clearer "Copernican" perspective on the causes of

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major war, the trauma of systems transformation, and the path to world order (Hoffmann 1960, Waltz 1979).

Power cycle theory emerged from historical sociological analysis of the first three epochs of systems transformation and the postwar efforts to establish world order (Doran 1971). Why did statesmen fail to preserve the peace? What strategies did they employ, what political obstacles did they face? What was it about the rise and decline of great powers that repeatedly proved so traumatic? Once conceptualized, the "idealized power cycle" disclosed conflicting messages and surprises in relative growth itself. It became apparent that the state power cycle involves much more than mere rise and decline, and that the heart of what the statesman considers important in world politics is ensconced in the uniqueness of the relative power dynamic. In power cycle analysis, the concern of the statesman that the "tides of history have changed" takes on very specific meaning, a meaning absent from the balance-of-power assessment of state behavior.

Economics stresses the importance of change in the absolute levels of power. At the heart of international politics are changes in relative power. The power cycle encompasses state and system in a single dynamic of relative power change within that system. When conceived in terms of such a single historical dynamic, the perspective of changing relative power opens up a whole new structural interpretation. A light bulb comes on, illuminating the discommodious complexity of world politics. In the hour of its greatest achievement, the state is driven onto unexpected paths by the bounds of the system.

That complexity is not only structural. It must also encompass the essential behavioral component of statecraft. Hence "power cycle" is an abbreviation of "cycle of power and role" and its operationalization as the "cycle of relative capability." The power cycle is, in essence, the state's development as a major international political actor involving a variety of leadership roles. It depends on both actualized capabilities and the latent capabilities which are necessary to sustain its long-term growth in power and role. The cycle traces a state's changing performance and size relative to other leading states over long time periods, and hence, in the broadest (simplest) sense, its rise and decline as a great power. While it does offer historians a clear depiction of the "shifting balance of world forces" (Mowat 1968), of the trends of history (Dehio 1962, Kennedy 1988), the power cycle is an even more potent analytical device. It is a key to the uniquely international political mind-set of the contemporaneous statesman.

The power cycle records, at each moment in time, the state's clearly defined past and the likely trajectory of its yet-to-be-determined

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future. It records the political development of the state as an evolving phenomenon, revealing at each step how contemporaneous statesmen perceive the state, its past history, and its projected future. The power cycle thus is a concept that encompasses the requirements of the statesman and the analyst of international political behavior, and thereby R. G. Collingwood's requirement that the historian "re-enact the past in his own mind" (1956, p. 282).

Hence, while the analysis is based solely on the facts of history as they unfold, its approach is that of historical sociology which analyzes history holistically (Hoffmann 1960). Historical sociology studies international political behavior from a variety of sociological perspectives, and it requires methods, concepts, and analyses that go beyond the descriptions and explanations of the events that evolved. It invites (rather than eschews) speculation about the likely effects of alternative responses which decision makers did indeed consider, and about the morality or justice of various alternatives which decision makers did (and do) explicitly evaluate. In turn, the resulting analytical constructs and speculations attempt to provide new understanding and clarity to historical description.

Power cycle theory thus provides a uniquely international political perspective for the understanding of statecraft, in past history and in contemporary policy. It demonstrates that relative power, and hence the international political issues confronting statesmen, cannot be fully understood outside the context of the full relative power dynamic. Removed from the singular preoccupation with the flat chessboard of military strategy, with the perceptions and concerns of statesmen correctly focused, the origins of the First World War look quite different. So does the possibility for a resolution to the so-called "dilemma of peaceful change."

Derived from international political assessment, and quite intuitive once explained, the logic of the political dynamic at critical points, including the likelihood for instability there, is supported by the rigor of mathematical logic. Critical points are mathematically unique points of abrupt change in the dynamic, the very opposite of gradual change. Uniquely at the critical points, the state experiences a sudden, unanticipated, and ineluctable *inversion* in the trend of foreign policy expectation. During critical periods, when the tides of history suddenly change, adjustment is both necessary and more difficult.

Notwithstanding the inherent structural instability at critical points, why have governments so often failed to adjust? Why is the occurrence of a critical point so potentially unsettling and traumatic?

First, with very high uncertainty about systemic structure, the

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familiar policy anchors are either gone or in question. It is uncertain whether a state remains in the central system, how many major players will count in the future, who alliance partners are and how steadfast, whether security arrangements are less certain or open to reinterpretation, and whether foreign policy role is in jeopardy. All of these are high stakes matters manifested in radically altered foreign policy expectations. Such uncertainty is not a secure basis for new foreign policy initiative.

Second, gaps between interests and power long in the making are squeezed to the surface of awareness by the stress of state interaction in the critical interval. Governments probe and struggle for advantage when opportunities previously restricted suddenly appear within grasp, or just beyond reach. What rationalization or subterfuge has earlier foreclosed now seems ripe for taking. But the atmosphere has been poisoned by the resulting tension. Governments are defensive and are not prone to bargain as rationally as during normal times. Overreaction and anxiety occur, and decision making may take on a crisis quality. Inversions of force expectation are of a much higher probability, for state policy initiatives and systemic responses are likely to be less controlled.

Third, even if policy makers are able to overcome uncertainty and act in as controlled a manner as at other times in the state's history, they still must translate policy choice into action. To do so they must convince reluctant policy elites to yield long-held foreign policy interests or to assume new interests they are hesitant to support. Policy makers may have to call for increases in military spending or for expeditious cutbacks, policy choices determined by the requirements of external equilibrium. Because of their abstruse nature, when set against practical matters of territorial concessions or financial expenditure, the dictates of external equilibrium are difficult to explain to publics, and difficult to sell to the bureaucracy or the political party. Inertia is as common to the implementation of policy as it is to the making of decisions.

But can governments learn from history? Can they learn to adjust to the determinants of structural change? Of course they can. That is the imperative for which this book has been written. A clue to adjustment lies within the power cycle dynamic.

"Policy makers can, if they will, use history more discriminatingly." Ernest May's (1973) prescription for the more discriminate use of history has an uncanny resemblance to the clue within power cycle theory: "Instead of merely projecting a trend, [analysts] can dissect the forces that produced it and ask whether or not those forces will persist

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with the same vectors" (p. xii). The perceptive historian or political scientist, like the perceptive commodity trader or perceptive politician at election time, knows that critical points do exist when *everything changes*, when forces suddenly do *not* "persist with the same vectors." In international politics, a complete *inversion* in the prior trend of *relative* power occurs at a critical point, inverting the very assumptions upon which the state has long become accustomed to viewing its future. Power cycle theory warns statesmen that existing trends in relative power will someday change, even as trends in absolute power continue unchanged. When relative power trends do change, there will be a need and a demand for adjustments.

Just as the politician, commodity broker, or coach learns to capture the "existential moment" of change and turn it to advantage, so the statesman must learn to adapt to the dynamic of the power cycle and to adjust foreign relations accordingly. But the analyst should not assume that such adjustment will be easy. Confusions regarding the appropriate adjustment increase multifold during the trauma and massive uncertainty of a critical period. When to accommodate and when to oppose – the dilemma of peaceful change – has too often resulted in the wrong choice.

At the height of crisis in the 1930s, the dilemma of peaceful change was the focus of practicing diplomats and their foreign policy advisors, of international lawyers and legal scholars, who watched it fail in policies of "appeasement of aggressors" (Wright 1942, p. 1075). Stimulated by events in Japan and Germany early in the decade, widely discussed at conferences and in books by the policy elite in New York, London, and Paris, the dilemma was not a theoretical contrivance but a real-world diplomatic conundrum. Norms and legal regimes were even then at the heart of the search for solutions. Yet the debate was overtaken by events, because the underlying structural problem was never solved concerning how to reconcile changing power with legitimate interest. What kinds of international political demands are legitimate and what is a just response? This book proposes a possible solution to that dilemma based on the power cycle dynamic, a solution that puts the burden on decision makers to eliminate power-role fissures *prior to* the crisis of critical change.

International relations as a field has attempted to explain foreign policy outcomes through an integration of strategy with the dictates of the systems structure, and with norms later to be encompassed in the notion of international regimes. As the paradigm shift to an international political perspective evolved, a number of enigmas required sorting out: (1) the complex relationship between absolute and relative

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power change; (2) how to distinguish state and systemic level analysis without distorting either; (3) how to proceed from a static conception of structure to a truly dynamic interpretation, and (4) how to dissociate economic processes and concerns from that which is uniquely international political in the structural dynamic and in the behavioral responses of statesmen. Power cycle theory addresses each enigma directly.

But there was also a tendency in structural analyses either to reject balance-of-power thinking as invalid, or to accept it unquestioningly. Only belatedly has the vertical international relations perspective been integrated more fully with a modified horizontal balance perspective. Likewise, the idea of foreign policy role had to be reunited with the parallel notion of national capability. Within power cycle theory, management of systems change is viewed as a restoration of conceptions of morality and legitimacy on a par with the structural foundation of international political order.

In the midst of far-reaching structural change, what set of policies will contribute to global security and political stability? Viewed from the systemic perspective, the challenge for policy in a transforming world looks at once clearer and more complex.

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