The Problem of Change in International Relations Theory

K.J. Holsti

Institute of International Relations
The University of British Columbia

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About the Author

K. J. Holsti is University Killam Professor of Political Science at the University of British Columbia, Vancouver, Canada. He is a former president of both the Canadian Political Science Association and the International Studies Association. He has authored numerous articles and six books. His latest volume is *The State, War, and the State of War*, 1996, published by Cambridge University Press. Holsti was elected a Fellow of the Royal Society of Canada in 1983.

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Abstract

One of the most important features distinguishing different schools of thought about international relations is the notion of change. Despite its critical importance, it remains under-theorized. Since the end of the Cold War, in particular, claims about world "transformation," a "new era," "new epoch," and other types of change have proliferated. We do not have, however, any benchmarks with which to evaluate these claims. This essay examines different conceptions of change, how they are used and misused, and why it is therefore appropriate to infuse inquiry with some disciplined research. The paper concludes that a critical benchmark to identify and measure change is the international institution. It illustrates this argument with some examples of recent institutional change, transformation, and obsolescence.

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Because we have an inadequate basis for comparison, we are tempted to exaggerate either continuity with the past that we know badly, or the radical originality of the present, depending on whether we are more struck by the features we deem permanent, or with those we do not believe existed before. And yet a more rigorous examination of the past might reveal that what we sense as new really is not, and that some of the "traditional" features are far more complex than we think.

- Hoffmann, 1977, p.57

(Since) no shared vocabulary exists in the literature to depict change and continuity,…we are not very good as a discipline at studying the possibility of fundamental discontinuity in the international system.

- Ruggie, 1993, pp.140, 143-144

I. Introduction[1]

These observations about the nature of inquiry in international relations points directly to a fundamental, if often hidden, dimension of all international theory. It is the problem of change. Ruggie is right: we do not have even the beginning of a consensus on what constitutes change or transformation in political life. Currently, the field is in the throes of a major theoretical reorganization precisely because change, whether in speed, organizational types, or processes, seems to be ubiquitous in the contemporary world. But we do not know what, theoretically, to make of it because there is no consensus on what we mean by change, not to mention how we identify it. This is strange, since major schools of thought diverge from each other over differing perspectives on the human condition.

Indeed, one can make the case that the great debates among theorists of international relations have been implicit arguments about the nature of change, its possibilities, and its consequences (Cf., Buzan and Jones, 1981:2). Along with other dimensions that distinguish the various schools and strains of international theory, mutability has been a major area of disagreement (Ferguson and Mansbach, 1988; Holsti, 1990). Those who have been labeled realists belong to that category because they believe in common that anarchy creates a realm, which predisposes states and their policy-makers to behave in certain ways irrespective of national attributes and policy-makers' wishes. The price paid for political independence is insecurity, and it matters not whether we are speaking of the independent Greek city-states, the city-states of Renaissance Italy, or modern nation-states. Thucydides, Meineke, von Gentz, Gilpin, and Waltz commonly share a view of recurrence in international politics, and are skeptical about the possibilities of transcending the consequences of anarchy through international institutions, learning, or sociological and technological changes at the unit or transnational levels. Realists, in this sense, are pessimists and whatever else their differences, change in international relations is limited to narrow parameters such as alterations in the balance of power, the poles of power, or the cast of great power characters.

Realists are castigated by many for not acknowledging that some things in international life have fundamentally changed and that, therefore, the conceptual apparatus that may have been useful for understanding and even explaining diplomatic/military life in eighteenth and nineteenth century Europe will not help us a great deal today (Cf., Holsti, 1994; Strange, 1996). Proponents of the view that the quality of international life today is fundamentally different are equally criticized for failing to acknowledge continuities (Cf., Bull, 1977: ch. 10; Mearsheimer, 1990). Absent some agreement on what we mean by change, how we identify it, and for what purposes, these debates are likely to continue and to come to no resolution.

Liberals and constructivists of various stripes continue to emphasize the variability of state interests, the capacity of policy-makers to learn, and the prospects for progress away from standard scenarios of realists such as security dilemmas and stag hunts (Cf., Adler, 1991). Post-modernists join a variety of positivist-oriented critics in claiming that the main conceptual categories of the realist tradition — for example sovereignty and anarchy — are no longer consistent with the observed facts of international life. R.B.J. Walker (1993: x), for example, charges that mainstream versions of IR theory "remain caught within the discursive horizons that express spatiotemporal configurations of another era." Susan Strange (1996: 3) argues that "…social scientists, in politics and economics especially, cling to obsolete concepts and inappropriate theories. These theories belong to a more stable and orderly world than the one we live in." The result is "one-eyed social science" (p. 195). For others, traditional concepts are mere "discursive strategies" used to play or support the game of power politics (George, 1995). In these views, we are living in an era of profound change, but our ways of seeing the world have not changed. Few of the assumed "realities" of, say, the nineteenth century remain with us any longer. We continue to employ the older conceptual apparatus at our intellectual peril. It is incumbent upon us to

[1] This working paper is a revised version of a paper presented at the ISA-ECPR meetings in Vienna, September 16-19, 1998.

accomplish an intellectual "jailbreak" (Rosenau, 1990: ch. 2), to move beyond ritual invocations of concepts that once had theoretical and descriptive uses, but that are no longer able to capture those things that are truly new and novel in the world. We need, in brief, to reconfigure our conceptual equipment and to look at the world in new ways. Today, traditional concepts act as ontological blinders (Deibert, 1997: 169) rather than as aids to understanding.

But there is more than just change in the theoretical air. Increasingly, scholars of International Relations are claiming fundamental ***transformations***. We live in an era not of marginal alterations and adaptations, of growth and decline, but in an era of discontinuity with the past. Rosenau speaks (1990: ch. 1) of post-international politics and (1997: 7) of a contemporary "epochal transformation." Yoshikazu Sakamoto (1994: 15,16) characterizes the contemporary scene as a ***new era*** involving fundamental transformations. Takehiko Kamo (1994: 108) argues that "the very rules of the game of international relations have shifted." Rey Koslowski and Friederich Kratochwil (1994: 215-48) argue that the end of the Cold War constituted a "transformation" of the international system — not a change within the system but a change ***of*** system. The 1998 annual meetings of the International Studies Association were resplendent with papers and panel titles bearing the term "Post-Westphalian" order, suggesting that recent trends and events have transcended some of the foundational principles of international politics as we have known and studied them over the past century.

Post-modernists and many critical theorists join the stream of criticism but read our intellectual predicament somewhat differently. Rosenau and Strange, they might suggest, do not go far enough because they remain wedded to positivism and to the idea that the trained observer can through a variety of rigorous procedures encapsulate the amazing complexity of the world into totalizing theoretical projects such as Rosenau's (1990) "two worlds of world politics." The world, they claim, cannot be rendered intelligible through "grand" theoretical projects that attempt to distill complexity, paradox, and change into neat theoretical packages and categories. Rather, we now have to acknowledge that everything is in flux, paradox prevails, and we can only know what we ourselves experience (Cf., Ashley and Walker, 1990; George, 1995).[2] Generalization is a Western logocentric practice that invariably contains a political program. To know, literally, is to act, and since the record of action on the diplomatic front in the twentieth century is not one to be proud of, it is probably better not to know in the sense of generalization. Post-modernists, in their profound pessimism and epistemological narcissism, basically claim that change has rendered the pursuit of knowledge as we have known it since Aristotelian times not only a fool's game, but also ethically dangerous. The human mind is incapable of understanding the complexity of the world, and since change is ubiquitous, any attempt to characterize it in general terms is bound to fail.

Analysis of change, then, has become almost a constant in the academic field of international theory. A whole new vocabulary of clichés or analogies has invaded debate. "Globalization," the "global village," "spaceship earth," "interdependence," the "new millennium," "the borderless world," and the like, suggest that we have entered, or are entering, a new era or epoch in which contemporary ideas, practices, institutions, and problems of international politics are fundamentally different from their predecessors. But popular monikers, while evocative of things that are different, do not substitute for rigorous analysis. Lacking in all of this claim of novelty is a consensus not only on ***what*** has changed but also on ***how we can distinguish*** minor change from fundamental change, trends from transformations, and growth or decline from new forms. The intellectual problems are both conceptual and empirical.

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[2] The anti-theoretical stance of many post-modernists and post-structuralists renders it incapable of little but "dissidence" and "resistance." Most definitions of social science include terms such as explanation, generalization, construction, and the like. These are not possible in an approach that assumes that knowledge can come only from direct experience or that can be only local. Sandra Harding (1986: 164) sums up this view: "…coherent theories in an incoherent world are either silly and uninteresting or oppressive and problematic, depending on the degree of hegemony they manage to achieve. Coherent theories in an *apparently* coherent world are even more dangerous, for the world is always more complex than such unfortunately hegemonic theories can grasp." See Ashley and Walker, (1990) and George (1995), for similar sentiments.

This essay addresses two questions: (1) what do we mean by change? and (2) what, exactly, has changed in the fundamental institutions of international politics? This implies a sub-question, namely, what has ***not*** fundamentally changed?

II. Markers of Change

Change, like beauty and good skiing conditions, is in the eye of the beholder. From a micro perspective, the international events recorded in today's headlines constitute change because they are not identical to yesterday's news. The media, to perhaps a greater extent than ever before, run on a 24-hour cycle that militates against notions of continuity, that emphasizes novelty, and that encourages pessimistic framing of issues for analysis (Cf., Patterson, 1998). To a historian of civilizations, on the other hand, today's events do not even appear on the intellectual radar screen. They are not noted because nothing in those events suggests any sort of fundamental alteration of the persisting dynamics and patterns of power, achievement, authority, status, and the nature of social institutions. Somewhere between these micro (media) and macro (philosophical) extremes, observers may note certain types of markers where, typically, things appear to be done differently than they were previously. There is of course no objective marker that suggests one type of change is more obvious than the other. The only question is the uses to which different conceptions of change are put. To CNN, the daily headlines are all that matters. The 24-hour period becomes the main analytical unit marking one set of events from another. But CNN's operating idea of change is of no use to the historian of civilizations, or even to most theorists of international politics, for the vast majority of daily headlines do not suggest something that is ***fundamentally*** new. Micro change almost never indicates macro transformation. Yet, as the works of the French historian Fernand Braudel indicate, grass-roots-level actions and activities can be imaginatively aggregated to produce a multi-layered narrative of change with historical and philosophical import. At the bottom layer is the pattern of daily activities — not the great events of kings and warriors but the lives of the ordinary — that produce or account for trends over a period of time. These combine over the *longue durée* into patterned structures spanning centuries (Cf., Braudel, 1990).

A simple move away from daily events, whether at the individual or systemic levels, to more extended time periods — an alteration of perspective — does not solve the problem of change, however. It is not only units of time or levels of activity that encapsulate change. Trend analysis, to be sure, identifies change through ***quantitative alterations*** of common practices. Time is the backdrop of trends, but trends seldom mark or identify transformations because by definition a transformation indicates a change in properties rather than a mere quantitative increase or decrease of a category of behaviour. Let us now examine in more detail several popular markers of change.

Trends. Trends record one kind of change. Population grows, the membership in the United Nations increases, communications networks and the messages they carry proliferate and speed up (space and time are compressed), the volume of international trade grows at a much faster rate than total economic production, and the numbers of people traveling abroad increases annually. Moving in the other direction, the incidence of terrorist acts and airline hijacking declines, as do the number of nuclear warheads and the incidence of interstate wars. What are we to make of these well-chronicled trends? That they are noticeable or that they occur over a relatively short period of time does not necessarily make them theoretically significant. For the stock market player, the day's events, or the week's economic trends may be a key component of buy or sell decisions. But for the theorist of international politics, mere quantitative change on a particular dimension of international communication over a relatively short period of time will probably be of little interest unless those trends have a demonstrable major impact on how diplomatic, military, or commercial things are typically done. The change must have significant consequences. Otherwise the claim of change is no more than one observer's arbitrary judgment that things in a quantitative sense are not the same as they used to be. We have many notable trends over the past half-century, but their implications are by no means obvious. The theorist's claim to novelty thus remains no more than a claim: population, international trade, number of sovereign states, number of

IGOs and NGOs, investment flows, citizen competence, and the like may increase. But individually or collectively, what is their import? This is the Hegelian and Marxist problem: at what point does quantitative change lead to qualitative consequences (Cf., Jones, 1981: 20)? If the United Nations, with 51 founding members, ultimately has 300 members in 2050, can we say that it is the same organization? If global literacy rates reach the 75 percent mark in the next century, compared to 10 percent at the beginning of the nineteenth century, is this merely a quantitative change? Surely there must be some ***consequences*** — social, economic, political, and the like — that transform mere quantities into qualities. It is not the quantities that are so important; it is our designation of a meaning to them, usually a meaning that connects causes — quantitative changes — to consequences, or qualitative (type) changes.

Many contemporary clichés about international life implicitly make a quantitative/qualitative distinction, but without specifying at what point and how quantitative changes have produced ***new*** patterns, practices, and institutions — that is, new types. Absent a discussion of how we attribute meaning to quantities, we have no way of knowing when change becomes significant, or, more important, when it is or becomes transformational. Is the proliferation of communications networks of major significance? The concept of the "global village" suggests that at some point this quantitative growth in the media has led to ***new*** types of politics. But unless this novelty can be demonstrated, the idea remains a cliché rather than a useful analytical concept. All the problems of simple quantitative analysis emerge here. It can be argued, for example, that an increase in message volume between people says nothing about content. How does one compare a cryptic 6-word e-mail message today with a 12-page handwritten letter of the 1930s? Which is likely to have a greater impact on the reader, and in what ways? How do we interpret the well-known statistic that about 100 million people in the world regularly use the world wide web against the less well-known statistic that one-half of the world (three billion souls) have never made a telephone call? If you choose the first you will infer very different characteristics of the world than if you choose the second. Thus, inferring system-wide transformations from increases or decreases of selective quantitative trends is a tricky business indeed. Few of the advocates of the "new" international politics (or new paradigm, or whatever) have made a convincing case that all the quantitative changes since 1945 or 1989 — to pick arbitrary dates — somehow constitute a revolution, a new era, or a transformation in the world.

Trends are relative to the scales against which they are measured. And these are almost without exception arbitrary. Take one obvious example. If a war causes 40,000 casualties in one year — a Chechnya-like conflict — the matter is likely to make headlines as long as the "story" continues. But when 40,000 Europeans are killed annually in road accidents, this is not newsworthy. The scale here is not one of time or location, but of type of activity. Because of our values, we designate deliberate killing through armed combat a major event, while killing through accident is less significant. Our scales, then, are not merely quantitatively arbitrary, but also qualitatively constructed. This is one reason why it is so difficult to pin down the meaning of change: we have no consensus on the scales to use in measuring trends.

Great Events. Others favour "great events" as the main markers of change. Change is not an accumulation of many little acts, seen as trends. What matters are not quantities of standard practices, but great variations from the typical. Significant change, many argue, tends to be dramatic and compressed. The practices, ideas, and institutions of international politics assume reasonably fixed patterns over the long haul, until a major historical event — usually cataclysmic — changes them. Lord Bolin broke defined epochs in terms of chains of events (indicating regular patterns) being so broken "as to have little or no real or visible connection with that which we see continue" (quoted in Ruggie, 1993: 148). Historians often use the device of a major ***discontinuity*** to organize their narratives. Since 1800 to 1900 would be a purely arbitrary designation of the "nineteenth century," most historians prefer the period 1815 to 1914. The markers of change here are the end of one great period of European war and the beginning of another. An era or period is configured around major events that ostensibly caused major disruptions or changes of previous patterns. They are also the sources of entirely new patterns. Martin Wight (1978: 85) offers a good example when he argues that "the Versailles settlement was the final victory in Europe of the French Revolution over the Holy Alliance." For Wight, the historical markers

are clear and their significance for international politics are monumental. James Der Derian (1997: 66) has termed these "monster years," for they mark a fundamental transition, not just some arbitrary point on a quantitative scale. Notice, however, that the marker is still a chronological artifact and there is no guarantee that major events in fact alter typical patterns.

The problems of major events as markers of change are nicely (if unwittingly) summarized in Ian Clark's *Globalization and Fragmentation: International Relations in the 20th Century* (1997). He summarizes a number of historians' use of periodization to characterize the twentieth century. Most use the great events of 1914, 1919, 1939, 1945, and/or 1989-1991 as demarcating significant changes, even transformations, rather than continuities. But there is no agreement on these dates. That they all contained significant events is beyond dispute, but there is no consensus — indeed there is wide disagreement — as to whether or not these events were the sources of change or transformation. As with trends, choices tend to be arbitrary.

Did 1815 or 1919 really constitute some sort of discontinuity? Woodrow Wilson's wartime and post-war perorations would certainly lead one to believe that after 1919 the world had entered some sort of new age that was fundamentally different from its predecessors. Yet, the record of war, imperialism, and national chauvinism in the 1920s and 1930s would justifiably give rise to skepticism. A major event — the Great War and its subsequent peace conference — may have been notable, but in many respects it did not fundamentally and irrevocably alter diplomatic and military practices and institutions. Was 1945 a major marker separating significantly different epochs of twentieth century history? Many analysts have made a compelling case that it was; others have simply assumed it. Yet others, such as Clark himself, vigorously dispute the dichotomization of the twentieth century into two clear-cut parts. Thus one person's discontinuity or great event is not necessarily a sign of transformation for others. Arbitrary decisions remain, and because this is so, theorists of international relations are not likely to agree on their import.

Great Achievements. Another common marker is the "great achievement(s)" which stands in contrast to the ordinary and mundane. Unlike "great events," they suggest an ongoing pattern of difference from previous eras. New patterns of social practice deriving from these great achievements do not necessarily outlive their originators, however, and so change in this sense may be ephemeral. In eras marked by greater opportunities for heroism or the unique contributions of leaders, the markers can correspond to a dynastic reign, such as the Han dynasty[3] or the age of Louis XIV. Or it can refer to an era of great popular social, artistic, and cultural achievement as in the case of the "golden age" of Greece in the fifth century BC.

Significant Social/Technological Innovations. In the twentieth century, analysts have used many other types of events as historical markers suggesting fundamental change. After 1945, there was a good deal of talk about the "nuclear revolution," a technological innovation that nullified the Clausewitzian conception of war… or so it was believed. The record of war since 1945 is inconsistent with the conclusion, however. The "nuclear revolution" altered the nature of relations between great powers, to be sure, but it did not terminate violence between states. One reason there is a process of nuclear dismantling between some countries is the recognition that for most purposes they are very costly weapons that have become highly irrelevant to most foreign policy problems. Yet the term "nuclear age" still has some resonance and continues to suggest that those two days in August 1945 ushered in new qualities to international politics.

Today, however, the computer has reputedly replaced the atomic bomb as the causal agent of change or transformation. The bomb could only alter traditional security thinking — away from how to win wars to how to prevent them — whereas the microelectronic revolution has changed the daily life of several billion people. Its influences are more ubiquitous, and therefore more transformative than nuclear weaponry. Most of the discussion of "globalization," "the global village" or "borderless world" derives specifically from a technological innovation. As with "great events," however, there is little consensus on

[3] Even in contemporary Japan, official dates are recorded not according to the Western calendar, but to the year of the emperor's reign.

the consequences of the innovation. For some, "globalization" results in the erosion of sovereignty; for others it has strengthened the state. And there are innumerable positions between these two extremes.

III. Concepts of Change

Markers only identify when, supposedly, change takes place. They do not specify what kinds of change are involved. Theorists in our field, perhaps astonishingly, rarely take the trouble to define what they mean by change, even when disagreements about change are what drive many of the great theoretical debates in the field. But there are several major conceptions of change. These include change as replacement, change as addition, dialectical change, and transformation.[4] Most authors fail to specify which kind they have in mind, yet the differences between them are theoretically important, perhaps even crucial in estimating the validity of claims.

Change as Replacement

The end of the Cold War stimulated a large industry of projections for the future. Most of these heralded significant changes in the texture, structures, and practices of international relations as we head to a new millennium. For McFaul and Goldgeier (1993), Singer and Wildavsky (1993), and Koslowski and Kratochwil (1994), the end of the Cold War constituted, at a minimum, a fundamental change in the way the superpowers relate to each other and, at a maximum, a true transformation of the international system. They accept Mueller's (1989) view that the probabilities of seeing a major power war are significantly declining. If there is such a trend, then obviously one significant pattern of international relations since the 16th century — great power war — will terminate. Surely this would qualify as a significant, and perhaps even transformational, change in the international system's evolution. For Samuel Huntington (1993), in contrast, war and violence do not end with the Cold War. Only the fault-lines of international conflict have changed from conflicts between states and their encapsulated ideologies, to conflicts between civilizations. Notice that one common practice of international politics, namely war, does not disappear; only the types of actors that engage in it do. Huntington's change is therefore not so fundamental as Francis Fukuyama's (1990). For the latter, we are in the midst of a major historical transformation, where for a variety of ideational and technological reasons, something resembling perpetual peace — the dream of thinkers since at least the Duc de Sully in the 17th century — will come to pass. For Alain Minc (1993), there is yet another area of change. The breakdown of political authority in many Third World states and in the OECD countries is giving rise to "*le nouveau moyen âge*," an era where we can expect less safety of life and property than we have seen in almost a millennium. If Minc's prognostication comes to pass, clearly there will have been more than just a quantitative change. The patterns and structures of the past will be ***replaced*** by vast sets of novel conditions.

For Mueller and Fukuyama, peace replaces war. For Huntington, civilizational wars replace inter-state wars. For Goldgeier and McFaul, Wildavsky and Singer, and Kaplan (1994) the relative stability of the Cold War is replaced by the "coming chaos" characteristic of armed conflict in the Third World. Whether or not these changes are true transformations can be debated endlessly, but all the authors take a common stand in their implicit notion of change. ***A significant change is something new, and that new thing is usually the antithesis of something old.***

This is a ***discontinuous*** idea of change: new ones replace old forms, so the problem of transformation does not arise. Certainly nothing new develops without a past, but the characteristics of the new may be so fundamentally different from anything preceding that transformation is not an

[4] This list is not necessarily exhaustive. It does not include the jargon of contemporary debates, such as "shift," "move," or "moment." These terms are so nebulous that they cannot add to conceptual clarity.

appropriate word. Replacement means novelty. Anthony Giddens (1987: 33-34), though focusing on macro-social phenomena rather than contemporary international politics, adopts the discontinuist view of history on the grand scale when he argues:

> … I do not wish to deny the importance of transitions or ruptures in previous eras. I do, however, want to claim that, originating in the West but becoming more and more global in their impact, there has occurred a series of changes of extraordinary magnitude when compared with any other phases in human history. What separates those living in the modern world from all previous types of society, and all previous epochs in history, is more profound than the continuities which connect them to the longer spans of the past…. [T]he contrasts which can be made will often prove more illuminating than the continuities that may be discerned. It is ***the*** task of sociology… to seek to analyze the nature of that novel world which, in the late twentieth century, we now find ourselves…. In a period of three hundred years, an insignificant sliver of human history as a whole, ***the face of the earth has been wiped clean*** (my italics).

This is not an organic view of historical change. It is not similar to Braudel's concept of the "*longue durée*." It is not analysis of trends, of systemic change at the margins, or of the transformation of old institutions. In elaborating his social theory, Giddens makes it clear that contemporary social formations, and in particular the modern state, ***have virtually nothing in common with what has preceded***. For Giddens, meaningful modern history is the story of discontinuity and replacement, not of transformation. And so it is with many current speculations about the character of international politics after the Cold War.

Change as Addition

Change can also be ***additive***. Is it necessary for the state to disappear or to lose its authority and functions just because an increasing proportion of the economy of the world is becoming global? Will classical interstate wars disappear just because most wars today are internal (Holsti, 1996)? Is international law disappearing just because individuals have become subjects of law — a relatively new development? In none of these and many other cases, is a new phenomenon necessarily a ***replacement***. The old and the new can coexist, in which case change is additive. For theories of international relations, this means that there is not necessarily replacement of old patterns and concepts, but increased ***complexity***. It means that while behaviours consistent with elements of realism persist in many areas of the world, new forms of collaboration, cooperation, and governance are also developing. Stag hunts, security dilemmas, and prisoners' dilemmas (India-Pakistan, the South China Sea) coexist with international regimes, global governance, integration, and the development of pluralistic security communities (Sweden-Norway, Canada and the United States, the European Union, and the like). Global "civil society" does not replace national-level political activity; it only complements it. A significant proportion of the debates about theories of international relations over the past several decades do not claim that realism is wrong, but that it is incomplete. It is not the only game in town and for the sake of comprehensiveness we need to add other perspectives and other forms of activity. More on this below.

Dialectical Change

Dialectical concepts of change do not solve all the problems of identifying change, establishing markers, distinguishing quantitative from qualitative changes, the problems of micro versus macro perspectives, and the like. But they do handle in a unique way the old and the new. Change does not displace. But it is more than additive, meaning greater complexity. It can represent ***new forms*** built upon the old. Thus, there is both novelty ***and*** continuity. It can combine the new and the old without total replacement. But we must be wary of any teleological elements to dialectical notions of change. In the Marxist idiom, the synthesis arising from the contradictions between old forms always led to a "higher"

form. This progressivist notion of change may sound nice, but a synthesis can also signify reversal, corruption, or decline.

Change as Transformation

Transformation can result from quantitative changes which, when accumulated over a period of time, bring new forms to life. But, logically, the new forms must derive from old patterns. They can partly ***replace*** old forms, but by definition they must include residues or legacies of the old. One cannot transform from nothing. In the case of social and political institutions, a transformation is distinguished from obsolescence in the sense that old ideas, practices, and norms may remain reasonably similar over long periods of time, but the ***functions*** of the institution change. A good example is monarchy. In the Scandinavian countries, Japan, and perhaps less so in England, many of the practices of monarchy, as well as protocol, norms, and ideas remain similar over the centuries, but the functions of the monarchy have changed from ruling, to symbolism and national identity. There has been a transformation of an institution, but not its replacement. The old and the new coexist.

Much of the international relations rhetoric of the past decade implicitly makes the case for concepts of change as replacement or transformation. This seems natural following great events such as the end of the Cold War. Human propensities to optimism are particularly pronounced when long eras of tension, war, and violence seemingly come to an end. But previous claims to a "new world order," whether in 1815, 1919, 1945, or 1989-1991, have usually turned out to be somewhat premature. Most often, the claims of replacement and transformation would better be classified as additions or dialectical syntheses, where elements of the old and the new coexist. For example, if we do indeed live in a "Post-Westphalian" order, then there must be few traces of Westphalia remaining in it. We cannot use "Post-Westphalia" legitimately if there are only new elements added to the old. Similarly, if, as Rosenau (1990) suggests, we now live in a new epoch of post-international politics, then the main characteristics of international politics as we knew them for about three centuries must be demonstrated to have disappeared and to have been replaced by other (or new) practices, ideas, and norms. That we have more states, that we communicate more rapidly, or that we trade more within the context of a vastly expanded global population does not automatically entitle us to claim either discontinuity or transformation. Yet, this is exactly the tone of much international relations scholarship today.

James Rosenau and Change

Rosenau is one of the few in the field of international relations who has explicitly confronted the problem of change. He (1990: ch. 4) addresses most of the problems of change—the critical importance of time perspectives, philosophies of history, the scope of change (local, regional, global) and the extent to which "turning points," "tectonic shifts" and other markers or metaphors of change are the analyst's arbitrary designations. However, he is not explicit on the differences between anomalies, discontinuities, replacement, and transformation. His position is notable, nevertheless, because he insists that the analyst or observer establish ***benchmarks*** against which change can be measured — something that almost no theorists of international relations have done. For Rosenau, global change occurs only when ***system parameters become variables***. In his definition of parameters, one gets a sense of distinction between the ephemeral and the critical change:

> [T]he distinction between parameters and variables… lies at the heart of the tension between constancy and change…. [T]he parameters of a system are the wellsprings of continuity — the norms, procedures, and institutions evolved and tested through long experience that represent, as it were, "history's dictates" and that thus exert pressure against any developments that might lead to fundamental transformations. Put differently, parameters are the basic rules and organizing principles of a system that prescribes the goals, means, and resources of the system's role-occupants, including the mechanisms of enforcement (p. 79).

There are ambiguities here, but there is also a requirement for discipline, some notion of basics that transcend great events, personages, turning points or mere trends. Rosenau proceeds to make the case that three critical parameters of the international system have changed into variables, thus justifying his claim that we have entered a new era (a new type of system) labeled "post-international politics." Yet, while making claims of very significant changes in the three parameters, adding them up results in the two worlds of world politics, one of which — interstate politics — looks strikingly familiar to the world of international politics described in most textbooks in the field. Rosenau in fact adopts an ***additive*** notion of change, where the world of non-sovereignty based actors joins with the more traditional state-centered political universe. But this impression is not consistent with his intention, for he also (1990: 23) characterizes the micro-sociological changes in his analysis as constituting the "bases of a whole new order" which began to emerge in the 1950s (1990: 107-12). In his most recent global analysis (1997: 7, 273), he also writes of "epochal transformation" — implying the persistence of some elements of the old — into a ***new*** world order (implying replacement).

Rosenau has contributed vastly to our appreciation of the thorny issue of change. His insistence on establishing benchmarks gets to the heart of the matter. But in his interchangeable use of terms such as transformation, reconfiguration, new order, new epoch, and fundamental change for a wide variety of phenomena, there is disciplinary slippage. There is also the question whether Rosenau's three parameters are the crucial ones to examine. He places a great deal of emphasis on the change of individuals' relations to official authority and to the seeming decline of state authority, but relatively less to the fundamental institutions of international politics. Finally, many of Rosenau's new phenomena, particularly those relating to citizen-authority relationships, do not appear so new when viewed in historical context. Many of the examples of spontaneous citizen uprisings to alter government personnel and structures in the late 1980s — happenings crucial to Rosenau's suspicion that "the course of events" is entirely new — have more than superficial similarity with the events of the great revolutionary year of 1848 in Europe.

Systemic and Lower Levels of Change

Much of the popular discourse on contemporary change refers to systemic phenomena. The indicators of change, be they trends, transformations, or replacements, are universal. A new era in international relations, for example, does not refer to a single country's foreign policy alteration, but to properties of the entire system. Population growth, compression of time and space, decline in the incidence of interstate wars, or the waning authority of states are in most of the literature statements about universal trends. Whatever it is that is happening is not nationally- or regionally-based. The spatial hallmark of almost all international relations theory, indeed, is its unabashed — and therefore inappropriate — universalism (Holsti, 1998: 104-109).

There is, however, an approach to change that begins at the state or individual level. It is a theory of learning. We now have a large, mostly American-based, literature of this genre (Keohane, 1984; Peter Haas, 1990; Finnemore, 1997). Its focus is on the ways that foreign policy-makers re-define state interests as a result of learning through participation in international organizations and their encompassed epistemic communities. In Keohane's (1984: 97) terms, "changes in how people think about their interests" can be accounted for by "the close ties among officials involved in managing international regimes.…" Many similar statements abound in the literature. But change here is at the unit level, whether a policy-maker or a state's definition of interests. It does not automatically warrant claims of systemic change. This would be the ecological fallacy in reverse. Although Lebow (1994: 276) claims that "[é]lite learning at the unit level has systemic consequences," it would require a very muscular state indeed to change the entire texture of international relations in a given time period. Even the most revolutionary leaders like Hitler and Stalin were unable to alter the fundamental institutions of international relations, although they tried. World War II, among other purposes, was a war to sustain the Westphalian system, which means a group of institutions that sustain the sovereignty and independence of distinct political communities called states. Change at the unit level is not likely to alter such a system,

although when many states begin to emulate the changes of some "leaders," there may well be some form of system change or even transformation.[5]

IV. Making Sense of Change in International Relations: The Present Confusion

Assertions of change and novelty abound in contemporary international relations theory and in more descriptive and policy-relevant analyses. Regrettably, the assertions are often more notable for their stridency than for their sensitivity to important distinctions between concepts of change. We all seem to acknowledge obvious trends and tendencies, but we are much less certain as to their consequences for international relations. Time and space have been compressed; economics is being globalized; frontiers erode; autonomy is constrained; sovereignty is dead; an international civic society is developing to challenge the authority of the state; there are elements of a "new mediaevalism," and global problems have rendered solutions in terms of national priorities obsolete. The list is partial and only suggestive of the vast range of assertions about contemporary novelty. Most of these assertions are accepted as established trends or transformations, and hence the popularity of the demand for changing our ways of thinking. At the 1989 International Studies Association meetings, for example, one panel boldly announced: "International Theory: Out with the Old, In with the New." The claims of conceptual obsolescence are almost as numerous as the assertions of a new global politics.

Not everyone, of course, accepts these assertions. Adherence to "eternal verities," whether conceptual or empirical, remains striking in both academic discourse and in the ways that states conduct their foreign relations. Claims of a new world order or escaping "conceptual jails" notwithstanding, the behaviour of Pakistanis and Indians, Israelis and Arabs, or Greeks and Turks toward each other is strikingly reminiscent of Soviet and American relations during the Cold War, or of the Anglo-German rivalry before 1914. Chinese military activities in the South China Sea could be reasonably compared to French/Spanish/British struggles to control the Balearic Islands in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Current textbooks in international relations have not jettisoned concepts such as power, the state, national interest, conflict, security, or international organizations despite many claims that such ideas are dated, outworn, or part of an obsolete and closed "modernist discourse." Clearly, not everything has changed, so the cry for "out with the old" or abandoning outdated "discursive strategies" may be somewhat premature.

How are we to judge this proliferation of assertions and warnings? How are we to distinguish the significant from the passing and ephemeral? How can we assess the rival claims that changes constitute additions versus replacements and/or transformations? How can we judge whether or not conceptual "jailbreaks" are worth the effort?

In some respects, we cannot judge. One of the reasons the great disputes in international theory cannot be resolved is because we — analysts and theorists of the field — have fundamentally different conceptions of the world that we are trying to characterize, interpret, and explain. Realists are interested in the classical problems of peace and war and consequently concentrate on the official relations between states and between states and their international organizations. Others, in contrast, are not comfortable with the world of international politics. They want to examine "world politics," "global politics," or "globology" (sociology on a world scale, see Saurin, 1995: 257), that is, any political activity whose actors are somehow linked across state boundaries. The intellectual mandate of world or global politics runs from the activities of the secretary-general of the United Nations to African market women and the

[5] Koslowski and Kratochwil (1994) demonstrate how domestic changes in the Soviet Union in the late 1980s resulted in significantly different diplomatic-military practices that can be considered as system-transforming. The question is whether the end of the Cold War transformed the entire system, as they imply, or just the Cold War subsystem.

wives of Zapatista rebels in Chiapas. The purview of "globology" is no less than the grand project of global social change. Rosenau's recent work, as an exemplar of this much broader agenda, is perhaps better referred to as "global sociology" than international politics.[6] Analysts of "global civil society," "interdependence," or "transnational relations," as well as most post-modernists, have a similarly broad agenda. Since these perspectives are so different from the focus of the "classical tradition" — that is, the relations between states as they revolve around issues of war, peace, and security — they are incommensurable. They are not right or wrong, but different. There cannot be, therefore, some consensus on what has changed and what continues. For the global sociologist, all sorts of trends suggest change, though not many would qualify as evidence of a new epoch or transformation in the relations between states.[7] On the other hand, because many governments behave in ways approximating the tenets of realism or liberalism, those characterizations have a ring of truth that hints more at continuities than at transformation.

V. Change and International Institutions

Though we cannot judge between conceptions of the world, we must, as Rosenau insists, develop benchmarks from which significant deviations can be noted. This is, of course, an arbitrary choice but in the case of international institutions, it is one that can be vigorously defended. This choice may not be accepted by all because it is political rather than economic or sociological, and because it is state-centric. However, an essential foundation of a society of states is the international institution. It would be difficult to make the case that international institutions are not fundamental both to the study and practice of international politics. If the fundamental institutions of international relations, collectively, change to the point of transformation, as many contemporary analyses argue or imply, then with some authority we can make the case that we are seeing the emergence of a new kind of international system. We must specify, however, whether the change is a replacement, addition, transformation, or synthesis. If, on the other hand, most international institutions maintain their essential characteristics, though with some degrees of change such as added complexity, then we have no solid basis for making the claim that in terms of international politics, we live in a new world. There may be substantial changes in the distribution of capabilities, such as occurred at the end of the Cold War, but this does not add up to a systems change. Nor do sociological phenomena such as increased communication, the growth of the international economy, or increases in tourism, terrorist incidents, and the like.

The institutions of international politics are fundamental. They are not to be confused with organizations, such as the United Nations. I follow Hedley Bull's use of the term institution which, while not exact, implies the critical importance of the combination of ideas, practices, and norms:

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[6] Rosenau (1990: 35) defines global, world, or postinternational politics — his intellectual domain — in terms of "people, goods, and ideas that span the borders of countries in a political context." Saurin (1995), among others, seeks to eliminate the privileged status of states in these analyses and to view social change from a truly global perspective. Hence his call for the "end of international relations." The lack of agreement on the scope of the field is brilliantly, if inadvertently, reflected in Jim George's (1995) critical survey of the field. He implies (p.116) that the attempt to describe and explain the behaviour of states is not a priority intellectual activity because it is "framed" in a "closed modernist discourse" based on positivism and state-centrism (p.119), while resistance to "brutality" at the "everyday, community, neighborhood and interpersonal levels" (pp.214-215) is the proper analytical and political focus for the field.

[7] Bull (1977: ch. 11) is highly skeptical about the novelty of many sociological phenomena, including non-state actors, interdependence, and the like. Many sociological treatments of "global politics" are rather cavalier in their dismissal of historical evidence. One minor example: Rosenau (1997: 317) claims that "… triumphant subgroupism [has] ***lately*** become a recurrent feature of global politics." This overlooks the triumphant subgroupism of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries that gave birth to ten new European states.

> A ***society of states*** (or international society) exists when a group of states, conscious of certain common interests and common values, form a society in the sense that they conceive themselves to be bound by a common set of rules in their relations with one another, and share in the working of common institutions…. In international society… the sense of common interests… does not in itself provide precise guidance as to what behaviour is consistent with these goals; to do this is the function of ***rules***. These rules may have the status of international law, of moral rules, of custom or established practice, or they may be merely operational rules or 'rules of the game,' worked out without formal agreement or even without verbal communication. It is not uncommon for a rule to emerge first as an operational rule, then to become established practice, then to attain the status of a moral principle and finally to become incorporated in a legal convention… (13, 67). States communicate the rules through their official words.… But they also communicate the rules through their actions, when they behave in such a way as to indicate that they accept or do not accept that a particular rule is valid (71).

I do not adopt the teleological aspects of this definition, because institutional growth, development, and decline are not always accounted for by common purposes.[8]

We can distinguish ***foundational institutions*** of the states system that emerged in the seventeenth century from procedural institutions such as diplomacy. Foundational institutions have allowed analysts of virtually all persuasions — from realists to liberal institutionalists and constructivists — to claim or assume that there is an international states system (or society of states, to use Bull's term) that is markedly distinguishable from empires, migrant clans and lineages, the complex mediaeval system of overlapping jurisdictions, leagues of cities, suzerainty systems, and other formats for organizing distinct political communities (Cf., Watson, 1992). Without these foundational institutions, we could not make these claims. Political space would be organized on different principles and, presumably, on different institutional formats. Foundational institutions define (1) legitimate actors; (2) the fundamental principles upon which they are based; and (3) the major norms, assumptions and/or rules upon which their mutual relations are based. The foundational institutions of the Westphalian international system includes states, sovereignty, territoriality, and the fundamental norm of all international law, *pacta sunt servanda*.

Procedural institutions are those repetitive practices, ideas, and norms that underlie and regulate interactions and transactions between the separate actors. These institutions refer not to questions of "who are we" and "how do we claim status and legitimacy," but to more instrumental issues of how we behave towards one another. They are important in helping us describe the essential characteristics of an international system, but they are of secondary significance compared to the foundational institutions. A procedural institution such as war could disappear without fundamentally altering the foundational institutions. A warless (in the sense of interstate war) world would be a wonder, but would it also be something else than a world of states? The states system has survived the demise of the international slave trade and colonialism, and with the new technologies available today, we can at least conceive of the death of traditional diplomatic institutions, but the foundational institutions might endure without substantial transformation.

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[8] There is no consensus on the meaning of the term ***institution***. I prefer Bull's version because it refers to ideas and practices as well as to rules. Keohane uses a narrower conception when he defines them as "rules and standards to govern specific sets of activities." (Keohane, 1998: 3). This term refers only to rules and norms and does not include ideas and common practices that are critical to the broader notion of institutions. An important analysis of the concept of international institutions is in Wendt and Duvall (1989). They contrast the "English School" notion of institutions — similar to the idea of *Gemeinschaft* — with the neo-realist notion that is akin to *Gesellschaft*. Wendt and Duvall emphasize that institutions both regulate practice and are constituted through practices. "Fundamental" institutions "represent the shared intersubjective understandings about the… preconditions for meaningful state action" (p.53) and are thus more than simply the results of calculations of state interests or the desire to reduce transactions costs. Kratochwil (1989:64) also emphasizes the combination of practices and norms.

Institutions are comprised, adding to Bull's definition, of a combination of (1) common ***practices***; (2) a ***consensus of ideas underlying those practices***; and (3) commonly observed and accepted ***norms, rules, and etiquette***. All three interconnected components must be present to constitute an international institution. Diplomacy is a procedural institution of international politics because it is a common and patterned ***practice*** in the sense that thousands of government officials are in daily contact for the purposes of exchanging information, persuasion, and formal negotiation. We can also predict with almost complete certainty that they will do exactly the same tomorrow, this date next year, and probably this date in 2015. It is precisely because diplomacy is practiced so widely, so frequently, and according to such common procedures that we take it for granted. Taking practices for granted provides one clue that they have become institutionalized. If political units went to war to see which ones could send diplomats abroad, if they regularly imprisoned, assassinated, or poisoned emissaries, and if major crises erupted over issues of diplomatic precedence, then we could not claim that the practice was either regular or institutionalized. Second, the practices of diplomacy are founded upon or surrounded by (1) concepts which command common understanding (e.g., diplomat, ambassador, conference, and the like) and (2) sets of ideas and expectations about how governments should deal with each other. There is no ideology of diplomacy, but there is something we can call a "diplomatic vocabulary" or "diplomatic culture" that is based upon ideas that command common recognition and understanding. Finally, diplomacy is surrounded by an extensive and commonly observed network of norms, protocols, regulations, and etiquette. Many of these have reached the status of law, as contained in the Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Privileges, Intercourse and Immunities (1961) which gave concrete form to and amended the conventional laws and practices of diplomacy developed in 1815 and subsequently. Although the ***practices*** of diplomacy may have changed in many ways — for example in the incorporation of representatives of non-governmental organizations or individual citizens in official diplomatic delegations — there is not much evidence available to suggest that the institution of diplomacy has been replaced or transformed. The ideas, norms, regulations, and conventions of diplomacy remain largely intact.

VI. Possibilities of Institutional Change

There are four possibilities for institutional change. Institutions can (1) arise; (2) change (increase in complexity); (3) transform, perhaps through dialectical processes; and (4) disappear.

Institutions seldom just appear suddenly. They are themselves the consequences of previous practices. When we say that they have arisen, we mean only that those practices have (1) become generalized, predictable, and patterned, (2) have been suffused with ideological justification or adorned with a commonly understood set of concepts and ideas, and (3) have become surrounded with norms, regulations, and etiquette. Diplomacy as a form of communication between distinct political entities has existed for several millennia. We know of clay tablets from the 3,000 BC on which matters of protocol and many other aspects of negotiation are inscribed. Permanent embassies became a fixture of the fourteenth century Italian city-states. But we cannot say that diplomacy became institutionalized until perhaps the seventeenth century or even later. For it was only in this era that the emerging states of Europe established permanent contact. They also agreed upon the essential qualifications for diplomats, developed ideas about a generic activity called diplomacy (Cf., Keens-Soper, 1973), instituted special training, distinguished between legitimate and illegitimate (e.g. espionage) activities, and formulated regulations, etiquette, and rules that governed matters such as precedence, *agrément*, status, rank, and numerous matters of protocol.

Once institutionalized, a practice or activity may change quantitatively. Today diplomacy encompasses the activities of hundreds of thousands of officials (compared to hundreds in the eighteenth century), taking place annually in thousands of multilateral meetings, and mostly practiced by issue-based experts in constant touch with their superiors. This pattern contrasts with the few "gentlemen" who received general instructions from their sovereign and then disappeared to a foreign capital for a decade

or more to bring those instructions to life. These mostly quantitative alterations do not fundamentally alter the practices, ideas, and rules developed in previous centuries. We would be hard-pressed to make the case that there has been a replacement or transformation of diplomacy. Why? Simply put, because the practices, ideas, conventions, and purposes or functions of diplomacy have not changed significantly.

There has been change in the forms of diplomacy as well as increased complexity. Compared to the eighteenth century, diplomacy has become professionalized, bureaucratized, and specialized. It is suffused with public relations work in ways that were unknown in previous eras. But staging, theatre, and spectacle surrounding diplomacy are not at all new. If anything, they were probably more elaborate and formal in the eighteenth century. The frequency of heads-of-state meetings is also at higher levels, but is not an innovation of the post-1945 period. Change in diplomacy has thus been primarily of the additive kind, involving greater complexity. But this is not the same as transformation.

Transformation is the third possibility. This is the case when change in the three defining variables has been so profound — once again, an arbitrary judgment — that even though the activity retains its original name, what really goes on is no longer the same. A further indicator of transformation is change in function (Cf., Deibert, 1997: 184) or purposes. Forms, rules, and ideas may remain, but the practices and purposes of the practices become transformed. War may be a current example of institutional transformation. In the eighteenth century, it was characterized by a set pattern of activities (training, mobilization, battle, command and control), a commonly accepted set of justifications (e.g., *raison d'etat),* definitions (e.g., Clausewitz), and other ideas. War was highly regulated by conventions, protocols, and etiquette (e.g., surrender ceremonies, treatment of prisoners and wounded, respect for civilian life, uniforms, ranks, declarations of war, and the like). The purpose of war was, according to its main philosopher of the period, Clausewitz, to promote and protect the interests of the state. Recent wars in Liberia, Sierra Leone, Tajikistan and other places have only killing in common with nineteenth century wars. In every other way they are a different phenomenon. Their purpose, or function, is not the pursuit of state interests "by other means," but to enrich small groups of kleptocrats whose private interests are paramount. Mercenaries have reappeared. The distinction between war and criminality has become increasingly blurred, as has the distinction between combatants and civilians. One of the major post-1945 trends that does suggest fundamental change is the pronounced waning of inter-state, Clausewitzian-type wars, and the luxurious growth of domestic violence where the practices, ideas, and norms of classical warfare are notable by their absence (Holsti, 1996: chs. 2-3). There is plenty of evidence to sustain an argument of the institutional transformation of contemporary war.

Finally, institutions can disappear. The international slave trade is one example. It began as a common ***practice*** in the sixteenth century.[9] By the eighteenth century, a variety of ideas, theses, and academic treatises justified it. Many of them had religious foundations, and others were based on Europeans' construction of a hierarchy of human worth, with savages occupying the lowest rung, and pagans the higher echelons. Savages were commonly considered as less than human and were therefore fair game for slavery. Pagans were civilized but suffered from the flaw of being non-Christians. They were human, however, and thus exempt from slavery. The norms and regulations of the institution dealt with questions of who could legitimately trade in slaves (including Arabs), shipping arrangements, and some primitive notions of paternalism in the care and treatment of the commodity. Thanks to the peace movement, various abolition societies, and some American state governments in the early nineteenth century, the Congress of Vienna officially declared it illegal.

Colonialism was another practice that became surrounded with norms and regulations, and was propped up with an elaborate set of social and political justifications (e.g., *la mission civilisatrice*), an elaborate anthropological taxonomy that clearly demarcated superiors and inferiors, and ideological principles. By the early twentieth century, notions of self-determination gained currency as moral justification for the creation of new European states from old empires. The rules of the colonial game also changed. The main idea of the League of Nations Mandates system was to prepare colonial peoples

[9] Slave trading was practiced systematically by the Greeks, Persians, Romans, and Arabs, among many others. We are concerned here only with its organized practice during the early modern European period.

for self-government, if not independence. This was an idea that only one-half century earlier would have been unheard of. By the end of World War II, statehood became the great goal of liberation policies and the ideological props of colonialism had been discredited by the barbarism of intra-Europan wars, by the spread of liberalism, and by forms of proto-nationalism in places like India. With no further ideological legitimacy, colonial practices gave way to the birth of over 130 countries in a matter of two decades. Today, colonialism has been rendered illegitimate by the fiat of United Nations resolutions.

Some have made the argument that colonialism had not died. It has been, instead, transformed. Fundamental structures of exploitation and domination remain, even though the new states have the paraphernalia of sovereignty. Some call it neo-colonialism, others "dependency" (Cf.., Galtung, 1971). Whatever the case, the official legal status of colonialism no longer exists and we can no longer call it an institution in the sense defined above.

The four possibilities — new institutions, institutional change (complexity), institutional transformation, and institutional demise — do not necessarily take place simultaneously in the international system. Some institutions die off as new ones arise. All institutions change over time, but some may do so more quickly than others. And some changes may lead to transformations, while others do not alter the three generic characteristics we use.

From the perspective of system change, presumably transformations in foundational institutions are more important than those of procedural institutions. We can chronicle institutional transformation in the practice of war, but this may not have system-changing consequences. If, in contrast, the institution of sovereignty is transforming, as an increasing number of analysts claim (Cf., Rosenau, 1990; Ruggie, 1993; Strange, 1996; Clapham, 1998), then there is a case for the view that we are in the midst of epochal change in the fundamental characteristics of international relations. We are in the process of systems rather than systemic change. Such a determination would provide a major filip for those who maintain that older generalizations about the fundamental characteristics of international politics are woefully out of date.

I conclude with a brief list of the major institutions of contemporary international relations (see Table 1). I have no rigid selection criteria (nor does Bull), but while all may not agree that the list is exhaustive, there would probably be a reasonable consensus that the main foundational and procedural institutions are included. In the right column, I make observations on an impressionistic basis about the kind of change that we have seen in each institution during approximately the period since 1945. The reader may want to add her or his own observations, and in particular note the kind of evidence that is needed to sustain the overall judgment about change.

This discussion will not end the debate about change in both the practice and theory of international politics but it may help to discipline the proliferation of claims about novelty, "new eras," "new world orders," transformations, and post-this or post-that. One detects in these claims a large component of wishful thought that seems to be replacing serious, empirically-based, and authoritative analysis. On the other hand, those who see nothing new and who continue to think that Thucydides, Machiavelli, or Morgenthau described the eternal verities of international politics will note, when examining international institutions, significant changes and even the demise of some institutions that were considered normal and quite permanent during their heydays. Not all may support the notion of international institutions as the only or most appropriate benchmark for noting change and continuity. But benchmarks of some kind are essential. In their absence, we have little but trends of debatable consequences, arbitrary dates, unsubstantiated epochs, eras, or systems, and no discrimination about types of change. In the midst of the current cacophony of countering claims, now is a good time to begin thinking systematically and in a disciplined fashion about the problem of change in international politics.

Table 1. Continuity and Change in International Institutions

Institutions	Major Changes	Current Status
Foundational Institutions		
Sovereignty	Increased complexity; some delegation of (EU); UN practices on humanitarian intervention; *quasi states*; international criminal activity	In process of transformation?
State	Reduced autonomy; growth of multiple loyalties; retrenchment of state functions; fragmentation of weak states	Slow transformation?
Territoriality	Increasing permeability but firmer legal status; reduced incidence of territorial change; outlaw change by force	Persisting / strengthening
International law	Growing complexity; foundational principles (*pacta sunt servanda*, reciprocity, equality) remain	Complexity (change)
Process Institutions		
Diplomacy	Growing complexity; "democratization;" foundational principles increasingly elaborated and legalized	Complexity (change)
Commerce	Growing complexity; quantitative increase; increasingly rule-bound; political influence of TNC's; rise of drug trade and international crime	Complexity (change); increased institutionalization, thus strengthening
Colonialism	Collapse of an institution	Obsolescence
Slave trade	Only few vestiges remain (traffic in women)	Obsolescence

War	Primarily within states; mostly civilian casualties; laws of war not observed; violence combined with criminality	Transforming or replacement
Conflict Management	Role of igo's in controlling conflicts; elaboration of pko functions; de-legitimization of use of force in IR	Arising (compared to pre-1945)
Governance	Vast elaboration of international regimes and management organizations; G-7, IMF, environmental regulations, etc.	Arising (compared to pre-1919)

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