Selected Readings of International Relations Theory

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## Contents

**Critical Debates: Evolution of International Relations Theory**


**Theory and the Levels of Analysis**


**Realism**


**Liberalism**


<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Vol 2 Constructivism</th>
<th>PP</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

**Radicalism**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Vol 3 The International System</th>
<th>PP</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No.</td>
<td>Author(s)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----</td>
<td>-----------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Vol 4</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>International Political Economy</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Global Governance**


The study of international relations is supposed to tell us how the world works. It’s a tall order, and even the best theories fall short. But they can puncture illusions and strip away the simplistic brand names—such as “neocons” or “liberal hawks”—that dominate foreign-policy debates. Even in a radically changing world, the classic theories have a lot to say. | By Jack Snyder

The U.S. government has endured several painful rounds of scrutiny as it tries to figure out what went wrong on Sept. 11, 2001. The intelligence community faces radical restructuring; the military has made a sharp pivot to face a new enemy; and a vast new federal agency has blossomed to coordinate homeland security. But did September 11 signal a failure of theory on par with the failures of intelligence and policy? Familiar theories about how the world works still dominate academic debate. Instead of radical change, academia has adjusted existing theories to meet new realities. Has this approach succeeded? Does international relations theory still have something to tell policymakers?

Six years ago, political scientist Stephen M. Walt published a much-cited survey of the field in these pages (“One World, Many Theories,” Spring 1998). He sketched out three dominant approaches: realism, liberalism, and an updated form of idealism called “constructivism.” Walt argued that these theories shape both public discourse and policy analysis. Realism focuses on the shifting distribution of power among states. Liberalism highlights the rising number of democracies and the turbulence of democratic transi-
sections. Idealism illuminates the changing norms of sovereignty, human rights, and international justice, as well as the increased potency of religious ideas in politics.

The influence of these intellectual constructs extends far beyond university classrooms and tenure committees. Policymakers and public commentators invoke elements of all these theories when articulating solutions to global security dilemmas. President George W. Bush promises to fight terror by spreading liberal democracy to the Middle East and claims that skeptics “who call themselves ‘realists’…. have lost contact with a fundamental reality” that “America is always more secure when freedom is on the march.” Striking a more eclectic tone, National Security Advisor Condoleezza Rice, a former Stanford University political science professor, explains that the new Bush doctrine is an amalgam of pragmatic realism and Wilsonian liberal theory. During the recent presidential campaign, Sen. John Kerry sounded remarkably similar: “Our foreign policy has achieved greatness,” he said, “only when it has combined realism and idealism.”

International relations theory also shapes and informs the thinking of the public intellectuals who translate and disseminate academic ideas. During the summer of 2004, for example, two influential framers of neoconservative thought, columnist Charles Krauthammer and political scientist Francis Fukuyama, collided over the implications of these conceptual paradigms for U.S. policy in Iraq. Backing the Bush administration’s Middle East policy, Krauthammer argued for an assertive amalgam of liberalism and realism, which he called “democratic realism.” Fukuyama claimed that Krauthammer’s faith in the use of force and the feasibility of democratic change in Iraq blinds him to the war’s lack of legitimacy, a failing that “hurts both the realist part of our agenda, by diminishing our actual power, and the idealist portion of it, by undercutting our appeal as the embodiment of certain ideas and values.”

Indeed, when realism, liberalism, and idealism enter the policymaking arena and public debate, they can sometimes become intellectual window dressing for simplistic worldviews. Properly under-
stood, however, their policy implications are subtle and multifaceted. Realism instills a pragmatic appreciation of the role of power but also warns that states will suffer if they overreach. Liberalism highlights the cooperative potential of mature democracies, especially when working together through effective institutions, but it also notes democracies’ tendency to crusade against tyrannies and the propensity of emerging democracies to collapse into violent ethnic turmoil. Idealism stresses that a consensus on values must underpin any stable political order, yet it also recognizes that forging such a consensus often requires an ideological struggle with the potential for conflict.

Each theory offers a filter for looking at a complicated picture. As such, they help explain the assumptions behind political rhetoric about foreign policy. Even more important, the theories act as a powerful check on each other. Deployed effectively, they reveal the weaknesses in arguments that can lead to misguided policies.

**Is Realism Still Realistic?**

At realism’s core is the belief that international affairs is a struggle for power among self-interested states. Although some of realism’s leading lights, notably the late University of Chicago political scientist Hans J. Morgenthau, are deeply pessimistic about human nature, it is not a theory of despair. Closersighted states can mitigate the causes of war by finding ways to reduce the danger they pose to each other. Nor is realism necessarily amoral; its advocates emphasize that a ruthless pragmatism about power can actually yield a more peaceful world, if not an ideal one.

In liberal democracies, realism is the theory that everyone loves to hate. Developed largely by European émigrés at the end of World War II, realism claimed to be an antidote to the naive belief that international institutions and law alone can preserve peace.

In liberal democracies, realism is the theory that everyone loves to hate. It claims to be an antidote to the naive belief that international institutions and law alone can preserve peace.

(Mindful of the overwhelming importance of U.S. power to Europe’s development, Joffe once called the United States “Europe’s pacifier.”) China’s current foreign policy is grounded in realist ideas that date back millennia. As China modernizes its economy and enters international institutions such as the World Trade Organization, it behaves in a way that realists understand well: developing its military slowly but surely as its economic power grows, and avoiding a confrontation with superior U.S. forces.

Realism gets some things right about the post-9/11 world. The continued centrality of military strength and the persistence of conflict, even in this age of global economic interdependence, does not surprise realists. The theory’s most obvious success is its ability to explain the United States’ forceful military response to the September 11 terrorist attacks. When a state grows vastly more powerful than any opponent, realists expect that it will eventually use that power to expand its sphere of domination, whether for security, wealth, or other motives. The United States employed its military power in what some deemed an imperial fashion in large part because it could.

It is harder for the normally state-centric realists to explain why the world’s only superpower announced a war against al Qaeda, a nonstate terrorist organization. How can realist theory account for the importance of powerful and violent individuals in a world of states? Realists point out that the central battles in the “war on terror” have been fought against two states (Afghanistan and Iraq), and that states, not the United Nations or Human Rights Watch, have led the fight against terrorism.

Even if realists acknowledge the importance of nonstate actors as a challenge to their assumptions, the theory still has important things to say about the behavior and motivations of these groups. The realist scholar Robert A. Pape, for example, has argued that suicide terrorism can be a rational, realistic strategy for the leadership of national liberation.
movements seeking to expel democratic powers that occupy their homelands. Other scholars apply standard theories of conflict in anarchy to explain ethnic conflict in collapsed states. Insights from political realism—a profound and wide-ranging intellectual tradition rooted in the enduring philosophy of Thucydides, Niccolò Machiavelli, and Thomas Hobbes—are hardly rendered obsolete because some nonstate groups are now able to resort to violence.

Post-9/11 developments seem to undercut one of realism’s core concepts: the balance of power. Standard realist doctrine predicts that weaker states will ally to protect themselves from stronger ones and thereby form and reform a balance of power. So, when Germany unified in the late 19th century and became Europe’s leading military and industrial power, Russia and France (and later, Britain) soon aligned to counter its power. Yet no combination of states or other powers can challenge the United States militarily, and no balancing coalition is imminent. Realists are scrambling to find a way to fill this hole in the center of their theory. Some theorists speculate that the United States’ geographic distance and its relatively benign intentions have tempered the balancing instinct. Second-tier powers tend to worry more about their immediate neighbors and even see the United States as a helpful source of stability in regions such as East Asia. Other scholars insist that armed resistance by U.S. foes in Iraq, Afghanistan, and elsewhere, and foot-dragging by its formal allies actually constitute the beginnings of balancing against U.S. hegemony. The United States’ strained relations with Europe offer ambiguous evidence: French and German opposition to recent U.S. policies could be seen as classic balancing, but they do not resist U.S. dominance militarily. Instead, these states have tried to undermine U.S. moral legitimacy and constrain the superpower in a web of multilateral institutions and treaty regimes—not what standard realist theory predicts.

These conceptual difficulties notwithstanding, realism is alive, well, and creatively reassessing how its root principles relate to the post-9/11 world. Despite changing configurations of power, realists remain steadfast in stressing that policy must be based on positions of real strength, not on either empty bravado or hopeful illusions about a world without conflict. In the run-up to the recent Iraq war, several prominent realists signed a public letter criticizing what they perceived as an exercise in American hubris. And in the continuing aftermath of that war, many prominent thinkers called for a return to realism. A group of scholars and public intellectuals (myself included) even formed the Coalition for a Realistic Foreign Policy, which calls for a more modest and prudent approach. Its statement of principles argues that “the move toward empire must be halted immediately.” The coalition, though politically diverse, is largely inspired by realist theory. Its membership of seemingly odd bedfellows—including former Democratic Sen. Gary Hart and Scott McConnell, the executive editor of the American Conservative magazine—illuminates the power of international relations theory to cut through often ephemeral political labels and carry debate to the underlying assumptions.

LIBERALISM has such a powerful presence that the entire U.S. political spectrum, from neoconservatives to human rights advocates, assumes it as largely self-evident.

THE DIVIDED HOUSE OF LIBERALISM
The liberal school of international relations theory, whose most famous proponents were German philosopher Immanuel Kant and U.S. President Woodrow Wilson, contends that realism has a stunted vision that cannot account for progress in relations between nations. Liberals foresee a slow but inexorable journey away from the anarchic world the realists envision, as trade and finance forge ties between nations, and democratic norms spread. Because elected leaders are accountable to the people (who bear the burdens of war), liberals expect that democracies will not attack each other and will regard each other’s regimes as legitimate and nonthreatening. Many liberals also believe that the rule of law and transparency of democratic processes make it easier to sustain international cooperation, especially when these practices are enshrined in multilateral institutions.
Liberalism has such a powerful presence that the entire U.S. political spectrum, from neoconservatives to human rights advocates, assumes it as largely self-evident. Outside the United States, as well, the liberal view that only elected governments are legitimate and politically reliable has taken hold. So it is no surprise that liberal themes are constantly invoked as a response to today’s security dilemmas. But the last several years have also produced a fierce tug-of-war between disparate strains of liberal thought. Supporters and critics of the Bush administration, in particular, have emphasized very different elements of the liberal canon.

For its part, the Bush administration highlights democracy promotion while largely turning its back on the international institutions that most liberal theorists champion. The U.S. National Security Strategy of September 2002, famous for its support of preventive war, also dwells on the need to promote democracy as a means of fighting terrorism and promoting peace. The Millennium Challenge program allocates part of U.S. foreign aid according to how well countries improve their performance on several measures of democratization and the rule of law. The White House’s steadfast support for promoting democracy in the Middle East—even with turmoil in Iraq and rising anti-Americanism in the Arab world—demonstrates liberalism’s emotional and rhetorical power.

In many respects, liberalism’s claim to be a wise policy guide has plenty of hard data behind it. During the last two decades, the proposition that democratic institutions and values help states cooperate with each other is among the most intensively studied in all of international relations, and it has held up reasonably well. Indeed, the belief that democracies never fight wars against each other is the closest thing we have to an iron law in social science.

But the theory has some very important corollaries, which the Bush administration glosses over as it draws upon the democracy-promotion element of liberal thought. Columbia University political scientist Michael W. Doyle’s articles on democratic peace warned that, though democracies never fight each other, they are prone to launch messianic struggles against warlike authoritarian regimes to “make
the world safe for democracy.” It was precisely American democracy’s tendency to oscillate between self-righteous crusading and jaded isolationism that prompted early Cold War realists’ call for a more calculated, prudent foreign policy.

Countries transitioning to democracy, with weak political institutions, are more likely than other states to get into international and civil wars. In the last 15 years, wars or large-scale civil violence followed experiments with mass electoral democracy in countries including Armenia, Burundi, Ethiopia, Indonesia, Russia, and the former Yugoslavia. In part, this violence is caused by ethnic groups’ competing demands for national self-determination, often a problem in new, multiethnic democracies. More fundamental, emerging democracies often have nascent political institutions that cannot channel popular demands in constructive directions or credibly enforce compromises among rival groups. In this setting, democratic accountability works imperfectly, and nationalist politicians can hijack public debate. The violence that is vexing the experiment with democracy in Iraq is just the latest chapter in a turbulent story that began with the French Revolution.

Contemporary liberal theory also points out that the rising democratic tide creates the presumption that all nations ought to enjoy the benefits of self-determination. Those left out may undertake violent campaigns to secure democratic rights. Some of these movements direct their struggles against democratic or semidemocratic states that they consider occupying powers—such as in Algeria in the 1950s, or Chechnya, Palestine, and the Tamil region of Sri Lanka today. Violence may also be directed at democratic supporters of oppressive regimes, much like the U.S. backing of the governments of Saudi Arabia and Egypt. Democratic regimes make attractive targets for terrorist violence by national liberation movements precisely because they are accountable to a cost-conscious electorate.

Nor is it clear to contemporary liberal scholars that nascent democracy and economic liberalism can always cohabitate. Free trade and the multifaceted globalization that advanced democracies promote often buffet transitional societies. World markets’ penetration of societies that run on patronage and protectionism can disrupt social relations and spur strife between potential winners and losers. In other cases, universal free trade can make separatism look attractive, as small regions such as Aceh in Indonesia can lay claim to lucrative natural resources. So far, the trade-fueled boom in China has created incentives for improved relations with the advanced democracies, but it has also set the stage for a possible showdown between the relatively wealthy coastal entrepreneurs and the still impoverished rural masses.

While aggressively advocating the virtues of democracy, the Bush administration has shown little patience for liberalism’s emphasis on the importance of international institutions. While aggressively advocating the virtues of democracy, the Bush administration has shown little patience for liberalism’s emphasis on the importance of international institutions. Far from trying to assure other powers that the United States would adhere to a constitutional order, Bush “unsigned” the International Criminal Court statute, rejected the Kyoto environmental agreement, dictated take-it-or-leave-it arms control changes to Russia, and invaded Iraq despite opposition at the United Nations and among close allies.

Recent liberal theory offers a thoughtful challenge to the administration’s policy choices. Shortly before September 11, political scientist G. John Ikenberry studied attempts to establish international order by the victors of hegemonic struggles in 1815, 1919, 1945, and 1989. He argued that even the most powerful victor needed to gain the willing cooperation of the vanquished and other weak states by offering a mutually attractive bargain, codified in an international constitutional order. Democratic victors, he found, have the best chance of creating a working constitutional order, such as the Bretton Woods system after World War II, because their transparency and legalism make their promises credible.

Does the Bush administration’s resistance to institution building refute Ikenberry’s version of liberal theory? Some realists say it does, and that recent events demonstrate that international institutions cannot constrain a hegemonic power if its preferences change. But international institutions
**The Theories: Realism, Liberalism, Idealism (Constructivism)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Core Beliefs</th>
<th>Realism</th>
<th>Liberalism</th>
<th>Idealism (Constructivism)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Self-interested states compete for power and security</td>
<td>Spread of democracy, global economic ties, and international organizations will strengthen peace</td>
<td>International politics is shaped by persuasive ideas, collective values, culture, and social identities</td>
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| Key Actors in International Relations | States, which behave similarly regardless of their type of government | States, international institutions, and commercial interests | Promoters of new ideas, transnational activist networks, and nongovernmental organizations |

| Main Instruments | Military power and state diplomacy | International institutions and global commerce | Ideas and values |

| Theory’s Intellectual Blind Spots | Doesn’t account for progress and change in international relations or understanding that legitimacy can be a source of military power | Fails to understand that democratic regimes survive only if they safeguard military power and security; some liberals forget that transitions to democracy are sometimes violent | Does not explain which power structures and social conditions allow for changes in values |

| What the Theory Explains About the Post-9/11 World | Why the United States responded aggressively to terrorist attacks; the inability of international institutions to restrain military superiority | Why spreading democracy has become such an integral part of current U.S. international security strategy | The increasing role of polemics about values; the importance of transnational political networks (whether terrorists or human rights advocates) |

| What the Theory Fails to Explain About the Post-9/11 World | The failure of smaller powers to militarily balance the United States; the importance of non-state actors such as al Qaeda; the intense U.S. focus on democratization | Why the United States has failed to work with other democracies through international organizations | Why human rights abuses continue, despite intense activism for humanitarian norms and efforts for international justice |

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can nonetheless help coordinate outcomes that are in the long-term mutual interest of both the hegemon and the weaker states. Ikenberry did not contend that hegemonic democracies are immune from mistakes. States can act in defiance of the incentives established by their position in the international system, but they will suffer the consequences and probably learn to correct course. In response to Bush’s unilateralist stance, Ikenberry wrote that the incentives for the United States to take the lead in establishing a multilateral constitutional order remain powerful. Sooner or later, the pendulum will swing back.

**Idealism’s New Clothing**

Idealism, the belief that foreign policy is and should be guided by ethical and legal standards, also has a long pedigree. Before World War II forced the United States to acknowledge a less pristine reality, Secretary of State Henry Stimson denigrated espionage on the grounds that “gentlemen do not read each
other’s mail.” During the Cold War, such naive idealism acquired a bad name in the Kissingerian corridors of power and among hardheaded academics. Recently, a new version of idealism—called constructivism by its scholarly adherents—returned to a prominent place in debates on international relations theory. Constructivism, which holds that social reality is created through debate about values, often echoes the themes that human rights and international justice activists sound. Recent events seem to vindicate the theory’s resurgence; a theory that emphasizes the role of ideologies, identities, persuasion, and transnational networks is highly relevant to understanding the post-9/11 world.

The most prominent voices in the development of constructivist theory have been American, but Europe’s role is significant. European philosophical currents helped establish constructivist theory, and the European Journal of International Relations is one of the principal outlets for constructivist work. Perhaps most important, Europe’s increasingly legalistic approach to international relations, reflected in the process of forming the European Union out of a collection of sovereign states, provides fertile soil for idealist and constructivist conceptions of international politics.

Whereas realists dwell on the balance of power and liberals on the power of international trade and democracy, constructivists believe that debates about ideas are the fundamental building blocks of international life. Individuals and groups become powerful if they can convince others to adopt their ideas. People’s understanding of their interests depends on the ideas they hold. Constructivists find absurd the idea of some identifiable and immutable “national interest,” which some realists cherish. Especially in liberal societies, there is overlap between constructivist and liberal approaches, but the two are distinct. Constructivists contend that their theory is deeper than realism and liberalism because it explains the origins of the forces that drive those competing theories.

For constructivists, international change results from the work of intellectual entrepreneurs who proselytize new ideas and “name and shame” actors whose behavior deviates from accepted standards. Consequently, constructivists often study the role of transnational activist networks—such as Human Rights Watch or the International Campaign to Ban Landmines—in promoting change. Such groups typically uncover and publicize information about violations of legal or moral standards at least rhetorically supported by powerful democracies, including “disappearances” during the Argentine military’s rule in the late 1970s, concentration camps in Bosnia, and the huge number of civilian deaths from land mines. This publicity is then used to press governments to adopt specific remedies, such as the establishment of a war crimes tribunal or the adoption of a landmine treaty. These movements often make pragmatic arguments as well as idealistic ones, but their distinctive power comes from the ability to highlight deviations from deeply held norms of appropriate behavior.

Progressive causes receive the most attention from constructivist scholars, but the theory also helps explain the dynamics of illiberal transnational forces, such as Arab nationalism or Islamist extremism. Professor Michael N. Barnett’s 1998 book Dialogues in Arab Politics: Negotiations in Regional Order examines how the divergence between state borders and transnational Arab political identities requires vulnerable leaders to contend
for legitimacy with radicals throughout the Arab world—a dynamic that often holds moderates hostage to opportunists who take extreme stances.

Constructivist thought can also yield broader insights about the ideas and values in the current international order. In his 2001 book, *Revolutions in Sovereignty: How Ideas Shaped Modern International Relations*, political scientist Daniel Philpott demonstrates how the religious ideas of the Protestant Reformation helped break down the medieval political order and provided a conceptual basis for the modern system of secular sovereign states. After September 11, Philpott focused on the challenge to the secular international order posed by political Islam. “The attacks and the broader resurgence of public religion,” he says, ought to lead international relations scholars to “direct far more energy to understanding the impetuses behind movements across the globe that are reorienting purposes and policies.” He notes that both liberal human rights movements and radical Islamic movements have transnational structures and principled motivations that challenge the traditional supremacy of self-interested states in international politics. Because constructivists believe that ideas and values helped shape the modern state system, they expect intellectual constructs to be decisive in transforming it—for good or ill.

When it comes to offering advice, however, constructivism points in two seemingly incompatible directions. The insight that political orders arise from shared understanding highlights the need for dialogue across cultures about the appropriate rules of the game. This prescription dovetails with liberalism’s emphasis on establishing an agreed international constitutional order. And, yet, the notion of cross-cultural dialogue sits awkwardly with many idealists’ view that they already know right and wrong. For these idealists, the essential task is to shame rights abusers and cajole powerful actors into promoting proper values and holding perpetrators accountable to international (generally Western) standards. As with realism and liberalism, constructivism can be many things to many people.

**STUMPED BY CHANGE**

None of the three theoretical traditions has a strong ability to explain change—a significant weakness in such turbulent times. Realists failed to predict the end of the Cold War, for example. Even after it happened, they tended to assume that the new system would become multipolar (“back to the future,” as the scholar John J. Mearsheimer put it). Likewise, the liberal theory of democratic peace is stronger on what happens after states become democratic than in predicting the timing of democratic transitions, let alone prescribing how to make transitions happen peacefully. Constructivists are good at describing changes in norms and ideas, but they are weak on the material and institutional circumstances necessary to support the emergence of consensus about new values and ideas.

With such uncertain guidance from the theoretical realm, it is no wonder that policymakers, activists, and public commentators fall prey to simplistic or wishful thinking about how to effect change by, say, invading Iraq or setting up an International Criminal Court. In lieu of a good theory of change, the most prudent course is to use the insights of each of the three theoretical traditions as a check on the irrational exuberance of the others.
Realists should have to explain whether policies based on calculations of power have sufficient legitimacy to last. Liberals should consider whether nascent democratic institutions can fend off powerful interests that oppose them, or how international institutions can bind a hegemonic power inclined to go its own way. Idealists should be asked about the strategic, institutional, or material conditions in which a set of ideas is likely to take hold.

Theories of international relations claim to explain the way international politics works, but each of the currently prevailing theories falls well short of that goal. One of the principal contributions that international relations theory can make is not predicting the future but providing the vocabulary and conceptual framework to ask hard questions of those who think that changing the world is easy.

Stephen M. Walt’s “International Relations: One World, Many Theories” (FOREIGN POLICY, Spring 1998) is a valuable survey of the field. For a more recent survey, see Robert Jervis, “Theories of War in an Era of Leading Power Peace” (American Political Science Review, March 2002).


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International relations: One world, many theories

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Abstract:
The study of international affairs is best understood as a continuing competition between the realist, liberal, and radical traditions. Walt explains each of these paradigms as well as some constructivist theories.

Full Text:
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Why should policymakers and practitioners care about the scholarly study of international affairs? Those who conduct foreign policy often dismiss academic theorists (frequently, one must admit, with good reason), but there is an inescapable link between the abstract world of theory and the real world of policy. We need theories to make sense of the blizzard of information that bombards us daily. Even policymakers who are contemptuous of "theory" must rely on their own (often unstated) ideas about how the world works in order to decide what to do. It is hard to make good policy if one's basic organizing principles are flawed, just as it is hard to construct good theories without knowing a lot about the real world. Everyone uses theories—whether he or she knows it or not—and disagreements about policy usually rest on more fundamental disagreements about the basic forces that shape international outcomes.

Take, for example, the current debate on how to respond to China. From one perspective, China's ascent is the latest example of the tendency for rising powers to alter the global balance of power in potentially dangerous ways, especially as their growing influence makes them more ambitious. From another perspective, the key to China's future conduct is whether its behavior will be modified by its integration into world markets and by the (inevitable?) spread of democratic principles. From yet another viewpoint, relations between China and the rest of the world will be shaped by issues of culture and identity: Will China see itself (and be seen by others) as a normal member of the world community or a singular society that deserves special treatment?

In the same way, the debate over NATO expansion looks different depending on which theory one employs. From a "realist" perspective, NATO expansion is an effort to extend Western influence well beyond the traditional sphere of U.S. vital interests—during a period of Russian weakness and is likely to provoke a harsh response from Moscow. From a liberal perspective, however, expansion will reinforce the nascent democracies of Central Europe and extend NATO's conflict management mechanisms to a potentially turbulent region. A third view might stress the value of incorporating the Czech Republic, Hungary, and Poland within the Western security community, whose members share a common identity that has made war largely unthinkable.

No single approach can capture all the complexity of contemporary world politics. Therefore, we are better off with a diverse array of competing ideas rather than a single theoretical orthodoxy. Competition between theories helps reveal their strengths and weaknesses and spurs subsequent refinements, while revealing flaws in conventional wisdom. Although we should take care to emphasize inventiveness over invective, we should welcome and encourage the heterogeneity of contemporary scholarship.

WHERE ARE WE COMING FROM?

The study of international affairs is best understood as a protracted competition between the realist, liberal, and radical traditions. Realism emphasizes the enduring propensity for conflict between states; liberalism identifies several ways to mitigate these conflictive tendencies; and the radical tradition describes how the entire system of state relations might be transformed. The boundaries between these traditions are somewhat fuzzy and a number of important works do not fit neatly into any of them, but debates within and among them have largely defined the discipline.

Realism

Realism was the dominant theoretical tradition throughout the Cold War. It depicts international affairs as a struggle for power among self-interested states and is generally pessimistic about the prospects for eliminating conflict and war. Realism dominated in the Cold War years because it provided simple but powerful explanations for war, alliances, imperialism, obstacles to cooperation, and other international phenomena, and because its emphasis on competition was consistent with the central features of the American-Soviet rivalry.

Realism is not a single theory, of course, and realist thought evolved considerably throughout the Cold War. "Classical" realists such as Hans Morgenthau and Reinhold Niebuhr believed that states, like human beings, had an innate desire to dominate others, which led them to fight wars. Morgenthau also stressed the virtues of the classical, multipolar, balance-of-power system and saw the bipolar rivalry between the United States and the Soviet Union as especially dangerous.

By contrast, the "neorealist" theory advanced by Kenneth Waltz ignored human nature and focused on the effects of the international system. For Waltz, the international system consisted of a number of great powers, each seeking to survive. Because the system is anarchic (i.e., there is no central authority to protect states from one another), each state has to survive on its own. Waltz argued that this condition would lead weaker states to balance against, rather than bandwagon with, more powerful rivals. And contrary to Morgenthau, he claimed that bipolarity was more stable than multipolarity.

An important refinement to realism was the addition of offensedefense theory, as laid out by Robert Jervis, George Quester, and Stephen Van Evera.
These scholars argued that war was more likely when states could conquer each other easily. When defense was easier than offense, however, security was more plentiful, incentives to expand declined, and cooperation blossomed. And if defense had the advantage, and states could distinguish between offensive and defensive weapons, then states could acquire the means to defend themselves without threatening others, thereby dampening the effects of anarchy. For these “defensive” realists, states merely sought to survive and great powers could guarantee their security by forming balancing alliances and choosing defensive military postures (such as retaliatory nuclear forces). Not surprisingly, Waltz and most other neorealists believed that the United States was extremely secure for most of the Cold War. Their principle fear was that it might squander its favorable position by adopting an overly aggressive foreign policy. Thus, by the end of the Cold War, realism had moved away from Morgenthau’s dark brooding about human nature and taken on a slightly more optimistic tone.

Liberalism

The principal challenge to realism came from a broad family of liberal theories. One strand of liberal thought argued that economic interdependence would discourage states from using force against each other because warfare would threaten each side’s prosperity. A second strand, often associated with President Woodrow Wilson, saw the spread of democracy as the key to world peace, based on the claim that democratic states were inherently more peaceful than authoritarian states. A third, more recent theory argued that international institutions such as the International Energy Agency and the International Monetary Fund could help overcome selfish state behavior, mainly by encouraging states to forego immediate gains for the greater benefits of enduring cooperation.

Although some liberals flirted with the idea that new transnational actors, especially the multinational corporation, were gradually encroaching on the power of states, liberalism generally saw states as the central players in international affairs. All liberal theories implied that cooperation was more pervasive than even the defensive version of realism allowed, but each view offered a different recipe for promoting it.

Radical Approaches

Until the 1980s, marxism was the main alternative to the mainstream realist and liberal traditions. Where realism and liberalism took the state system for granted, marxism offered both a different explanation for international conflict and a blueprint for fundamentally transforming the existing international order.

Orthodox marxist theory saw capitalism as the central cause of international conflict. Capitalist states battled each other as a consequence of their incessant struggle for profits and battled socialist states because they saw in them the seeds of their own destruction. Neomarxist “dependency” theory, by contrast, focused on relations between advanced capitalist powers and less developed states and argued that the former-aided by an unholy alliance with the ruling classes of the developing world-had grown rich by exploiting the latter. The solution was to overthrow these parasitic elites and install a revolutionary government committed to autonomous development.

Both of these theories were largely discredited before the Cold War even ended. The extensive history of economic and military cooperation among the advanced industrial powers showed that capitalism did not inevitably lead to conflict. The bitter schisms that divided the communist world showed that socialism did not always promote harmony. Dependency theory suffered similar empirical setbacks as it became increasingly clear that, first, active participation in the world economy was a better route to prosperity than autonomous socialist development; and, second, many developing countries proved themselves quite capable of bargaining successfully with multinational corporations and other capitalist institutions.

As marxism succumbed to its various failings, its mantle was assumed by a group of theorists who borrowed heavily from the wave of postmodern writings in literary criticism and social theory. This “deconstructionist” approach was openly skeptical of the effort to devise general or universal theories such as realism or liberalism. Indeed, its proponents emphasized the importance of language and discourse in shaping social outcomes. However, because these scholars focused initially on criticizing the mainstream paradigms but did not offer positive alternatives to them, they remained a self-consciously dissident minority for most of the 1980s.

Domestic Politics

Not all Cold War scholarship on international affairs fit neatly into the realist, liberal, or marxist paradigms. In particular, a number of important works focused on the characteristics of states, governmental organizations, or individual leaders. The democratic strand of liberal theory fits under this heading, as do the efforts of scholars such as Graham Allison and John Steinbruner to use organization theory and bureaucratic politics to explain foreign policy behavior, and those of Jervis, Irving Janis, and others, which applied social and cognitive psychology. For the most part, these efforts did not seek to provide a general theory of international behavior but to identify other factors that might lead states to behave contrary to the predictions of the realist or liberal approaches. Thus, much of this literature should be regarded as a complement to the three main paradigms rather than as a rival approach for analysis of the international system as a whole.

NEW WRINKLES IN OLD PARADIGMS

Scholarship on international affairs has diversified significantly since the end of the Cold War. Non-American voices are more prominent, a wider range of methods and theories are seen as legitimate, and new issues such as ethnic conflict, the environment, and the future of the state have been placed on the agenda of scholars everywhere.

Yet the sense of déjà vu is equally striking. Instead of resolving the struggle between competing theoretical traditions, the end of the Cold War has merely launched a new series of debates. Ironically, even as many societies embrace similar ideals of democracy, free markets, and human rights, the scholars who study these developments are more divided than ever.

Realism Redux
Although the end of the Cold War led a few writers to declare that realism was destined for the academic scrapheap, rumors of its demise have been largely exaggerated.

A recent contribution of realist theory is its attention to the problem of relative and absolute gains. Responding to the institutionalists' claim that international institutions would enable states to forego short-term advantages for the sake of greater long-term gains, realists such as Joseph Grieco and Stephen Krasner point out that anxiety forces states to worry about both the absolute gains from cooperation and the way that gains are distributed among participants. The logic is straightforward: If one state reaps larger gains than its partners, it will gradually become stronger, and its partners will eventually become more vulnerable.

Realists have also been quick to explore a variety of new issues. Barry Posen offers a realist explanation for ethnic conflict, noting that the breakup of multiethnic states could place rival ethnic groups in an anarchic setting, thereby triggering intense fears and tempting each group to use force to improve its relative position. This problem would be particularly severe when each group's territory contained enclaves inhabited by their ethnic rivals—as in the former Yugoslavia—because each side would be tempted to "cleanse" (preemptively) these alien minorities and expand to incorporate any others from their ethnic group that lay outside their borders. Realists have also cautioned that NATO, absent a clear enemy, would likely face increasing strains and that expanding its presence eastward would jeopardize relations with Russia. Finally, scholars such as Michael Mastanduno have argued that U.S. foreign policy is generally consistent with realist principles, insofar as its actions are still designed to preserve U.S. predominance and to shape a postwar order that advances American interests.

The most interesting conceptual development within the realist paradigm has been the emerging split between the "defensive" and "offensive" strands of thought. Defensive realists such as Waltz, Van Evera, and Jack Snyder assumed that states had little intrinsic interest in military conquest and argued that the costs of expansion generally outweighed the benefits. Accordingly, they maintained that great power wars occurred largely because domestic groups fostered exaggerated perceptions of threat and an excessive faith in the efficacy of military force.

This view is now being challenged along several fronts. First, as Randall Schweller notes, the neorealists assumption that states merely seek to survive "stacked the deck" in favor of the status quo because it precluded the threat of predatory revisionist states—nations such as Adolf Hitler's Germany or Napoleon Bonaparte's France that "value what they covet far more than what they possess" and are willing to risk annihilation to achieve their aims. Second, Peter Liberman, in his book Does Conquest Pay?, uses a number of historical cases such as the Nazi occupation of Western Europe and Soviet hegemony over Eastern Europe to show that the benefits of conquest often exceed the costs, thereby casting doubt on the claim that military expansion is no longer cost-effective. Third, offensive realists such as Eric Labs, John Mearsheimer, and Fareed Zakaria argue that anarchy encourages all states to try to maximize their relative strength simply because no state can ever be sure when a truly revisionist power might emerge.

These differences help explain why realists disagree over issues such as the future of Europe. For defensive realists such as Van Evera, war is rarely profitable and usually results from militarism, hypernationalism, or some other distorting domestic factor. Because Van Evera believes such forces are largely absent in post-Cold War Europe, he concludes that the region is "primed for peace." By contrast, Mearsheimer and other offensive realists believe that anarchy forces great powers to compete irrespective of their internal characteristics and that security competition will return to Europe as soon as the U.S. pacifier is withdrawn.

New Life for Liberalism

The defeat of communism sparked a round of self-congratulation in the West, best exemplified by Francis Fukuyama's infamous claim that humankind had now reached the "end of history." History has paid little attention to this boast, but the triumph of the West did give a notable boost to all three strands of liberal thought.

By far the most interesting and important development has been the lively debate on the "democratic peace." Although the most recent phase of this debate had begun even before the Soviet Union collapsed, it became more influential as the number of democracies began to increase and as evidence of this relationship began to accumulate.

[Chart]

Caption:

Democratic peace theory is a refinement of the earlier claim that democracies were inherently more peaceful than autocratic states. It rests on the belief that although democracies seem to fight wars as often as other states, they rarely, if ever, fight one another. Scholars such as Michael Doyle, James Lee Ray, and Bruce Russett have offered a number of explanations for this tendency, the most popular being that democracies embrace norms of compromise that bar the use of force against groups espousing similar principles. It is hard to think of a more influential, recent academic debate, insofar as the belief that "democracies don't fight each other" has been an important justification for the Clinton administration's efforts to enlarge the sphere of democratic rule.

It is therefore ironic that faith in the "democratic peace" became the basis for U.S. policy just as additional research was beginning to identify several qualifiers to this theory. First, Snyder and Edward Mansfield pointed out that states may be more prone to war when they are in the midst of a democratic transition, which implies that efforts to export democracy might actually make things worse. Second, critics such as Joanne Gowa and Edward Mansfield have argued that the apparent absence of war between democracies is due to the way that democracy has been defined and to the relative dearth of democratic states (especially before 1945). In addition, Christopher Layne has pointed out that when democracies have come close to war in the past their decision to remain at peace ultimately had little do with their shared democratic character. Third, clearcut evidence that democracies do not fight each other is confined to the post-1945 era, and, as Gowa has emphasized, the absence of conflict in this period may be due more to their common interest in containing the Soviet Union than to shared democratic principles.
Liberal institutionalists likewise have continued to adapt their own theories. On the one hand, the core claims of institutionalist theory have become more modest over time. Institutions are now said to facilitate cooperation when it is in each state's interest to do so, but it is widely agreed that they cannot force states to behave in ways that are contrary to the states' own selfish interests. [For further discussion, please see Robert Keohane's article] On the other hand, institutionalists such as John Duffield and Robert McCalla have extended the theory into new substantive areas, most notably the study of NATO. For these scholars, NATO's highly institutionalized character helps explain why it has been able to survive and adapt, despite the disappearance of its main adversary. The economic strand of liberal theory is still influential as well. In particular, a number of scholars have recently suggested that the "globalization" of world markets, the rise of transnational networks and nongovernmental organizations, and the rapid spread of global communications technology are undermining the power of states and shifting attention away from military security toward economics and social welfare. The details are novel but the basic logic is familiar: As societies around the globe become enmeshed in a web of economic and social connections, the costs of disrupting these ties will effectively preclude unilateral state actions, especially the use of force.

This perspective implies that war will remain a remote possibility among the advanced industrial democracies. It also suggests that bringing China and Russia into the relentless embrace of world capitalism is the best way to promote both prosperity and peace, particularly if this process creates a strong middle class in these states and reinforces pressures to democratize. Get these societies hooked on prosperity and competition will be confined to the economic realm.

This view has been challenged by scholars who argue that the actual scope of "globalization" is modest and that these various transactions still take place in environments that are shaped and regulated by states. Nonetheless, the belief that economic forces are superseding traditional great power politics enjoys widespread acceptance among scholars, pundits, and policymakers, and the role of the state is likely to be an important topic for future academic inquiry.

Constructivist Theories

Whereas realism and liberalism tend to focus on material factors such as power or trade, constructivist approaches emphasize the impact of ideas. Instead of taking the state for granted and assuming that it simply seeks to survive, constructivists regard the interests and identities of states as a highly malleable product of specific historical processes. They pay close attention to the prevailing discourse(s) in society because discourse reflects and shapes beliefs and interests, and establishes accepted norms of behavior. Consequently, constructivism is especially attentive to the sources of change, and this approach has largely replaced Marxism as the preeminent radical perspective on international affairs.

The end of the Cold War played an important role in legitimating constructivist theories because realism and liberalism both failed to anticipate this event and had some trouble explaining it. Constructivists had an explanation: Specifically, former president Mikhail Gorbachev revolutionized Soviet foreign policy because he embraced new ideas such as "common security."

Moreover, given that we live in an era where old norms are being challenged, once clear boundaries are dissolving, and issues of identity are becoming more salient, it is hardly surprising that scholars have been drawn to approaches that place these issues front and center. From a constructivist perspective, in fact, the central issue in the post-Cold War world is how different groups conceive their identities and interests. Although power is not irrelevant, constructivism emphasizes how ideas and identities are created, how they evolve, and how they shape the way states understand and respond to their situation. Therefore, it matters whether Europeans define themselves primarily in national or continental terms; whether Germany and Japan redefine their pasts in ways that encourage their adopting more active international roles; and whether the United States embraces or rejects its identity as "global policeman."

Constructivist theories are quite diverse and do not offer a unified set of predictions on any of these issues. At a purely conceptual level, Alexander Wendt has argued that the realist conception of anarchy does not adequately explain why conflict occurs between states. The real issue is how anarchy is understood-in Wendt's words, "Anarchy is what states make of it." Another strand of constructivist theory has focused on the future of the territorial state, suggesting that transnational communication and shared civic values are undermining traditional national loyalties and creating radically new forms of political association. Other constructivists focus on the role of norms, arguing that international law and other normative principles have eroded earlier notions of sovereignty and altered the legitimate purposes for which state power may be employed. The common theme in each of these strands is the capacity of discourse to shape how political actors define themselves and their interests, and thus modify their behavior.

Domestic Politics Reconsidered

As in the Cold War, scholars continue to explore the impact of domestic politics on the behavior of states. Domestic politics are obviously central to the debate on the democratic peace, and scholars such as Snyder, Jeffrey Frieden, and Helen Milner have examined how domestic interest groups can distort the formation of state preferences and lead to suboptimal international behavior. George Downs, David Rocke, and others have also explored how domestic institutions can help states deal with the perennial problem of uncertainty, while students of psychology have applied prospect theory to explain why decisions makers fail to act in a rational fashion. [For further discussion about foreign policy decision making, please see the article by Margaret Hermann and Joe Hagan.]

The past decade has also witnessed an explosion of interest in the concept of culture, a development that overlaps with the constructivist emphasis on the importance of ideas and norms. Thus, Thomas Berger and Peter Katzenstein have used cultural variables to explain why Germany and Japan have thus far eschewed more self-reliant military policies; Elizabeth Kier has offered a cultural interpretation of British and French military doctrines in the interwar period; and lain Johnston has traced continuities in Chinese foreign policy to a deeply rooted form of "cultural realism." Samuel Huntington's dire warnings about an imminent "clash of civilizations" are symptomatic of this trend as well, insofar as his argument rests on the claim that cultural affinities are now supplanting national loyalties. Though these and other works define culture in widely varying ways and have yet to provide a full explanation of how it works or how enduring its effects might be, cultural perspectives have been very much in vogue during the past five years. This trend is partly a reflection of the broader interest in cultural issues in the academic world (and within the public debate as well) and
partly a response to the upsurge in ethnic, nationalist, and cultural conflicts since the demise of the Soviet Union.

**TOMORROW’S CONCEPTUAL TOOLBOX**

While these debates reflect the diversity of contemporary scholarship on international affairs, there are also obvious signs of convergence. Most realists recognize that nationalism, militarism, ethnicity, and other domestic factors are important; liberals acknowledge that power is central to international behavior; and some constructivists admit that ideas will have greater impact when backed by powerful states and reinforced by enduring material forces. The boundaries of each paradigm are somewhat permeable, and there is ample opportunity for intellectual arbitrage.

Which of these broad perspectives sheds the most light on contemporary international affairs, and which should policymakers keep most firmly in mind when charting our course into the next century?

Although many academics (and more than a few policymakers) are loathe to admit it, realism remains the most compelling general framework for understanding international relations. States continue to pay close attention to the balance of power and to worry about the possibility of major conflict. Among other things, this enduring preoccupation with power and security explains why many Asians and Europeans are now eager to preserve—and possibly expand—the U.S. military presence in their regions. As Czech president Vaclav Havel has warned, if NATO fails to expand, “we might be heading for a new global catastrophe . . . [which] could cost us all much more than the two world wars.” These are not the words of a man who believes that great power rivalry has been banished forever.

As for the United States, the past decade has shown how much it likes being “number one” and how determined it is to remain in a predominant position. The United States has taken advantage of its current superiority to impose its preferences wherever possible, even at the risk of irritating many of its long-standing allies. It has forced a series of one-sided arms control agreements on Russia, dominated the problematic peace effort in Bosnia, taken steps to expand NATO into Russia's backyard, and become increasingly concerned about the rising power of China. It has called repeatedly for greater reliance on multilateralism and a larger role for international institutions, but has treated agencies such as the United Nations and the World Trade Organization with disdain whenever their actions did not conform to U.S. interests. It refused to join the rest of the world in outlawing the production of landmines and was politely uncooperative at the Kyoto environmental summit. Although U.S. leaders are adept at cloaking their actions in the lofty rhetoric of “world order,” naked self-interest lies behind most of them. Thus, the end of the Cold War did not bring the end of power politics, and realism is likely to remain the single most useful instrument in our intellectual toolbox.

Yet realism does not explain everything, and a wise leader would also keep insights from the rival paradigms in mind. Liberal theories identify the instruments that states can use to achieve shared interests, highlight the powerful economic forces with which states and societies must now contend, and help us understand why states may differ in their basic preferences. Paradoxically, because U.S. protection reduces the danger of regional rivalries and reinforces the "liberal peace" that emerged after 1945, these factors may become relatively more important, as long as the United States continues to provide security and stability in many parts of the world.

Meanwhile, constructivist theories are best suited to the analysis of how identities and interests can change over time, thereby producing subtle shifts in the behavior of states and occasionally triggering farreaching but unexpected shifts in international affairs. It matters if political identity in Europe continues to shift from the nation-state to more local regions or to a broader sense of European identity, just as it matters if nationalism is gradually supplanted by the sort of "civilizational" affiliations emphasized by Huntington. Realism has little to say about these prospects, and policymakers could be blind-sided by change if they ignore these possibilities entirely.

In short, each of these competing perspectives captures important aspects of world politics. Our understanding would be impoverished were our thinking confined to only one of them. The "compleat diplomat" of the future should remain cognizant of realism's emphasis on the inescapable role of power, keep liberalism's awareness of domestic forces in mind, and occasionally reflect on constructivism's vision of change.

**WANT TO KNOW MORE?**


should also examine the responses in the Summer 1995 issue. For applications of institutionalist theory to NATO, see John Duffield's "NATO's Functions after the Cold War" (Political Science Quarterly, Winter 1994-95) and Robert McCalla's "NATO's Persistence after the Cold War" (International Organization, Summer 1996).


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Neorealism and Neoliberalism

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Review Articles

NEOREALISM AND NEOLIBERALISM

By JOSEPH S. NYE, JR.*


INTERNATIONAL relations theory is constrained by the fact that history provides a poor substitute for a laboratory. In world politics, a relatively small number of states play major roles, along with many other entities that seek to influence events. Even if one focuses on state behavior, one is confronted by few independent events and by multiple causes of behavior at different levels of analysis. Furthermore, strategic interaction is inherently indeterminate, and states often have incentives to deceive observers. To use an analogy from another social science, multiple causality makes some aspects of international relations more like macroeconomics than like microeconomics, and strategic indeterminacy means that the relevant analogy in microeconomics would be the troubled area of oligopoly theory.

Moreover, most theorists of international relations suffer from being in the middle of events, rather than viewing them from a distance. Thus it is not surprising that international relations theory has always been strongly affected by current political concerns. This is true even for the Realists with their parsimonious efforts to state eternal truths. Thucydides, the founding father of Realism, presented a structural account of the origins of the Peloponnesian War in part because of the lessons he wished to teach his fellow citizens.\footnote{When Hans J. Morgenthau wrote his post-war classic, Politics Among Nations, he was clearly intent on instructing his fellow citizens about the importance of avoiding the idealist and iso-}
lationist fantasies of the interwar period. Even the neorealist structural theories of Kenneth Waltz can best be read as exhortations to policymakers and fellow citizens about how they ought to respond to the structure of power rather than as accurate accounts of how the two superpowers behave.

THE CHANGING CONTEXT OF THEORY

In the early 1970s, many theorists, reflecting current concerns, overreacted to the traditional theories of Realism. There was widespread repugnance to the Vietnam War, and detente seemed to reduce the importance of the nuclear competition. At the same time, international trade grew more rapidly than world product. Transnational corporations not only developed patterns of international production, but in some instances played dramatic political roles as well. All this occurred against a backdrop of declining U.S. economic predominance—from one-third to less than one-quarter of world product. President Nixon and Secretary of State Kissinger spoke of the development of a five-power world, and futurists such as Herman Kahn predicted the imminent arrival of a multipolar international system.\(^1\)

On top of all this came the oil crisis of 1973. Some very weak states extracted enormous resources from the strong. Even Hans Morgenthau described what he called an unprecedented divorce of military and economic power based on the control of raw materials.\(^2\) The vulnerability of the Western societies at a period of high commodity prices encouraged many of the less developed countries to believe that a greater transformation of power had occurred than was actually the case. A number of theorists reflected these concerns. Among the modernist writers of the 1970s, a representative view was that

> the forces now ascendant appear to be leaning toward a global society without a dominant structure of cooperation and conflict—a polyarchy in which nation-states, subnational groups, and transnational special interests and communities would all be vying for the support and loyalty of individuals, and conflicts would have to be resolved primarily on the basis of ad hoc bargaining in a shifting context of power relationships.\(^3\)

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\(^1\) Herman Kahn and B. Bruce-Briggs, Things to Come (New York: Macmillan, 1972).
By the late 1970s the mood began to change both in the United States and in the United Nations. East-West concerns started to supplant North-South issues at the top of foreign policy agendas. The experience of the Carter administration reflects the changes in American opinion: while campaigning in 1976, Jimmy Carter promised to reduce the defense budget, but by 1980 his position was closer to that of his rival, Reagan, than to his own previous position. The election of Ronald Reagan to the American presidency accentuated these trends. American policy focused on East-West confrontation and scaled down North-South issues and the role of multilateral institutions. The defense budget increased in real terms for five straight years, and the United States became more willing to use military force, albeit against extremely weak states such as Grenada and Libya. Arms control was downgraded and the modernization of nuclear forces was seen as restoring an “edge” for additional utility of military force. This shifting agenda of world politics saw a resurgence of Realist analysis, for history seemed to have vindicated the Realist model.

While some analysts in the 1970s tended to overstate the obsolescence of the nation-state, the decline of force, and the irrelevance of security concerns, some in the early 1980s unduly neglected the role of transnational actors and economic interdependence. Contrary to the tone of much political rhetoric and some political analyses, the world of the 1980s is not a return to the world of the 1950s. Just as the decline of American power was exaggerated in the 1970s, so was the restoration of American power in the 1980s. Looking carefully at military and economic indices of power resources, one notes that there has been a far greater change in psychology and mood than in these indicators of power resources. The diffusion of power, as measured by shares in world trade or world product, continues. Economic interdependence, as measured by vulnerability to supply shocks, has eased in a period of slack commodity markets, but this could change if markets tighten again and growth of economic transactions continues. Sensitivity to exchange-rate fluctuations has remained high. The costs of the great powers’ use of force seem higher than in the 1950s—measured, for instance, by the ease with which the U.S. overthrew governments in Central America and Iran then as contrasted with the 1980s. Moreover, despite rhetoric, relations between the superpowers do not show a return to the Cold War period. Not only are alliances looser, but transactions are higher, and relations between the superpowers reflect a fair degree of “learning” in the nuclear area.

In a sense, the contrast between the 1970s and the 1980s is merely the latest instance of a recurring dialectic between the two main strands in what has been called the classical tradition of international relations theory. Realism has been the dominant strand; the second is the Liberal or Grotian tradition that tends to stress the impact of domestic and international society, interdependence, and international institutions. In their simplest forms, Liberal theories have been easily discredited. The proposition that the gains from commercial transactions would overcome the problems inherent in the security dilemma and make war too expensive were belied in 1914. Hopes that a system of international law and organization could provide collective security, which would replace the need for self-help inherent in the security dilemma, were disappointed by 1939. Nonetheless, the sharp disagreement between Realism and Liberal theories is overstated. In fact, the two approaches can be complementary. Sophisticated versions of Liberal theory address the manner in which interactions among states and the development of international norms interact with domestic politics of the states in an international system so as to transform the way in which states define their interests. Transnational and interstate interactions and norms lead to new definitions of interests, as well as to new coalition possibilities for different interests within states.

How states define their interests, and how their interests change, has always been a weak area in Realist theory. One of the most thought-provoking questions in international relations is how states learn. How do national interests become defined, and how do those definitions change? Can cooperation be learned? Realist theories maintain that states learn by responding to structural changes in their environment; to put it in game-theory terms, they adjust their behavior to changes in the payoff matrix. When mutual interests or a long shadow of the future suggest that rewards for cooperation are great, states may adopt new strategies in pursuit of their interests. In that case, Realists admit that cooperation can be learned. Although this is sometimes a satisfactory and parsimonious explanation of changing state behavior, it is often incomplete because it says little about how interests themselves are formulated or redefined. It does not show why the same situation may be perceived in totally different ways by successive governments or different leaders. A Bismarck, a Kaiser, and a Hitler can formulate different answers to similar geopolitical situations. Nor does Realist theory note how groups within societies

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can use partners in transnational coalitions or transnational norms and institutions to advance or retard the learning of new interests by their own governments.

Realist theory is better at explaining interactions than interests. A theory of interests defined solely in terms of power is an impoverished theory of interests. Here Liberalism can help. The more sophisticated variants of Liberal theory provide a useful supplement to Realism by directing attention to the ways in which domestic and international factors interact to change states' definitions of their interests. To say that states act in their self-interest is merely tautological (or "change" is reduced to merely a change in means) unless we have a reasonable account of how such interests are perceived and redefined. Both Realism and Liberalism can contribute to such an account.

The major developments in the Liberal tradition of international relations theory in the post-1945 period occurred in studies of regional integration. These studies did not explicitly refer to classical Liberalism; they were generally called "neofunctionalism." Nevertheless, their focus was clearly on issues emphasized in the Liberal tradition. Karl Deutsch concentrated on the development of pluralistic security communities—groups of states that developed reliable expectations of peaceful relations and thereby overcame the security dilemma that Realists see as characterizing international politics. Ernst Haas focused on the unifying of Europe and the transformation of the Franco-German hostility into a postwar economic and political community. Subsequent scholars extended these perspectives on economic, social, and political interdependence and integration to other regions. What these studies had in common was a focus on the ways in which increased transactions and contacts changed attitudes and transnational coalition opportunities, and the ways in which institutions helped to foster such interaction. In short, they emphasized the political processes of learning and of redefining national interests, as encouraged by institutional frameworks and regimes.

In a sense, the development of regional integration theory outstripped the development of regional communities. Predicted changes materialized more slowly than had been expected, which may account for the declining academic interest in the subject during the 1970s. The transformation of Western Europe into a pluralistic security community is real, however, and many of the insights from integration theory were transferred in the early 1970s to the growing and broader dimensions of inter-

national economic interdependence. Studies in transnational relations and interdependence broadened conceptions of how national interests are learned and changed. Some studies explicitly addressed the conditions under which assumptions of Realism were sufficient, or needed to be supplemented by a more complex model of change. Rather than focusing primarily on formal and universalistic organizations such as the United Nations, they devoted much attention to the role of international institutions. The concept of regime was borrowed from international law and broadened to incorporate the whole range of norms, rules, and procedures that constrain states' behavior and around which the actors' expectations converge within a given issue. A rich set of studies applied the concept of regimes to a broad range of behavior in international political economy. But in the climate of the early 1980s, it seemed that the Liberal legacy was relevant only to the peripheral literature on political economy and had little to contribute to the central theory of the field. Kenneth Waltz's Theory of International Politics, published in 1979, was a well-timed and elegant restatement of Realism that explicitly cast doubt on the relevance of the writings on interdependence.

The two books reviewed here provide a good opportunity to look at the latest turns in the classic dialectic between Realism and Liberalism. Richard Rosecrance's The Rise of the Trading State is clearly in the Liberal tradition. Rosecrance argues that an open trading system offers states ways to transform their positions through economic growth rather than through military conquest. All states can benefit from the enhanced growth. "The basic thrust of trade today is entirely different from what it was in the 1830s, the 1880s, and the 1930s" (p. 227). What is different in the world since 1945 "is that a peaceful trading is enjoying much greater efficacy than ever before..." The main thesis of this book is that a new "trading world of international relations offers the possibility of escaping ... a vicious cycle and finding new patterns of cooperation among national states" (p. ix).

Robert O. Keohane, in Neorealism and Its Critics, features four core chapters of Waltz's influential book and four criticisms of that work. In addition, he includes Waltz's first published reply to his critics. It is rare to have such clear intellectual dialogue in a single volume, and the whole issue is nicely framed by the editor's introductory essay.

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6 Waltz, Theory of International Politics (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley, 1979).
NEOREALISM AND NEOLIBERALISM

Neorealist Theory

As Keohane points out, the significance of Waltz’s work is not in elaborating a new line of theory, but in the systematization of Realism, which Robert W. Cox (one of the critics) has termed “neorealism.” While Hans J. Morgenthau may be the most influential of the postwar Realists, his aspirations to create a science of international politics were marred by inconsistency in his use of the concepts of power and balance. Moreover, by basing international politics on human nature’s drive for power, Morgenthau explained too little by explaining too much. Human nature does not adequately account for variation.

Waltz provides a more elegant theoretical basis for Realism. He avoids references to humans pursuing power as an end; pursuit of power as a means is sufficient for his theory. Balance-of-power behavior by states is predicted from the structure of the international system. A system is a set of interacting units having behavioral regularities and identity over time. Its structure defines the ordering of its parts. Structure involves an ordering principle, specification of the functions of different parts, and the distribution of capabilities. In international politics, the ordering principle is anarchy, interpreted as the absence of a higher government above states. The specification of differentiation drops out because states perform similar functions. Thus, the distribution of capabilities (multipolarity, bipolarity) predicts variations in states' balance-of-power behavior. Waltz provides not merely a systemic theory to predict the behavior of the units (states), but a parsimonious structural systemic theory.

In a sense, Waltz did for the classical Realists what they never did for themselves. His structural theory provides a simple deductive basis for what was hitherto a heterogeneous set of views about the importance of power politics. In the eyes of the critics, however, Waltz’s virtues and faults are two sides of the same coin. Parsimony has been purchased at too high a price. Robert Cox and Richard K. Ashley complain that Waltz’s neorealism has sacrificed the interpretive richness of classical Realism as a critical theory in order to transform it into a positivistic problem-solving theory. Although that may be true, neither essay provides a compelling alternative, and Waltz in his reply is quite happy to let their remarks roll off his back.

Keohane and John G. Ruggie launch more telling criticisms. Keohane points out that Waltz’s spare structural definition of system ignores international economic processes and institutions that can also have strong effects on states’ behavior. Ruggie argues that Waltz has not only ignored changes in the density of interactions in systems, but has been too quick
in assuming that the differentiation in units can be dropped as a characteristic of the structure of the international system. In the short term, states may be the dominant units and play a similar functional role, but over long periods other units may grow in importance, and roles may alter. Ruggie points to the evolution of the concept of territoriality at the end of the feudal era to illustrate such generative changes, and argues that Waltz’s theory is too static to explain such changes.

Waltz replies that “a structural theory of international politics can fix ranges of outcomes and identify general tendencies. . . . We cannot hope to predict specific outcomes” (p. 344). He would not deny the importance of change at the unit level. “Realist theory by itself can handle some, but not all, of the problems that concern us. . . . Yet some successful predictions can be made without paying attention to states” (p. 331). Structural analyses “tell us a small number of big and important things” (p. 329). If we add more variables, theoretical acuity gives way to rich and dense description. Many unit-level factors, such as density of interactions, demographic trends, resource constraints, national ideologies, and political systems, can affect systemic outcomes. Indeed, in the case of nuclear weapons, “a unit-level change has much diminished a structural effect” (p. 327). But it is a mistake to mingle structural and unit levels. Just as “economists get along quite well with separate theories of markets and firms” (p. 346), we shall have to get along with separate theories of international politics and of states.

Waltz has a valid point about the selectivity of theory and the costs of mixing unit and structural characteristics. But his reply to his critics is not entirely satisfactory. First, as Keohane points out in his Introduction, many economists are unhappy about the disjunction between the assumptions of microeconomics and what is known about the behavior of firms. Moreover, oligopoly theory tends to be indeterminate, and efforts to establish a rational-expectations micro-basis for macroeconomics have been problematic. In the words of one economist, the danger for a clinical profession is that “the models become more real than more explicitly descriptive reality.”

Second, Waltz accuses Ruggie of reductionism—the explanation of the whole by explaining the behavior of the parts. That is neither good nor bad per se. In a parsimonious systemic explanation, the behavior of the parts is handled by assumptions of rationality and the constraining conditions produced by the structure of the system. “Socialization and com-

petition are two aspects of a process by which the variety of behavior and outcomes is reduced." System theories explain why different units behave similarly; unit theories explain why different units behave differently despite similar placement in a system. But Waltz's own assignment of characteristics to the systemic and unit levels seems odd. It is easy to understand why characteristics of a particular leader or political culture or domestic regime fit at the unit level. In his words, "a theory about foreign policy is a theory at the national level." But why are demographic trends, transnational flows, and military technology that affect all (or many) states assigned to the unit level? It is particularly odd to see nuclear technology described as a unit characteristic that has had "system-wide" pacific effects (p. 327). Waltz has no way of knowing whether the vaunted stability of the bipolar system is caused by a structural or a unit-level characteristic. Moreover, by assigning everything except the distribution of capabilities to the unit level, that category becomes a dumping ground hindering theory building at anything but the structural level. The result may be theoretical parsimony, but parsimony is not the only way by which one judges good theory. Good theory also requires a good explanatory fit.

A third problem with Waltz's reply to his critics relates to his handling of false predictions. Waltz correctly states that a few false predictions do not falsify a theory. He admits that he will often need to supplement his sparse neorealist theory with foreign policy explanations in order to account for anomalous cases. But sometimes his handling of anomalies runs the risk of being retrogressive in Lakatos's terms—i.e., it explains less and directs researchers away from new information. In response to Keohane's evidence that Canada, a weak state, has often prevailed over the United States, Waltz introduces a power-activation hypothesis: "I suspect that American officials hardly cared about the outcomes or even noticed what they might be" (p. 333). But aside from the danger of tautology, such a reply ignores the evidence that the cases Keohane cites were at the presidential level, and that some, such as oil trade in 1974, were highly visible and politicized.

Some anomalies are forgiven for any theory that has a broad explanatory power and that points to the discovery of new empirical information. But Waltz's theory does not score well on those criteria: it describes a system as stable if it remains anarchic and there is no consequential change.

"Waltz (fn. 10), 77, 72.
in the number of political units. By this definition, the multipolar system was stable for 300 years until World War II reduced it to the current bipolar system, which has been stable because no third state has been able to develop capabilities comparable to those of the United States and the Soviet Union. But this portrayal of history by the theory leaves an enormous number of important changes unaccounted for, and lends credence to the charge that it is too static. There are so few strands in the web of Waltz's theoretical net that even very big fish slip through it. The change from a flexible alliance system to two rigid alliances before 1914 is not a shift from multipolarity to bipolarity for Waltz. Only the strength of single units counts in measuring bipolarity under his definitions. Thus, his theory tells us little about the onset of World War I. Instead, it disclaims any intent to predict particular wars. Neither is it clear that Waltz's theory tells us about what causes stability in the current world. There has been only one bipolar system as defined in Waltz's theory. Thus he has to test his conclusions about stability against evidence drawn from a sample of one. Waltz cannot determine which behavior is caused by structure and which by nuclear weapons (assigned by him to the unit level).

Moreover, Waltz's theory leads him to conclusions that seem to bury rather than uncover new information about the behavior of states. For example, he argues that "in a bipolar world, military interdependence declines even more sharply than economic interdependence. Russia and America depend militarily mainly on themselves." But it is an odd definition of military interdependence that blurs the change from the 1930s to a world in which the U.S. and U.S.S.R. can each destroy the other in thirty minutes. Even if Waltz means his statement to refer only to the formation of alliances, he has a hard time explaining the enormous efforts which both sides devote to their "unnecessary" alliance structures. Waltz may be right that "a five percent growth rate sustained for three years increases the American gross national product by an amount exceeding one-half of West Germany's GNP, and all of Great Britain's," but that alleged evidence for low military interdependence leaves the anomaly of actual U.S. behavior unexplained. In extolling the virtues of economic growth as a path to power, Waltz sounds a bit like Rosecrance; but, unlike the latter, he uses a restricted definition of interdependence to argue that economic interdependence is declining in the modern world. Once

14 Waltz (fn. 10), 162.
15 Ibid., 168.
16 Waltz ignored the criticism of narrow definitions of interdependence in terms of vulnerability alone that was published in Power and Interdependence (fn. 8). Had he considered a more complex treatment of interdependence, he might have come to different conclusions about its decline.
again, Waltz's theoretical lens focuses so tightly on bipolarity that it tends to generate anomalies and to direct attention away from the discovery of new information.

It is not true that Waltz's theory is completely static, for changes in the structure predict changes in unit behavior. But change at the structural level seems to have occurred only once in three hundred years for Waltz. That leaves an awful lot of the stuff of international politics to be explained at the unit level. Waltz would admit as much, but he is then left with a theory that is so spare that nothing seems to move. The charge that Waltz has explained less about more of what concerned traditional Realists seems justified. It is ironic that Robert Gilpin appears in the Keohane volume in a cameo role as the author of a brief reply to Ashley's scattershot criticism of neorealism. Gilpin's own work represents an updating of Thucydides' classical Realist theory of hegemonic transition, which has disappeared in Waltz's nearly static neorealist world. Like Thucydides, Gilpin focuses on the ways in which uneven growth leads to cycles of rising and declining hegemonic states and the onset of great systemic wars.\footnote{Robert Gilpin, *War and Change in World Politics* (New York and Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981).} Whatever its own problems, Gilpin's version of Realism is dynamic and focused on explaining the major changes in world politics that slip through the coarse net of Waltz's neorealist theory. Gilpin achieves this, however, by eschewing a purely structural theory and reaching deep into the unit level of analysis.

\section*{The Revival of Liberal Theories}

Partly in reaction to the inadequacies of neorealism, a number of theorists have begun to resurrect Liberal theory. While admitting the diversity of Liberal theories, they argue that the core of Liberalism is a concern for liberty. That philosophical perspective is often correlated with such features as an interest in limited government, institutional restraints, and open contacts (including trade) across borders.\footnote{Stanley Hoffmann, "Liberalism and International Affairs," in *Janus and Minerva* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1983). Hoffmann points out a terminological difficulty: many Realists are liberal in their domestic political preferences.} Michael Doyle has pointed out different historical strands of Liberal thought in Schumpeter's economic theories of pacifism, Machiavelli's republican theories of imperialism, and Kant's liberal international confederation based on republican governments and transnational contacts.\footnote{Michael Doyle, "Liberalism and World Politics," *American Political Science Review* 80 (December 1986), 1151-69.} Robert Keohane has
identified three major causal strands of classical Liberal theory: (1) commercial Liberalism, which asserts the pacific effects of trade; (2) democratic Liberalism, which asserts the pacific effects of republican government (at the unit level of analysis); and (3) regulatory Liberalism, which asserts the importance of rules and institutions in affecting relations between countries. One might add a fourth: sociological Liberalism, which asserts the transformative effect of transnational contacts and coalitions on national attitudes and definitions of interests. Many of these Liberal causal theories were central to the neofunctionalist theories of regional integration developed in the 1950s and 1960s.

By and large, Rosecrance’s The Rise of the Trading State fits mainly in the category of commercial Liberalism. His argument rests more upon the beneficial effects of trade than on the other three potential components of a neoliberal theory. Rosecrance’s view (p. 218) that “if nuclear war can be ruled out, economic processes will progressively act to reshape the international world” bears a strong family resemblance to Richard Cobden’s (1846) belief that “if we can keep the world from actual war, and I trust Trade will do that, a great impulse will from this time be given to social reforms.”

Rosecrance does not share all of the illusions of the classical free trade Liberals. He is fully aware that high levels of trade and other transactions did not prevent the outbreak of World War I, and that trade was often associated with conflict in earlier eras. But he argues that the world was different then: “the nineteenth and early twentieth century represent the apex of the military political system” (p. 88). In Rosecrance’s view, “it was not until after 1945 that large-scale territorial expansion began to evolve as too costly—too dangerous and too uncertain as a general strategy of national advancement.” As that lesson dawned, “one would have reached ‘the Japanese period’ in world politics . . .” (p. 20).

Even if Rosecrance proves to be correct in his projections, it is unclear to what extent the causation is due to factors stressed by Liberal or by Realist theories. Perhaps what happened after 1945 is that nuclear technology transformed a balance-of-power system into a balance of terror that encourages prudence about any territorial expansion that could raise nuclear risks. In this situation, Japan has found a more successful path to become the second-most-powerful economy in the world than it did in the 1930s. But it has done so while sheltered under the American nuclear


** Cobden, quoted in Kenneth Waltz, Man, the State, and War (New York: Columbia University Press, 1959), 164.
umbrella and spending only one percent of its GNP on defense. Rosecrance admits that hegemonic stability theory may have some relevance, but he argues that it does not explain "why there has not already been a marked decline in international economic cooperation... well after the onset of decline in American economic and military power" (p. 57). The answer may lie in the success of economic regimes (which Rosecrance discusses only briefly); or in the exaggeration of the decline of American power; or in Waltz’s theory of the stability of bipolarity; or in the analysis of the territorial conquest system caused by nuclear risk.” Causation remains unclear in Rosecrance’s account.

Because Rosecrance is cautious, there are really two versions of his argument—a strong form and a weak form. The strong form is close to classic commercial liberalism. “Since 1945, the world has been poised between... a territorial system... composed of states that view power in terms of land mass... and a trading system... based on states which recognize that self-sufficiency is an illusion,” Rosecrance writes (p. 156). “A major crossroad is now approaching... In the past the military-political world was efficient. It was cheaper to seize another state’s territory by force than to develop the sophisticated economic and trading apparatus needed to derive benefit from commercial exchange with it” (p. 160). “The current equipoise... can scarcely be maintained,” Rosecrance argues (p. 165). “The worst aspects of the Westphalian system with its emphasis on territoriality, sovereignty, and a spurious independence, are likely to be mitigated in the years ahead” (p. 211). “The increasing deconsolidation of traditional states and the decline of national loyalty as they seek to serve such purposes gradually undermines the military-political system” (p. 214).

But this strong liberal theory is eroded by the more cautious form of the argument. Dualism is proffered as “the minimum possible approach to an international theory” (p. 60). Which strategy will be dominant cannot be predicted at present. One can commend Rosecrance for his cautious judgments when faced with a confusing reality, but such caution

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10 Rosecrance mistakes the argument in Power and Interdependence as being similar to his own. Keohane and I did not establish “dualistic categories: power and interdependence... power is the preeminent goal of a state-centric universe, but interdependence is a characteristic that only applies when states as entities have lost control” (p. 62). On the contrary, we argued the need to see asymmetrical interdependence as a source of power. Rosecrance seems to confuse the ideal type of complex interdependence developed in chapter 2 of our work with our larger argument about interdependence.
does not enhance theoretical development. One wishes Rosecrance had gone further in specifying the relationship between the Liberal and Realist components of the dualistic theory he suggests in the weak form of his argument. Perhaps if he had gone beyond commercial liberalism and explored more deeply the effects of transnational contacts on domestic political coalitions, or looked more carefully at the effects of regimes on learning (even in the security area where he discounts regimes), he might have begun to suggest such connections. Since he did not, we are left with a suggestive work, but one that hardly provides the neoliberal theory needed to accompany Waltz’s neorealism.

**Directions for Future Research**

What do these works suggest for future research programs in international relations? Taken on its own terms, Waltz’s theory is too static to provide a rich agenda of research questions. But it may be more fruitful when coupled with the rational-actor approach that has received increasing attention in recent years. Neither game theory nor expected utility are really theories of international politics because they need to import theoretical assumptions about context. Here Waltz’s structural theory can be helpful, but only if handled with care.

Rational-choice theories can be parsimonious and powerful, but as research strategies, they run risks that are reinforced by the sparse structure of neorealism. How preferences are formulated and how learning occurs may be more important than the actual choice, yet both rational choice and neorealism are weak in this dimension and tend to turn attention in other directions. Moreover, while there is no *a priori* reason why game theory cannot be applied to transnational actors as well as to unitary state actors, such analyses are rare. The benefit of marrying rational choice with neorealism approaches is a double parsimony. The danger is that each already has a negative heuristic that directs attention away from preference formation and transnational interactions. Theorists who would make the marriage must be alert to such costs and open to the insights to be gained from other variants of Realist as well as Liberal theory.

Rosecrance’s work suggests a number of interesting avenues for those who wish to develop neoliberal theory. Many of the questions he raises in

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the area of commercial Liberalism suggest both historical and contemporary research about the interconnection between power and nonpower incentives with which states are confronted. But the indeterminacy of his work also suggests the limits of commercial liberalism alone. Much more attention needs to be paid to the effects of norms and institutions, both in the economic and in the security area. More can be done with the ways in which transnational contacts and coalitions affect attitudes, learning, and formulation of preferences. A careful rereading of neofunctionalist integration theory can suggest numerous hypotheses. Finally, neoliberal theory should not neglect the unit level of analysis. Michael Doyle's work on the possible causal relationship between democratic governments and foreign policy choices is highly suggestive.16

Above all, it is important to pay more attention to the ways in which Liberalism and Realism relate to each other. One way is to be less restrictive in the basic assumption of anarchy. Alker attacks the metaphor of "anarchy" and argues for Hedley Bull's concept of an "anarchic society," which admits the absence of any formal government above states, but does not define anarchy as the absence of communication, cooperation, and governance.17 In Power and Interdependence, Robert Keohane and I suggested that systemic theory could be enriched without (or before) retreating to the particularisms of the unit level of analysis by adding the concept of systemic process.

Systems have two dimensions: structure and process. We used the term "structure" in the neorealist sense to refer principally to the distribution of capabilities among units. "Process" refers to the ways in which the units relate to each other. In the metaphor of a poker game, the structure refers to the players' cards and chips, while the process refers both to the formal rules and the informal customs or conventions that affect interactions among the players. Variations in the ability of the players to calculate odds, infer the strength of opponents' hands, or bluff are at the unit, or actor, level.18

Factors such as the intensity of international interdependence and the degree of institutionalization of international rules do not vary from one state to another on the basis of their internal characteristics. Therefore, they should not be termed unit-level factors according to Waltz's own def-

inition. Making the unit level a grab bag for all unexplained variance is an impediment to the development of theory. Not only does it complicate the task of analysis by confusing unit-level factors referring to domestic political and economic arrangements with factors at the level of the international system; it also leads neorealist analysts to forgo the opportunity to theorize at a systemic level about nonstructural determinants of state behavior.

At the systemic level, in addition to the distribution of power, states experience constraints and opportunities because of changes in levels of world economic activity, technological innovation, shifts in patterns of transnational interactions, and alterations in international norms and institutions. These systemic processes affecting state choices can be categorized as non-power incentives and the ability to communicate and cooperate. Nonstructural incentives alter calculations of national interest without necessarily affecting the distribution of power among actors. For instance, the destructiveness of nuclear weaponry, which Waltz assigned to the unit level, is better portrayed as a feature of systemic process that produces incentives not to engage in warfare regardless of whether the structure is bipolar or multipolar. Similarly, reduced costs of communications and transportation may increase the benefits of transnational business and encourage state policies of greater economic openness, without any changes in the structure of power.

The ability to communicate and cooperate can provide opportunities for the redefinition of interests and for the pursuit of strategies that would not be feasible in a world where the only information available to states was about other states’ preferences and the power resources at their disposal. Just as allowing players in Prisoners’ Dilemma games to communicate with one another alters the nature of the game, so a systemic process that increases the capability of states to communicate and to reach mutually beneficial agreements can add to the repertoire of state strategies and thus alter political outcomes.

These two aspects of systemic process—non-power incentives and variations in the capacity to communicate and cooperate—have traditionally been emphasized by Liberal theory. Liberal theorists often stress the ways in which trade and economic incentives may alter states’ behavior. Similarly, Liberal theorists often stress the effects of increased transnational (and transgovernmental) contacts on attitudes and abilities to communicate. Institutions and norms have always played a role in Liberal theory.

This is not to say that Liberal theory has addressed all processes at the systemic level. For example, most Realists have been concerned about
technological changes even when they do not alter the distribution of power. And there is much in Liberal theory about the effect of domestic politics that does not belong at the systemic level. However, the addition of the process level to the concept of structure in defining international systems provides an opportunity to develop a "neoliberal" systemic theory that moves toward a synthesis rather than a radical disjunction between Realism and Liberalism. Neorealism would be most appropriate at the structural level of systemic theory; neoliberalism would more often be fruitful at the process level.

The time has come to transcend the classical dialectic between Realist and Liberal theories of international politics. Each has something to contribute to a research program that increases our understanding of international behavior. Perhaps work in the 1990s will be able to synthesize rather than repeat the dialectic of the 1970s and the 1980s.
Princes have always sought out soothsayers of one kind or another for the purpose of learning what the future holds. These hired visionaries have found portents in the configurations of stars, the entrails of animals, and most indicators in between. The results, on the whole, have been disappointing. Surprise remains one of the few things one can count on, and very few princes have succeeded in avoiding it, however assiduous the efforts of their respective wizards, medicine men, counselors, advisers, and think tank consultants to ward it off.

Surprise is still very much with us. The abrupt end of the Cold War, an unanticipated hot war in the Persian Gulf, and the sudden disintegration of the Soviet Union astonished almost everyone, whether in government, the academy, the media, or the think tanks. Although there was nothing inherently implausible about these events—the Cold War did have to end sometime, war had always been a possibility in the Middle East, and communism's failures had been obvious for years—the fact that they arose so unexpectedly suggests that deficiencies persist in the means by which contemporary princes and the soothsayers they employ seek to discern the future course of world affairs.

No modern soothsayer, of course, would aspire to total clairvoyance. We have no equivalent of Isaac Asimov's famous character, the mathematician Hari Seldon, whose predictive powers were so great that he was able to leave precise holographic instructions for his followers, to be consulted at successive intervals decades after his death.1 But historians, political scientists, economists, psychologists, and even mathematicians have sought out other means to lend their predictions a degree of plausibility.

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cians have claimed the power to detect patterns in the behavior of nations and the individuals who lead them; an awareness of these, they have assured us, will better equip statesmen—and states—to deal with the uncertainties that lie ahead.

The end of the Cold War presents an unusual opportunity to test these claims. That event was of such importance that no approach to the study of international relations claiming both foresight and competence should have failed to see it coming. None actually did so, though, and that fact ought to raise questions about the methods we have developed for trying to understand world politics. The following essay suggests some reasons for this failure of modern-day soothsaying; it will also advance a few ideas on how the accuracy of that enterprise might henceforth be improved.

Theory, Forecasting, and the Possibility of Prediction

The claims that those who study world politics have made regarding their ability to forecast the future grow, for the most part, out of efforts to construct theories of international relations. There is a very simple reason for this: visions of any future have to proceed from the awareness of some kind of past; otherwise there can be no conceptual frame of reference—more than that, there can be no language—with which to express them. Theories provide a way of packaging patterns from the past in such a way as to make them usable in the present as guides to the future. Without them, all attempts at forecasting and prediction would be reduced to random guessing.

2. My own use of these terms—which is not the usage of everyone cited in this paper—follows the distinctions of John R. Freeman and Brian L. Job: “a forecast is a statement about unknown phenomena based upon known or accepted generalizations and uncertain conditions (‘partial unknowns’), whereas a prediction involves the linkage of known or accepted generalizations with certain conditions (knowns) to yield a statement about unknown phenomena.” Freeman and Job, “Scientific Forecasts in International Relations: Problems of Definition and Epistemology,” International Studies Quarterly, Vol. 23, No. 1 (March 1979), pp. 117-118. It follows from this that forecasts can be neither deterministic—“if A, then (inevitably) B”—nor conditional—“if A, then (under specified conditions) B.” They are instead probabilistic statements: “if A, then (probably) B.” I owe this distinction between deterministic, conditional, and probabilistic statements to a suggestion from Alexander George, although I have fit it within my own differentiation between prediction and forecasting. See also, on these problems of definition, Nazli Choucri, “Key Issues in International Relations Forecasting,” in Nazli Choucri and Thomas W. Robinson, eds., Forecasting in International Relations: Theory, Methods, Problems, Prospects (San Francisco: W.H. Freeman, 1978), p. 4; and Richard A. Skinner, “Introduction: Research in the Predictive Mode,” in Charles W. Kegley, Jr., Gregory A. Raymond, Robert M. Rood, and Richard A. Skinner, eds., International Events and the Comparative Analysis of Foreign Policy (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1979), p. 211.

3. For the centrality to forecasting of theory based on past experience, see Choucri, “Key Issues in International Relations Forecasting,” pp. 5-7.

Hans J. Morgenthau put forward the first comprehensive modern theory of international relations—and the one from which most subsequent theories in that field have evolved—in his 1948 book, Politics among Nations: The Struggle for Power and Peace; his approach came to be known, in a somewhat self-congratulatory way, as “realism.” Earlier studies by diplomatic historians, international lawyers, and well-meaning reformers, Morgenthau complained, had failed to identify the “fundamental principles” of world politics, “which are revealed only by the correlation of recent events with the more distant past.” Even the most idiosyncratic event—and it is important to stress that Morgenthau never disregarded the importance of such events—reflected “social forces” which were, in turn, “the product of human nature in action. Therefore, under similar conditions, they will manifest themselves in a similar manner.” Knowledge of these patterns would allow one to “understand international politics, grasp the meaning of contemporary events, and foresee and influence the future.”

What was new in all of this was not Morgenthau’s insistence that the identification and careful examination of past patterns could improve the quality of future statecraft: historians had been saying that all along. Morgenthau’s innovation, rather, was the claim to have developed, as he himself put it, “the science of international politics.” The principal characteristics of this science were its reductionism—the argument that a drive for power inextricably rooted in human nature animated all politics—and its tough-mindedness—the assertion that a focus on power would free the study of international relations from the sentimentality, legalism, and irrelevant empiricism with which it had been afflicted.

5. Hans J. Morgenthau, Politics Among Nations: The Struggle for Power and Peace (New York: Knopf, 1948). There have been six editions of Morgenthau’s classic, the most recent published in 1985. (My references are to the 1948 edition.) Morgenthau was, of course, hardly the first “realist.” The tradition goes back at least as far as Machiavelli, and if one can accept E.H. Carr’s succinct definition of “realism”—“the impact of thinking upon wishing”—then the idea is as old as its opposite, which is utopian idealism. Edward Hallett Carr, The Twenty Years’ Crisis, 1919–1939: An Introduction to the Study of International Relations (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1939), p. 10. For Morgenthau’s primacy in the field of post-1945 international relations, see Martin Hollis and Steve Smith, Explaining and Understanding International Relations (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), pp. 22-28; and Robert O. Keohane, “Realism, Neorealism and the Study of World Politics,” in Robert O. Keohane, ed., Neorealism and Its Critics (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), p. 10.


7. Morgenthau used this as the title of Chapter Two of Politics among Nations beginning with its second edition, published in 1954.

8. Although some of Morgenthau’s writings appear to be scathing attacks on attempts to construct a “science” of politics—see his Scientific Man vs. Power Politics (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1945); also “Reflections on the State of Political Science,” Review of Politics, Vol. 27, No. 3 (October 1955), pp. 431-460; and “Common Sense and Theories of International Relations,” Journal of International Affairs, Vol. 21 (1967), pp. 207-214—a careful reading suggests that what Morgenthau really objected to in idealist, behavioral, and quantitative approaches was their unwillingness to place “power” in the central position to which he had assigned it. Morgenthau’s ambivalence about “scientific” approaches is discussed in Hollis and Smith, Explaining and Understanding International Relations, pp. 23, 27.
Morgenthau was always careful not to promise too much. “Trustworthy prophecies” in international politics would never be possible, he argued as early as 1948, because “contradictory tendencies” would always be present in every political situation: which of them would prevail was “anybody’s guess.” What theory could do, though, was to allow scholars to “trace the different tendencies which, as potentialities, are inherent in [the] situation[,] . . . point out the different conditions which make it more likely for one tendency to prevail than for another, and, finally, assess the probabilities for the different conditions and tendencies to prevail in actuality.”

It could, therefore, “confront what governments do, and what governments and peoples think, about international relations with independent prudential judgment and with the truth, however dimly perceived and tenuously approximated.”

Subsequent theorists of international relations—whether or not they agreed with Morgenthau’s insistence on the centrality of power—have nonetheless embraced his assumption that a “scientific” approach enhances the possibility of forecasting. Morton A. Kaplan acknowledged in 1957 that although theory would be of little use in anticipating the specific actions of individuals and nations, it could “predict characteristic or modal behavior within a particular kind of international system” as well as “the conditions under which the characteristic behavior of the international system will remain stable, the conditions under which it will be transformed, and the kind of transformation that will take place.”

J. David Singer argued several years later that any analytical model should “offer the promise of reliable prediction”—indeed Singer maintained that this task would be less difficult to accomplish than the other two requirements of such models, which were description and explanation.

“As our knowledge base expands and is increasingly integrated in the theoretical sense,” he added in 1969, “the better our predictions will be, and therefore, the fewer policy disagreements we will have.”


Kenneth N. Waltz, whose approach to theory differed sharply from those of Kaplan and Singer, nonetheless shared with them the goal of using theory to forecast the future. Waltz’s triple “images” of international relations, set out in *Man, the State, and War* in 1959, had explicitly prescriptive (and thereby implicitly predictive) purposes: “to explain how peace can be more readily achieved requires an understanding of the causes of war.” And in his even more influential *Theory of International Politics*, published in 1979, Waltz clarified his claims regarding prediction, in terms that did not differ greatly from those of Morgenthau or Kaplan: “Theory explains regularities of behavior and leads one to expect that the outcomes produced by interacting units will fall within specified ranges. The behavior of states and of statesmen, however, is indeterminate.”

The quest for forecasting and prediction has by no means operated exclusively at the level of international systems. The “operational code” technique for studying political leadership evolved from efforts made, during the early Cold War, to forecast the intentions and actions of top Soviet officials. Decision-making theorists set out to produce general propositions—which could be taken as forecasts—regarding behavior of leaders in crises. Deterrence theorists made specific predictions during the 1950s about how the two nuclear superpowers would behave; these in turn directly influenced decisions on the procurement, deployment, and planned use of nuclear weapons in both Washington and Moscow. Political development theory sought to identify patterns in the modernization process that would allow not only an anticipation of events in the Third World, but the formulation of policies aimed at shaping them. Studies of perception and misperception in international relations employed

psychological literature to identify recurring patterns in the behavior of individuals, a knowledge of which might improve the conduct of statecraft.\textsuperscript{20} And the use of game theory to model international rivalries had clear implications for attempts to anticipate the future of Soviet-American relations.\textsuperscript{21}

My point, then, is that the major theoretical approaches that have shaped the discipline of international relations since Morgenthau have all had in common, as one of their principal objectives, the anticipation of the future. Whether in science or politics, whether by the tough standards of prediction or the more relaxed ones of forecasting, the role of theory has always been not just to account for the past or to explain the present but to provide at least a preview of what is to come. It follows, therefore, that one way to confirm the validity of theories is to see how successfully they perform each of the tasks expected of them.\textsuperscript{22} The failure to accomplish a particular task would not necessarily invalidate an entire theory, but it should raise questions in our minds. It would be a warning signal, suggesting the need to rethink underlying assumptions. That is the kind of test this essay seeks to apply: how well did international relations theory carry out one of the important tasks it set for itself, which was forecasting the future of the Cold War?\textsuperscript{23}


\textsuperscript{23} Singer, conversely, argues that “despite the folklore to the contrary, prediction is neither the major purpose nor the acid test of a theory; the goal of all basic scientific research is \textit{explanation}.” But he then goes on to make the point that “a strong explanatory theory will—because it is better able to account for and explain the effects of changing conditions—provide a more solid base for predicting than one that rests on observed covariations and postdictions alone.” Singer, \textit{Models, Methods, and Progress in World Politics}, p. 74; see also p. 249.
Approaches to the Future

Before we can apply that test, though, there is an organizational problem to be got out of the way. It has to do with the fact that although international relations theorists have agreed on the importance of prediction and forecasting, they have by no means agreed on how to construct the theories that must be in place prior to performing these tasks. Differences over theory have long impeded efforts to build a "science" of international relations; they have also affected the assumptions behind, the procedures employed in, and the accuracy of the attempts theorists have made to look ahead.

Morgenthau's "realism" provided little practical guidance on how to use theory to foresee the future. It was true enough that statesmen define their interests in terms of power, Stanley Hoffmann pointed out, "but only at a level of generality that is fatuous"; after all, if everyone seeks power because they are human, then the value of a forecast stating that humans will seek power is somewhat limited. Other critics noted that Morgenthau had attempted to derive universally-valid propositions about human behavior from a particular set of human characteristics: there was no explanation of why the craving for power should necessarily take precedence over other human desires, or determine all human actions, or remain immutable for all time to come. Still others accused Morgenthau of failing to specify whether power was an end in itself or a means to an end; if it was both, then what he had achieved was not a theory but a tautology. Finally, Morgenthau's recommendations for policymakers boiled down to the exercise of prudence and restraint, qualities that seemed at odds with the unchanging characteristics of human nature he had earlier claimed to have identified. Morgenthau's "realism" was a starting point, but clearly much


24. One recent review of the field has characterized these contesting schools of thought as "partisan bands" who seize academic departments, entice graduate students into their camps, and carry on permanent feuds with one another. Yale H. Ferguson and Richard W. Mansbach, The Elusive Quest: Theory and International Politics (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1988), p. 18.
more would be required if international relations theory was to lead to the detection of laws, and hence to any possibility of forecasting and prediction.

Dissatisfaction with Morgenthau's attempt to build a comprehensive theory of international relations has led to a bewildering array of efforts, over the past several decades, to construct viable alternatives. None of these has come close to commanding universal assent, nor is there even any generally accepted way of categorizing them. For the purposes of this essay—but with the caution that these are oversimplifications—I identify them in terms of three distinctive approaches to theory: the "behavioral," the "structural," and the "evolutionary." 29 I then assess what the major practitioners of each of these approaches either said or implied about the end of the Cold War.

THE BEHAVIORAL APPROACH

The behavioral approach bases itself upon a key assumption of classical empiricism: that we can only know what we can directly observe and measure. "History, experience, introspection, common sense, and logic do not in themselves generate evidence," one of the leading behavioralists, J. David Singer, wrote in 1969; they are, rather, "ideas which must then be examined in the light of evidence," and that procedure can only take place on the basis of observations that are "systematic, explicit, visible, and replicable by other researchers." 30 A true science of politics would not simply call itself "scientific," as Morgenthau had described his theory; rather, it would apply methods of the physical and natural sciences, to the maximum extent possible, in analyzing human and state behavior. 31 Without the rigor such methods provide, behavioralists insist, 32 the study of international relations will always be subject to the very utopianism, emotionalism, bias, confusion, and contradiction from which Morgenthau's "realism" had sought to liberate it.


32. For a recent argument to this effect, see Paul Huth and Bruce Russett, "Testing Deterrence Theory: Rigor Makes a Difference," World Politics, Vol. 42, No. 4 (July 1990), pp. 466-501.
Behavioralists concentrate, for this reason, upon the careful characterization, and where possible quantification, of observable phenomena: examples have included battlefield casualties, voting returns, trade statistics, newspaper stories, and even patterns of communication.³³ Where direct measurement is not possible, they seek to generate measurable data either through the creation of rules for coding the activities of states, organizations, and individuals,³⁴ or through the simulation of situations in such a way as to yield calculable "inputs" and "outputs."³⁵ Considerable emphasis is placed on the use of rigorous mathematical techniques in analyzing information produced by these methods, both as a safeguard against bias and as a means of ensuring comparability.³⁶ The behavioralists proceed from a determinedly inductive, "bottom-up" approach, deferring the construction of theory until they have collected, measured, and compared as much observable evidence as possible, and after that cumulated, replicated, and thus verified the resulting findings.³⁷ Only then, presumably, can forecasting on any "scientific" basis take place.

The Structural Approach
The structural approach differs from the behavioral in that it focuses upon unobservable and hence unmeasurable structures that nonetheless shape international relations...
in observable and measurable ways. Behavioralists have never denied the existence or the importance of such structures; they maintain only that science lacks the means to deal with them. But structuralists point out that some of the most striking accomplishments of twentieth-century science have arisen from the assumption that unobservable structures produce observable effects: theories about the invisible structures of atoms, after all, brought about the all too visible incineration of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. The only truly inductive method, structuralists insist, is that of the blank mind; one has to assume a priori and unobservable structures because without them theories themselves could not exist, reality would be uncharacterizable, and certainly forecasting would be impossible. "Collecting facts is not enough," Stanley Hoffmann has commented; "it is not helpful to gather answers when no questions have been asked first."

International systems are one such structure: no one has ever seen, measured, or even described an international system with any precision; but few would deny that groups of nations in world politics do have characteristics that add up to more than the sum of their parts. Multipolarity and bipolarity are real conditions in international affairs, despite the fact that no state's policies deliberately create them; it makes a difference which of these conditions prevails at any given time. Forms of

39. See, for example, Singer, "The Incompleat Theorist," pp. 65-68; also Vasquez, "The Steps to War," pp. 113-114.
41. See, for example, Waltz, Theory of International Politics, pp. 4-5. Thomas S. Kuhn, The Structure of Scientific Revolutions, 2d ed., enl. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970), makes the most influential argument regarding the impossibility of a pure empiricism.
44. This is not to say that statesmen have not tried, at one time or another, to create these structures: witness the efforts of Castlereagh and Metternich at the Congress of Vienna to build a multipolar system in post-Napoleonic Europe, or the attempts of their principal historical chronicler, Henry Kissinger, to follow their example during the Nixon administration. My point is that such efforts cannot work unless the systemic conditions that favor them are already present.
government provide another example: no absolute standard allows one to distinguish democracies from dictatorships in the way that one can specify the differences between apples and oranges; and yet everyone knows that these two forms of government are not the same, and that the effects they produce—whether in terms of free elections, functioning economies, or respect for human rights—are indeed measurable. Unobservable structures can exist within governments, where they take the form of bureaucratic, organizational, and psychological constraints that do not always reflect what might be apparent on the "observable" surface. And it is very likely that such structures also exist in our minds, producing observable effects in the way in which we perceive reality, respond to it, and even, by means of language, characterize it.

Structuralists proceed, then, from a primarily deductive, "top-down" approach that assumes the existence of unobservable phenomena in international relations, uses the collection of empirical evidence—by no means excluding quantitative and simulative techniques—to refine and verify generalizations about them, and then produces forecasts by projecting the resulting patterns into the future.

THE EVOLUTIONARY APPROACH

The evolutionary approach combines elements of the structural and the behavioral approaches, but extends them along a third axis, which is that of time. Both structuralists and behavioralists tend toward a static perspective; they pay relatively little attention to the possibility that structures and behaviors in international relations might evolve. But the geological and biological sciences have preoccupied themselves with evolutionary processes—inanimate and animate—for almost two centuries now; historians, of course, have a much longer tradition of temporal analysis. It should have come as no surprise, therefore, that an evolutionary approach to international relations theory would sooner or later make its appearance. Its adherents


have come to see that the passage of time can not only influence both behavior and structure in world politics; it can also obscure the distinction between them.50

Theorists have become increasingly interested, for example, in the possibility that periods of war, peace, and political-economic hegemony recur in cyclical patterns extending over several hundred years.51 This interest, in turn, has spawned a lively concern—extending well beyond the academic community—with the conditions that lead to the rise and decline of great powers.52 But theorists have also begun to turn their attention to the possibility that irreversible shifts in individual and state behavior can occur on a worldwide scale, and that these can over time modify systemic structures.53 The assumption here is that human beings and the states they create not only accumulate experience but also learn from it; and that such learning can bring about new ways of doing things, whether at the level of the international system as a whole, aggregations of states within that system, individual states themselves, or groups and individuals within the state.54 The passage of time itself appears

to be the critical requirement in order for this process to take place: if states are to transcend their own natures and evolve techniques of cooperation, then they must have the opportunity to learn from experience, together with the confidence that existing conditions will continue at least into the near future.55

Behavioral, structural, and evolutionary approaches to the construction of international relations theory each have their weaknesses. The behavioralists tend to focus only on observable, measurable phenomena, thereby excluding from their vision those aspects of international relations that do not fall into that category. The structuralists, by taking the opposite approach, produce impressionistic judgments and unverifiable conclusions. And both behavioralists and structuralists neglect the role of time in world politics, a subject the evolutionists focus on, but only at the expense of blurring the distinction between behavior and structure in the first place. It is hardly surprising, therefore, that no grand theory of international relations has arisen to replace Morgenthau;56 the absence of such a theory, in turn, greatly complicates efforts to forecast world politics. Still the distinction between behavioral, structural, and evolutionary approaches should serve as an adequate framework within which to evaluate such efforts as have been made, and from which to make suggestions about possible improvements.

Theory, Theorists, and the End of the Cold War

Establishing criteria for success, in forecasting, is no easy thing to do.57 How much weight should one give, for example, to a vision of the future that turns out to be right, but for the wrong reasons? What if the reasons are right but the timing is wrong? How much precision should one demand, and how much detail can one expect? To what extent should one reward lucky guesses? How does one take into account the possibility that forecasts might make themselves inaccurate by encouraging action to alter existing trends? The complexities are such that one is tempted to fall back on Justice Potter Stewart’s famous rule for recognizing pornography: “I know it when I see it.”58


56. For the decline of grand theory, see K.J. Holsti, “Retreat from Utopia,” pp. 165–177.


For the purposes of this essay, though, let us establish a relatively easy test. Let us say that a successful anticipation of the Cold War's end need not have been a deterministic or a conditional prediction, but only a probabilistic forecast.59 Let us absolve it of any obligation to have foreseen all or even most of the circumstances that brought about that event. Let us require of it only the specification in advance of at least one of the following as likely: (1) the asymmetrical outcome—that is, the fact that only one of the two Cold War superpowers, not both, lost that status; (2) the manner in which this happened—that is, an abrupt but peaceful collapse of Moscow's authority both within and beyond the borders of the former Soviet Union; (3) the trends that caused this loss of authority to occur—that is, the increasing unworkability of command economies, together with the infeasibility of using authoritarian means to rescue them; (4) the approximate timing of these developments—that is, the last half of the 1980s and the early 1990s; or (5) the rough outlines of a world without the Cold War—especially one in which German reunification has taken place, NATO has survived despite the Warsaw Pact's demise, and democratization has revived ancient ethnic, linguistic, and religious rivalries in territories that once lay within, or adjacent to, the Soviet sphere of influence.

What is immediately obvious, on reviewing this list, is that very few of our theoretical approaches to the study of international relations came anywhere close to forecasting any of these developments. One might as well have relied upon star-gazers, readers of entrails, and other "pre-scientific" methods for all the good our "scientific" methods did;60 clearly our theories were not up to the task of anticipating the most significant event in world politics since the end of World War II.61 The following discussion of international relations theorists and the end of the Cold War must necessarily concentrate, therefore, on what did not happen rather than on what did. Still, as Sherlock Holmes noted long ago, dogs that do not bark in the night have their own important messages to convey.

BEHAVIORAL APPROACHES

The behavioralist research agenda, J. David Singer argued in 1972, was to move from the collection of data through the construction of theory to the generation of forecasts: "The number one task for peace research always turns out to be that of prediction," which, in turn, was "the ability to forecast, with increasing reliability, the outcomes

59. For definitions of these terms, see note 2.
which are most likely to emerge out of a given set of background conditions and behavioral events.” Existing methods of forecasting were inadequate: “if we peace researchers are to nudge human history onto a slightly different course—and we can strive for nothing less—we must radically revise the style and method of social forecasting as we know it today.”

Nine years earlier, Singer and his colleagues had founded the Correlates of War Project at the University of Michigan, a careful effort to catalog the causes and nature of modern wars that must now be the most frequently-cited of all data-collection enterprises in the field of international relations. The research program he laid out in 1972 is of special interest, therefore, not simply for its clarity but also for the central position its author has occupied in the study of war and peace over the past three decades. It provides a standard against which to measure what the behavioralist approach has achieved.

Dismissing such familiar—or fashionable—forecasting techniques as simple extrapolation, “seat of the pants” guessing, Delphi methods, and simulations, Singer called first for work to identify relationships between variables that were likely to influence conditions of war or peace. These correlations could be tested against the historical record; if they held up—and if one could reasonably assume their continuation into the future—then they might provide a means of forecasting what was to come. What would be needed if one were to accomplish this, though, Singer insisted, was “theory-based prediction.”

Singer defined theory as “a reproducible and compelling explanation of a given class of events.” Theories were superior to correlations because they could not only identify patterns, but also explain why, when, and under what circumstances patterns occurred. They could describe the dynamics of systems as well as their static characteristics. “In sum,” Singer concluded, “correlational knowledge can carry us part way, but until we have built and empirically tested a theory which offers a compelling explanation of the changing as well as the constant associations in the past, we make predictions of less than desirable solidity.”

The construction of such a theory would require, first, “a reasonably extensive and accurate data base.” Computer modeling could then allow the manipulation of variables at different magnitudes, after which the results could be checked—and refined—by reference back to historical experience. This technique would allow one, in effect, to “reproduce” diplomatic history, while at the same time projecting it into various futures as specified by the researcher. Out of these efforts would come, first, “the most feasible way of ascertaining when, and in what fashion, the theoretical dynamics of the international system change”; second, “the factors that most strongly account

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63. Popularized by the RAND Corporation in the 1950s, the Delphi method involved eliciting successively more specific predictions on a particular problem from a group of experts who were in touch with one another only to the extent that they reviewed each other’s predictions.
65. Ibid., pp. 5–6.
for those changing relationships"; and third, the ultimate identification of "the mechanisms which account for and produce such systemic dynamics."66

In the years that have followed the appearance of Singer's article, behavioralists have indeed made heroic efforts to collect and analyze data, not just on the causes and nature of war but on the workings of the international system generally.67 They have done this in a manner consistent with their determination to build theory only on a base of observable and measurable phenomena. They have identified key variables from this body of data; they have established correlations among them using an ingenious array of statistical and computer techniques; they have checked and rechecked these findings against the historical record; they have communicated the results honestly and openly; and they have trained an entire generation of students to carry on this research agenda into the future.

Unfortunately, though, the behavioralist approach has produced neither theory, nor forecasts, nor usable policy recommendations.68 At the time the Cold War ended it was still gathering and correlating data, a process from which few firm conclusions of any kind have emerged. The behavioralists themselves have often commented on this phenomenon: "Regardless of the theoretical interpretation, the empirical investigations led once more to inconsistent results."69 "Although the goal of a social scientific perspective on negotiations is cumulation, the development of the literature in this field to date suggests that the results fall well short of this goal."70 "Unquestionably, one of the greatest disappointments experienced by early [comparative foreign policy] proponents has been their perceived failure to generate intellectual products even roughly commensurate with early expectations."71

There are, to be sure, good reasons why the behavioral study of world politics has yielded such inconclusive results. For one thing, fewer directly measurable entities exist at the level of international relations than at other levels of human activity. It is

66. Ibid., pp. 7-8.
67. I refer here, not just to the Correlates of War Project, but also to such other data collection enterprises as the Dimensionality of Nations Project, the World Event Interaction Survey, the Conflict and Peace Data Bank, the Cooperative Research on the Events of Nations Project, and the Foreign Relations Indicator Project, all of which have operated according to different rules and for different purposes. I have chosen to focus this analysis on the Correlates of War Project because I believe its influence on the field of international relations has been, and remains, greater than that of the other data collection efforts; it is also the case that its principal founder, Singer, has made the most explicit claims regarding the utility of such data collection efforts in forecasting.
not all that difficult to accumulate data from questionnaires documenting the habits and preferences of individuals, or from votes cast in national elections, or from statistics on national economic performance, but how does one translate concepts like “polarity,” or “hostility,” or “deterrence”—fundamental as they are to an understanding of global systems—into calculable expressions? It is also worth remembering that behavioralism began as a young science, and that the behavioralists never claimed the ability to forecast anything with authority until theories derived from scientifically valid evidence were solidly in place, however long this took. From these perspectives, then, it is unfair to criticize behavioralist scholarship for not having anticipated the end of the Cold War.

Still, the protracted delay in producing what was promised cannot help but create doubts as to the ultimate viability of the behavioralist enterprise. It makes one wonder whether the approach may not be stuck in a permanent condition of adolescence. Certainly it raises question as to whether theory has not become, for the behavioralists, something like what the classless society once was for Marxist-Leninists: a goal to which one pays deference and toward which one works, but without ever getting there. The behavioral approach to international relations theory remains just that—an approach: it has never gotten beyond the generation of correlational knowledge that Singer specified as the first step toward theory construction. The absence of theory is a major reason, therefore, as well as an excuse, for why the behavioralist literature has given so little attention to forecasting, and hence to the end of the Cold War.

What insights, though, has behavioralism produced? Behavioralists have put forward some generalizations relating to present conditions and future prospects in world politics, but these tend to be highly tentative, imperfectly integrated, and drawn almost entirely from statistically demonstrated correlations. I have tried to summarize the most important of these below, with a view to determining what forecasting utility, if any, they might have had:

WARS ARE BECOMING LESS FREQUENT, BUT MORE DANGEROUS. The Correlates of War Project has shown that the frequency of both international and civil wars has been declining—when measured against the increasing number of states in the international system—and that it has done so dramatically since 1945. But behavioralists have not concluded from this, as have other scholars, that great power war is

75. Small and Singer, “Conflict in the International System,” pp. 61–74. See also Jack S. Levy, War in the Modern Great Power System, 1495–1975 (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1983), pp. 144–149, which argues that wars among great powers have been declining in frequency over the past five hundred years, but that they have been increasing in their severity.
76. For example, Mueller, Retreat from Doomsday; Ray, “The Abolition of Slavery and the End of International War.”
becoming obsolete; on the contrary, they have stressed the increasing severity of the wars that do occur, together with the persistence of arms races, the dangers of nuclear and conventional weapons proliferation, and the absence of safeguards that would keep wars from breaking out. They have tended to conclude, as Singer and Melvin Small did in 1979, that the international system remains “fundamentally as war-prone as it has been since the Congress of Vienna.” 77

**Alliances Rarely Bring Security.** One generally forms alliances for the purpose of making one’s nation more secure, but the behavioralist literature suggests strongly that one ought not to count on this. Past efforts to bolster security by aligning against potential adversaries have more often than not set off arms races, thereby diminishing security in the long run. 78 Except during the nineteenth century, most participants in alliances over the past five centuries—and all great power participants—have found themselves at war within five years after the alliance was formed. 79 One cannot rely on alliance partners to meet their obligations if war breaks out; alliances also tend to expand wars once they have begun. 80 “In sum,” Michael D. Wallace concluded in 1979, “most of the evidence seems to be against those who see military alliances as necessary to peace, and on the side of those who see them as a danger.” 81

**Preparation for War Rarely Ensures Peace.** The dictum “Let him who desires peace prepare for war” has long been used to justify the existence and expansion of large military establishments. But Correlates of War Project statistics suggest that preparation for war has most often caused arms races, with all their attendant risks, rather than the peace this ancient maxim promises. The “far safer course of action,” Wallace noted in 1981, “is to maintain unilateral restraint in acquiring new weapons systems while seeking every opportunity to negotiate bilateral and multilateral agreements to limit development and deployment.” 82 Subsequent research in this area has shown a close correspondence between increases in military spending and involvement in military conflict: excuses tend to be found to use the weapons one develops. 83 Meanwhile, quantitative studies of deterrence successes and failures have revealed little correlation between military superiority, on the one hand, and success in deterring adversaries, on the other. 84

**Power Disparities Promote Peace.** Behavioralists have also argued, though, that in the twentieth century at least, a well-defined international system—that is, one in

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which each state clearly understands the intentions and capabilities of the others—
makes the events that take place within that system more predictable; war, which
tends to arise from the inability of statesmen to foresee consequences, therefore
becomes less likely.\footnote{J. David Singer, “Research, Policy, and the Correlates of War,” in Øvind Østerud, ed.,
Studies of War and Peace (Oslo: Norwegian University Press, 1986), pp. 51-52; Singer, Models,
Methods, and Progress in World Politics, pp. 242-244. It is important to note, however, that Singer’s
evidence suggests the opposite to have been the case during the nineteenth century. For his
non-quantitative speculation as to the reasons for this, see ibid., pp. 252-255.} It would appear to follow from this that a hierarchical system
of international relations—a situation in which a few great powers dominate a much
larger number of weaker states—encourages stability. Great powers are more likely
than smaller ones to be cautious in their dealings with one another, while smaller
powers, whether cautious or not, lack the means and the inclination to challenge
Studies Quarterly, Vol. 30 (1986), especially pp. 85-87; also Manus I. Midlarsky, The Onset of World
War (Boston: Unwin Hyman, 1988).}

\textbf{BIPOLARITY MAY, OR MAY NOT, PROMOTE PEACE.} Behavioralists have long sought to
settle, by scientific means, the important question of whether bipolar or multipolar
systems are more stable. But as one recent review of this literature has noted, the
findings have been “exceedingly complicated and sometimes inconsistent.”\footnote{Vasquez, “The Steps to War,” p. 123.}
Some evidence suggests that war is more likely under conditions of extreme bipolarity and
extreme multipolarity, but less likely if the situation falls between these extremes.\footnote{Michael D. Wallace, “Alliance Polarization, Cross-Cutting, and International War, 1815–
1964: A Measurement Procedure and Some Preliminary Evidence,” in Singer and associates,
Explaining War, p. 105.}
Other research concludes—even less helpfully—that the increasing “tightness” of
bipolar alignments tends to lead to war, but that an expansion of “poles” within the
international system is likely to have the same result: shifts toward either bipolarity
or multipolarity, it appears, are dangerous.\footnote{Bruce Bueno de Mesquita, “Systemic Polarization and the Occurrence and Duration of War,”
in Singer and associates, Explaining War, pp. 129–32.} One can only conclude from all of this,
as Singer himself does, that “depending on the variables used, the ways in which they
were measured, the spatial-temporal domain covered, and the statistical models
that were applied to the data, we obtain appreciably different results.”\footnote{Singer, Models,
Methods, and Progress in World Politics, p. 255.}

This brief summary of behavioralist findings on the problem of war and peace fails
to do justice to the complexities and nuances of the research that produced them.
But the above propositions will serve, I think, as a fair approximation of what a
policy-maker interested in applying behavioral research to world politics would have
drawn from this body of work. They also suggest the difficulties such a policy-maker
would have in seeking to base any reasonably coherent course of action on them.

What is one to make, for example, of the observation that wars are becoming less
frequent but more dangerous? Is this insight likely to have escaped the attention of
policy-makers unfamiliar with behavioralist research? How is one to reconcile the
arguments (a) that alliances rarely achieve security and (b) that preparation for war provides no protection against it, with the assertion (c) that disparities in power correlate with peace? How have power differentials developed in the past, after all, if not largely through the accumulation of the military strength that alliances and armaments provide? And what policy implications would behavioralist findings on the respective merits of bipolarity and multipolarity suggest, given the uncertainty of the behavioralists themselves as to what those findings are? In short, the major "policy-relevant" conclusions behavioralist research has produced are either self-evident, self-contradictory, or self-confusing.

Nor, if the fading of Soviet-American competition can serve as a test, do these findings provide any very good basis for forecasting. The declining incidence of war would have been a good indicator of what was to happen, but behavioralists chose not to make the forecast one might have expected from such data; instead they concluded that the danger of a great power conflict would be at least as high during the 1980s as it had been in the past. The Western military buildup during the early part of that decade—together with the strengthening of the NATO alliance that accompanied it—does not appear to have delayed the end of the Cold War; on the contrary, these initiatives may have hastened it. The behavioralists' point about power disparities does help to explain the relative stability of the Cold War international system, but it would have provided no warning of that system's impending collapse. Nor—given their uncertainty on the effects of bipolarity and multipolarity—are the behavioralists able to make any coherent forecasts of what might replace it.

It is not my purpose here to question the competency of those scholars who have embraced behavioralism in the study of international relations. They have often been their own toughest critics; few of the criticisms I have made above have not also been made by behavioralists themselves in assessing their own work or that of their contemporaries.

91. This point is a controversial one, and the evidence necessary to confirm it is not yet available. It is clear that the initial response by the Brezhnev-Andropov leadership was a dangerous war scare, best discussed in Christopher Andrew and Oleg Gordievsky, KGB: The Inside Story of its Foreign Operations from Lenin to Gorbachev (New York: HarperCollins, 1990), pp. 581–605. But it also seems clear that President Reagan's announcement of the Strategic Defense Initiative in March 1983, together with the Soviet government's failure to prevent the NATO intermediate-range nuclear forces deployment later that year, did set off a fundamental reassessment of foreign and military policy inside the Kremlin. See Jerry Hough, Russia and the West: Gorbachev and the Politics of Reform, 2d ed. (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1990), pp. 118–121; also Michael MccGwire, Perestroika and Soviet National Security Policy (Washington, D.C.: Brookings, 1991), pp. 115–173. The key question is what influence this reassessment had on Mikhail Gorbachev when he came to power in 1985: did the Soviet Union's failures in these areas push him into perestroika, or would he have gone in that direction in any event? Preliminary attempts to answer this question include Deudney and Ikenberry, "The International Sources of Soviet Change," passim; Thomas Risse-Kappen, "Did 'Peace Through Strength' End the Cold War? Lessons from INF," International Security, Vol. 16, No. 1 (Summer 1991), pp. 162–188; Daniel Deudney and G. John Ikenberry, "Who Won the Cold War?" Foreign Policy, No. 87 (Summer 1992), pp. 123–138; and the account of a well-informed journalist, Don Oberdorfer, The Turn: From the Cold War to a New Era: The United States and the Soviet Union, 1983–1990 (New York: Poseidon, 1991).
colleagues. But if we are to determine why behavioralism’s performance with respect to forecasting has fallen so far short of what was promised, we must consider certain difficulties that have affected the approach as a whole:

THE TYRANNY OF METHOD OVER SUBJECT. Despite the self-chosen association of many behavioralists with the field of “peace studies,” the data bases they have assembled have concerned themselves, to a striking degree, with the subject of war. Their focus has been on conflict, escalation, deterrence, crisis management, and crisis decision-making. They have shown more interest in the circumstances that cause peace to break down than with those that cause it to break out. This has happened, I think, for two reasons.

First, these projects all began at the height of the Cold War, when the prospects of a hot war were uppermost in people’s minds. Given the massive character of these projects, and especially their emphasis on reproducible cumulative research, it has not been easy to redirect priorities as circumstances have changed. There is a considerable irony in the fact that it proved easier to modify the official policies of the United States and the Soviet Union toward one another than to shift the focus of the major behavioralist data-collection projects that were supposed to provide insights into how those governments’ policies might be modified.

Second, the behavioralists’ concentration on the causes and manifestations of conflict reflect what the historical logician David Hackett Fischer has called the “quantitative fallacy”: this is the assumption that “facts are important in proportion to their susceptibility to quantification.” It was simply easier to count events related to war than to peace. War is an exceptional event in international relations; despite the frequency with which it has occurred, it is always a departure from the normal state of affairs, and departures from the norm are always less difficult to measure than the norm itself.

There was nothing inherent in behavioralism that required its practitioners to proceed in this manner. One of the few even partially successful anticipations of the Cold War’s end came from a pioneer in the behavioral approach to international relations, Karl Deutsch, in a 1966 article entitled “The Future of World Politics.” In it, Deutsch focused not so much on the causes of conflict or the nature of the global system as on its impending transformation, a process he saw taking place because of the growth of literacy and urbanization, diminishing income inequalities, and the increasing involvement of the masses in politics. From these trends, he forecast that autocracies would find it more and more difficult to govern, that the costs of intervention in foreign countries would mount, that threats would carry less and less credibility, that nationalism would erode ideological blocs, that economic influence

92. This is especially true of Singer, whose recent collection of essays, Models, Methods, and Progress in World Politics, repeatedly reflects his willingness to submit behavioralist research to critical scrutiny. See also, in particular, Hermann and Peacock, “The Evolution and Future of Theoretical Research in the Comparative Study of Foreign Policy,” passim.
93. Fischer, Historians’ Fallacies, p. 90. For related criticisms, see Waltz, Theory of International Politics, p. 64; and Hoffmann, “The Long Road to Theory,” pp. 427–429.
would become more important than military force and that, in the end, a more mature condition of international society would develop than the one that had existed throughout most of the twentieth century.94

If a pioneer in the behavioralist movement could come up with these prescient observations a quarter of a century prior to the end of the Cold War, one has to wonder why the field as a whole was unable to accomplish anything like this. The answer would appear to be that Deutsch was prepared to depart from quantitative analysis when that technique was inappropriate: for him, subject determined method, rather than the other way around. Too many other behavioralists let method determine subject,95 with the consequences one might expect in any situation in which means are allowed to overshadow avowed ends.

PROBLEMS OF DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS. Any behavioralist would acknowledge, in principle, that one can never be totally atheoretical, otherwise one could never define research priorities. But Singer has made a point, in the Correlates of War Project, of deferring a commitment to any single theory until as much evidence as possible has been gathered. This procedure allows the testing of theories without preconceptions; presumably it would also make the endorsement of a particular theory, were that to occur, more convincing than it otherwise would have been.96 The difficulty here is that such a deferral also vastly increases the task of data collection, because one thereby loses a major function that theories serve, which is to provide a basis for distinguishing between significant and trivial information. The amount of potentially useful but still unassimilated evidence does not noticeably diminish, in an atheoretical research enterprise, with the passage of time.97 Or, to paraphrase a famous law of administrative science, data expands to fill the vacuum left by the absence of theory, and one never gets past the first step in one’s research agenda.

A related difficulty has to do with the kind of data one collects. Behavioralists limit themselves to measuring directly observable phenomena. They by no means ignore unobservable influences, but they count them only when they manifest themselves in some quantifiable form. That approach may work in fields like politics, economics, or academia, where a single universally accepted unit of measure—votes, for example, or money, or ponderous publications—exists. But there is no such unit in the field of international relations;98 one must choose, instead, between two alternatives, neither of them completely satisfactory: One can confine one’s analysis to that limited sphere of world politics in which quantifiable entities do exist—war casualties, arms races, trade statistics, population movements, and the like—but this can lead to the quan-

96. See, on these points, Singer, “The ‘Correlates of War’ Project,” pp. 248, 251.
97. Waltz, Theory of International Politics, p. 5. The behavioralists have fallen victim, I believe, to the fallacy of “holism.” For more on this, see Fischer, Historians’ Fallacies, pp. 65–68.
titative fallacy, and hence to the danger of missing the kind of non-quantifiable information Deutsch focused on in his 1966 article. Or one can artificially create quantifiable entities, a procedure that has been the basis for the “events data” movement, an important part of the behavioral approach to theory construction over the past several decades.

But this latter course raises other difficulties, which have to do with the way in which one interprets the data one collects. Because information gathered has to be coded if it is to be quantified—and because coding is inescapably dependent on the subjective perceptions of those doing the coding—“events data” tends to fall short of scientific standards for objectivity and reproducibility. Comparisons of data bases covering the same subject have shown an unsettling lack of correspondence, as have efforts to replicate coding procedures. One is left with the suspicion that our supposedly objective data-collection efforts may not be much freer from impressionistic and arbitrary judgments than are the old-fashioned historical narratives they sought to replace.

MODELING REALITY. Even if methods were subordinated to subjects and problems of data collection and analysis had been solved, the behavioralist approach to theory and forecasting would confront a remaining difficulty: it has to do with relating the generalizations that emerge from correlations to the real world. When Singer composed his 1972 research agenda, he envisaged constructing “the most plausible and parsimonious model” one could devise that would explain the recurrence of war and peace; one would then “examine how closely that model fits the historical patterns which have been observed and recorded earlier.” Adjustments in the model would bring it progressively closer to historical experience; computer simulation would then allow movement “from runs of the past to runs of the future,” without committing “the sin of mechanical extrapolation from past into future.”

There have always been doubts about the possibility of accomplishing this kind of thing. Gabriel Almond and Stephen Genco summarized them well in 1977 when, borrowing from Karl Popper, they pointed out that reality comprises a range of phenomena extending from the determinate to the indeterminate—from predictable clocks to unpredictable clouds, to use Popper’s metaphor—and that “models, pro-

cedures, and methodologies created to explore a world in which clocklike and cloud-
like characteristics predominate will capture only a part of the much richer world of
social and political interaction.” In their determination to be “scientific,” social sci-
entists had “overlooked the fact that much of social and political change has to be
explained . . . by accidental conjunctions—by events that had a low probability of
occurring.” The implication of all of this, Almond and Genco insisted, was that “the
explanatory strategy of the hard sciences has only a limited application to the social
sciences.”

This argument made little impact at the time, given the conviction of behavioralists
that a scientific approach, even to the study of apparently unpredictable phenomena,
was indeed possible: all that was necessary was to get the proper “fit” between
models and reality. But even as the social scientists were insisting on the need to
apply “hard” scientific techniques to their field if it was ever to succeed at forecasting,
the “hard” scientists themselves were backing away from the view that all phenomena
could be modeled and their future behavior therefore predicted. What is even more
ironic, in the light of Almond and Genco’s critique, is that this shift away from
scientific certainty began, quite literally, with the study of clouds.

Why, meteorologists had long asked, could one not build a computer simulation
of the atmosphere that would allow reliable long-range weather forecasting? In what
has now become a famous experiment, Edward Lorenz, a mathematically-inclined
meteorologist, sought to construct such a model on a primitive computer at the
Massachusetts Institute of Technology in 1961. Lorenz had his computer calculate
certain meteorological correlations, based on known variables and a single starting
point. But he quickly found that tiny variations in his parameters—the rounding of
a number from six decimal points to three, for example—produced startling effects
on his computer screen: patterns that should have corresponded in fact diverged
dramatically, and did so on the basis of statistical variations so minute that no real-
world measuring device could possibly compensate for them. What this suggested,
Lorenz noted in another cloud-related metaphor, was that something as unpredictable
as the fluttering of a butterfly’s wings over Beijing could produce a hurricane over
New York. Thus was born the principle of “sensitive dependence on initial condi-
tions,” the “butterfly effect,” that makes long-term weather forecasting—the trans-
formation of clouds into clocks, if you will—impossible.

Not all phenomena, to be sure, are subject to the butterfly effect. The motions of
planets, and of spacecraft traveling between them, do proceed like clockwork, and
the familiar principles of Newtonian physics provide an entirely adequate method of
forecasting their behavior for, if necessary, centuries to come. But these are systems
in which only a few critical and easily calculable variables are at work. Equally reliable
weather forecasting over a time scale extending only into next week would require

102. Gabriel A. Almond and Stephen J. Genco, “Clouds, Clocks, and the Study of Politics,”
103. The story is well told in James Gleick, Chaos: Making a New Science (New York: Viking,
metaphor to critique Correlates of War Project methodology.
calculating an infinite number of variables with infinite precision, a task well beyond the abilities of even the most sophisticated computer today, or in the foreseeable future. As a consequence, scientists have had to learn to live with the fact that some phenomena can be predicted with great accuracy, but that other phenomena can never be. Regularity and apparent randomness co-exist quite easily in a real world, which does not require their measurement, if not always in our minds, which do.104

Surely human affairs, and the history they produce, come closer to falling into the unpredictable rather than the predictable category: not only are the potentially relevant variables virtually infinite, but there is the added complication—not found in either clouds or clocks—of self-awareness, which means that the “variables” themselves can often foresee the consequences of contemplated actions, and reconsider them accordingly. The behavioralist enterprise of attempting to theorize about, and then to forecast, the actions of individuals, societies, nations, and groups of nations on the basis only of observable, calculable evidence and without taking into account the critical variable of self-awareness is, ultimately, an attempt to transform clouds into clocks. It is an incomplete, misleading, and washed-out representation of reality: no wonder, therefore, that it was so unsuccessful in forecasting the end of the Cold War.

STRUCTURAL APPROACHES

What about the structuralists? Did an approach to theory construction that incorporated the role of unobservable—and unquantifiable—phenomena in world politics do any better than the behavioralists in anticipating recent developments?

Morton A. Kaplan’s 1957 book, System and Process in International Politics, was the first major attempt at a structural analysis of world politics. In it, Kaplan identified six distinctive international systems, only two of which had actually existed in modern history.105 He described the characteristics of these systems in considerable detail, as well as the processes operating within them that would contribute to systemic perpetuation or disintegration. Kaplan claimed no ability to forecast what particular states within any of these systems might do in specific situations. He pointed out, though, that although physical scientists had no means of mapping in advance the paths of individual gas molecules, they could reliably predict how an aggregation of such molecules would behave under known pressures and temperatures. Theories of international politics, Kaplan thought, ought to work in much the same way: they should allow one to detect patterns of behavior within international systems, and they should be capable of specifying the conditions under which those systems would remain stable, or be transformed into something else.106

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104. See also, on the limited possibilities of prediction in the physical sciences, Kaplan, System and Process in International Politics, p. xvii.
105. Ibid., pp. 21–53. For an even more elaborate typology, based on actual historical experience, see Rosecrance, Action and Reaction in World Politics, pp. 219–275. As Waltz has pointed out, however, Rosecrance’s typology is not a structural theory. Waltz, Theory of International Politics, pp. 41–43.
106. Kaplan, System and Process in International Politics, pp. xvii–xviii. It is worth noting that
The two historical systems Kaplan identified were the familiar “balance of power” system, which had lasted throughout the eighteenth, nineteenth, and early twentieth centuries, and the “loose bipolar” system, which had been functioning since 1945. As its name implied, the balance of power system had operated without a dominant power or combination of powers; instead each major state sought to counter bids for dominance on the part of other states. The loose bipolar system, in contrast, evolved from the fact that two predominant states had emerged from World War II capable of incorporating less powerful states into coalitions they controlled; the configuration was “loose” because some other states remained apart from these alignments, and because a few significant actors within the system—the United Nations, in particular—were not states. Kaplan was able to draw upon historical evidence in describing these two systems, and in explaining how the first of them had evolved into the second. No historical evidence was available in 1957, though, to illustrate the breakup of a loose bipolar system, or to answer the question of what might replace it. Kaplan’s theoretical description of this process is of interest, therefore, as an early attempt to forecast, solely by deductive means, how the end of the Cold War might come about.

Total war in a loose bipolar system, Kaplan anticipated, would bring about a unipolar international system if one side won, or chaos if both sides were exhausted. A stalemate, he thought, would produce a “tight bipolar” system, in which both antagonistic coalitions would become hierarchical. But what if these blocs should begin to disintegrate without war taking place? Here Kaplan argued that the greater the amount of hierarchy within a bloc, the more resistant to fragmentation it would be: coalitions that had come together freely would tend to fly apart more easily than those that had been forged, and sustained, by tight central control. Instability within voluntary coalitions would probably push the system as a whole toward unipolarity; in the unlikely event that involuntary coalitions should break up, the international system would revert to a balance of power configuration, or toward some form of international organization. A simultaneous weakening of both coalitions would also probably revive the balance of power system or encourage movement toward some form of central world government.

Loose bipolarity, Kaplan noted, contained “a considerable degree of inherent instability,” because so much depended upon the kind of relationship that existed between the two dominant states. There would be, on the one hand, a strong temptation for each of them to seek to eliminate its rival, if for no other reason than to avoid the danger of being eliminated itself. But, on the other hand, if “the destructive power of weapons increases to an inordinate degree, this fact may raise the costs of military action so greatly that the blocs arrive at some form of accommodation.”

Kaplan’s claims regarding the structuralist approach to forecasting did not differ significantly from those Singer had made from a behavioralist perspective. See especially Singer, “The Peace Researcher and Foreign Policy Prediction,” p. 8.

107 Kaplan, System and Process in International Politics, pp. 22-25, 36-38. Loose bipolarity did not require equivalent behavior by each pole: Kaplan made a point of stressing that the coalitions within such a system could be organized either hierarchically or non-hierarchically, so that integration within them could come about by coercion or by choice.
And if such weapons should become relatively cheap, yet another kind of international system might evolve: a "unit veto" arrangement in which "each actor responded to the negative golden rule of natural law by not doing to others what he would not have them do to him." In short, all of the above options were possible: "Depending upon conditions, the loose bipolar system can be transformed ... into a tight bipolar system, into a hierarchical international system, a universal international system, a 'balance of power' system, or a unit veto system."108

Kaplan's book was a remarkable feat of theoretical imagination, but that was also its problem. Critics found his discussion of four systems that had never existed to be puzzling: how could one know, Hedley Bull asked, that these were the only four possible systems and that, even if they were, all of the relevant variables that might shape their character had been included?109 Kaplan's terminology was confusing—he used the term "subsystem dominant," for example, to suggest that the international system dominated units within it, and he applied the adjective "hierarchical" both to systems and to blocs within systems.110 His structuralist approach did generate forecasts, but these tended to be so abstract and indecisive—so inclined toward "all of the above" conclusions—that they were of little greater use to policy-makers than those of the behavioralists would be. And in those few instances in which Kaplan did make specific predictions—for example, his assertion that tightly controlled coalitions would be more durable than those that functioned by mutual consent—they have not held up particularly well.

The principal criticism of Kaplan's method, though, was that he had failed to distinguish the structure of his respective international systems from the behavior of states within them. In an effort to explain how systems can become unstable and evolve into something else, he fell into the argument that processes within states could shape systemic structures. The point would have been unexceptionable had Kaplan not also insisted that international systems determine the behavior of states. But since Kaplan had made that assertion, the logic of his analysis, and hence its capacity for forecasting, was questionable.111

That, at least, that was the argument that Kenneth N. Waltz, Kaplan's chief critic and the most influential "structuralist" in contemporary international relations theory, made in 1979. In his book, Theory of International Politics, Waltz sought to rescue the structuralist approach by making a sharp distinction between what he called "systems level" and "unit level" phenomena. Any theory that sought to account for or to anticipate the workings of an international system, he insisted, had to concern itself only with the characteristics of that system; it could not confuse the issue by introducing the behavior of individual states within it. The reason for this was that international systems imposed their own limits upon state action. Even the most revolutionary state would not revolutionize world politics if systemic influences re-

108. Ibid., pp. 40-43, 50.
111. Waltz, Theory of International Politics, pp. 54-59.
sisted that objective; even the most conservative nation would fail to stabilize an international order if the systemic prerequisites for stability were not present. The internal character of states—whether democratic or autocratic, capitalist or communist, peace-loving or aggressive—made no difference; what defined an international system was the anarchic environment in which it operated, together with the distribution of capabilities across the states that existed within it. Changes in this distribution produced shifts in systemic structure.112

Waltz agreed with Kaplan that there had been only two international systemic structures in modern history: the multipolar system that had characterized interstate relations from approximately the time of the Treaty of Westphalia through the end of World War II, and the bipolar system that had replaced it. But Waltz went well beyond Kaplan in insisting, on both theoretical and historical grounds, that bipolar systems were inherently more “stable” than their multipolar counterparts. From a theoretical perspective, the existence of only two major adversaries minimized the possibilities of misperception, confusion, and unpredictable interaction: as any physicist could explain, two-body problems are far easier to solve than those involving three or more.113 From a historical perspective, Waltz could point to the success of the United States and the Soviet Union in managing crises and maintaining alliances without resort to war over three and a half decades, a record that compared favorably with what the pre-1945 great powers had accomplished in a multipolar international environment.114

What did all of this imply about the future of the Cold War? A superficial reading of Waltz would suggest that, because he described bipolarity as more stable than multipolarity and because he defined “stability” as simply the capacity of the system to endure,115 he had been quite wrong in 1979: multipolarity, after all, lasted for three hundred years; bipolarity would survive only for another ten. But Waltz had been careful to point out that the principal actors in the pre–World War II multipolar system had changed frequently: of some seven great powers in 1700, only France and Great Britain continued to enjoy that status in 1939. Turkey, Sweden, Spain, Austria, and the Netherlands had all lost their preeminence by the time World War II broke out; Germany, Italy, Japan, the Soviet Union, and the United States had arisen to take their place. Soviet-American bipolarity seemed robust forty years later because no third power had developed capabilities comparable to those commanded by Moscow and Washington, but the system was “unlikely to last as long as its predecessor.”116

Common threats, Waltz believed, could transform enemies into allies. The emergence of the Soviet Union and the United States as adversaries after World War II

112. Ibid., pp. 97–98.
115. Ibid., pp. 132n, 161–162.
116. Ibid., p. 162.
had had the paradoxical effect of reconciling once antagonistic states in Western Europe. Conditions of insecurity that had caused Europeans to distrust one another for so long disappeared in the face of greater danger; long-term cooperation became possible, even as the Cold War itself intensified.\textsuperscript{117} Even if no third state seemed likely to threaten Russians and Americans in a way that might cause them to settle their differences, Waltz came to see that a common technological threat might have the same result. Waltz had minimized the effects of nuclear weapons in \textit{Theory of International Politics}—"in shaping the behavior of nations, the perennial forces of politics are more important than the new military technology"\textsuperscript{118}—but he soon reconsidered this position, so much so, indeed, that by 1981 he was advocating the proliferation of nuclear capabilities to smaller powers as a sure way to guarantee peace among them. The possibility of an all-out nuclear war might well serve as the functional equivalent of a third party threat in driving the United States and the Soviet Union toward the discovery of common ground; certainly concentration on the destructive capabilities of nuclear weapons "has obscured the important benefits they promise to states trying to coexist in a self-help world."\textsuperscript{119}

It was also the case that the very character of bipolar confrontation carried within it the causes of its own eventual demise. Citing conclusions drawn from the study of oligopolistic competition among corporations, Waltz pointed out that the passage of time makes it easier for rivals to cooperate: "The increasing similarity of competitors' attitudes, as well as their experience with one another, eases the adjustment of their relations." Bipolar situations, in particular, encouraged this process: "Tension in the system is high because each can do so much for and to the other. But because no appeal can be made to third parties, pressure to moderate behavior is heavy. . . . The simplicity of relations in a bipolar world and the strong pressures that are generated make the two great powers conservative."\textsuperscript{120} By this logic, the bipolar structure of the post-1945 international system suggested an eventual moderation of Soviet-American hostility, if not an end to it altogether.

Waltz was not at all certain, therefore, that the Cold War would continue: indeed \textit{Theory of International Politics} holds up rather well in its anticipation of several influences that would bring that conflict to an end. He did maintain, however, that bipolarity would survive: "The barriers to entering the superpower club have never been higher and more numerous. The club will long remain the world's most exclusive one."\textsuperscript{121} The maturation of a bipolar relationship did not necessarily mean its passing: "American and Russian behavior has changed somewhat over time, but it has changed

\begin{itemize}
  \item 117. Ibid., pp. 70–71.
  \item 118. Ibid., p. 173.
  \item 121. Ibid., p. 183.
\end{itemize}
in the direction one may expect it to take so long as the world remains bipolar."'22
This is where Waltz went wrong: he allowed for the possibility that Soviet and American behavior within a bipolar structure might evolve from confrontation to cooperation; but he made no allowance for the possibility that the structure itself might shift, or that changes in the policies of nations within it might contribute to that process.

The failure to account for structural change has always been the weakest point in Waltz's theory.'23 For if systemic structures do in fact reflect the distribution of capabilities across units, and if shifts in this distribution can in fact alter such structures, then it is difficult to see where those shifts might come from except from changes in the capabilities of states within the system. Those changes may arise, in turn, from a decision to make peace with rivals, or from a recognition that one can no longer keep up with rivals, or from both—the two perspectives are not incompatible, as Soviet policy after 1985 showed. But in either case they result from actions taken within units, and yet because they shape capabilities they also affect structures. Waltz himself acknowledged that structure does not account for everything that happens in world politics: "To explain outcomes one must look at the capabilities, the actions, and the interactions of states, as well as at the structure of their systems. . . . Causes at both the national and the international level make the world more or less peaceful and stable."'24

If unit-level behavior as well as system-level constraints can cause cooperation to evolve, though, it is difficult to see what is gained by insisting that students of world politics emphasize the latter at the expense of the former. Waltz had concentrated on the systemic level, he explained near the end of Theory of International Politics, "because the effects of structure are usually overlooked or misunderstood and because I am writing a theory of international politics, not foreign policy."'25 But this was only to make the same error the behavioralists had made, which was to let the method of one's inquiry shape its conclusions. It was also to imply that the behavior of states as well as systems is critical to an understanding of international relations—precisely what Waltz had criticized Kaplan for having asserted. In the end, then, the rigid separation of systems from units provided no firmer basis for theory—or for forecasting—than had an approach that had taken both of them into account.

Apart from these early and highly theoretical efforts by Kaplan and Waltz, structuralism produced few significant insights as to how the Cold War might end until the publication of Stephen Rock's Why Peace Breaks Out in 1989, literally on the eve

122. Ibid., p. 204.
125. Ibid., p. 175.
of that event. This book deserves special emphasis, not just because it is the only explicitly structural analysis we have of the circumstances that have caused cold wars in the past to disappear, but also because Rock sought to use the resulting hypotheses to specify what it would take would bring our own Cold War to a peaceful conclusion. Rarely does history provide so rapid an opportunity to test theory against experience.

Rock began by arguing that traditional balance of power theory fails to account for several important historical instances of great power rapprochement. Why, for example, did the unification of Germany in 1871, the most significant challenge to European equilibrium since the Napoleonic wars, produce more than four decades of European peace? Why did Great Britain in the 1890s suddenly stop trying to counter the rising power of an old antagonist whose rapidly increasing capabilities posed the greatest of all potential threats to British global hegemony—the United States? In neither of these cases, Rock maintains, did the emergence of any common threat force former adversaries to cooperate; considerations other than those of pure power were obviously involved. Complementary economies and ideologies muffled geopolitical conflicts: there were times when appeasing an ascending rival was likely to be less costly and more beneficial, from the standpoint of national priorities, than the path of resistance that strict adherence to balance of power principles would require. The causes of peace, therefore, lay not just in the configurations of international systems, but also in the internal structures of the states that make them up.

A careful analysis of these causes, Rock argued, would not reveal in advance exactly when two previously antagonistic states might reconcile their differences, but it would nonetheless have “predictive value.” It could, in particular, “provide us with clues as to whether or not a [Soviet-American] reconciliation is probable, and to the kinds of developments that would make one more (or less) likely in the future.” Rock extracted, from his study of great power rapprochements in the past, four specific hypotheses that could be used to evaluate the prospects for an end to the Cold War:

1. “A state of peace is most likely to emerge among states that are heterogenous in the exercise of national power.” By this somewhat murky formulation, Rock meant simply that states whose geopolitical interests do not clash tend not to clash militarily.

2. “A state of peace is most likely to emerge among states that are heterogenous in their economic activities.” Here Rock was making the useful point that the complementarity of economies, not the volume of transactions between them, encourages peace: states whose economies are not directly competitive with one another—whose exports do not displace the other’s domestic producers—will maintain more friendly
relations than states in which similar commodities are produced and competitive efforts to market them therefore ensue.

3. “A state of peace is most likely to emerge among states that are homogenous in their societal attributes.” This proposition was straightforward enough: states that resemble one another tend not to fight.

4. “Even if the exercise of power, economic activities, and societal attributes favor pacific relations, some catalytic event may be required to set the process of reconciliation in motion. The most probable candidate for this role is an acute crisis between the two states.” Or, the imminence of military conflict may force greater attention to economic and ideological complementarities.\textsuperscript{130}

The Soviet-American relationship, Rock noted, had never come close to meeting these standards. It was—and had been since 1945—one involving “intense geopolitical competition, a keen sense of ideological estrangement and mistrust, [and] potentially strong but actually weak economic connections.” Not even a crisis like the one over Cuba in 1962 had been sufficient to overcome these unpromising conditions and produce anything approaching a lasting reconciliation between Moscow and Washington. It was hardly surprising, therefore, that the Cold War had gone on for so long; “nor does any fundamental improvement in Soviet-American relations seem likely without some alteration in these conditions.” In the light of these structural impediments, it would be “naive,” Rock argued, to claim “that changes conducive to a far-reaching transformation of the Soviet-American relationship are probable, or that a rapprochement could be easily effected.”\textsuperscript{131}

The situation was not, however, entirely hopeless. The rise of a third power like China could cause Washington and Moscow to develop common geopolitical interests. A “long-term decline in Soviet and/or American military capabilities could force a strategic retrenchment on the part of one or both superpowers, reducing the extent to which their interests overlap”; the experiences of Vietnam and Afghanistan had already shown that the superpowers’ capacity for intervention in the Third World was not what it once had been. Both the Soviet Union and the United States faced potentially serious internal economic difficulties, and “although the correlation between a nation’s economic strength and its military capabilities is not perfect, there is clearly a relationship between the two factors.” There was no immediate prospect of ideological reconciliation: the United States was not about to relinquish its democratic principles; “nor can one expect the Soviet Union to renounce socialism, particularly since Marxist-Leninist doctrine serves to legitimize the existing Soviet regime.” Historical, linguistic, and cultural traditions were vastly different, “and will surely remain so.” But the economies of the two countries were potentially compatible, and there were some indications that Mikhail Gorbachev was seeking to jettison ideological orthodoxies, although by no means to the same extent that the Chinese government was doing.\textsuperscript{132}

\textsuperscript{130} Ibid., pp. 12–18.
\textsuperscript{131} Ibid., p. 151.
\textsuperscript{132} Ibid., pp. 151–154.
For the immediate future, Rock concluded, "perhaps the best for which we can hope is an end to . . . shrill ideological rhetoric." More fundamental changes might be possible over the long run as domestic politics in the United States swung back toward liberalism and as Gorbachev's reforms took hold. The existence of nuclear weapons had had "a considerable and even profound impact on the relations between states," even if they had not removed "the need to analyze and to understand other, more fundamental, sources of states' attitudes and behaviors toward one another." Effective statesmanship could certainly make a difference at the margins once the structural prerequisites for a reconciliation were in place. But nothing in Rock's book would have led a reader to expect the Cold War to end clearly and decisively within months of its publication. Nor did Why Peace Breaks Out come anywhere close to explaining how—or why—that event took place.

What actually happened, after all, was the abrupt and asymmetrical collapse of one superpower, not the gradual and symmetrical decline of both. The government of the Soviet Union did give up Marxism-Leninism, despite the fact that its own authority derived from that ideology. The Cold War ended without any significant increase in Soviet or Eastern European economic contacts with the West; indeed one could argue that it was precisely the absence of such contacts that hastened the Cold War's demise. No obvious third party threat existed: far from forcing cooperation between Moscow and Washington to counter the growing influence of China in the world, Beijing's aging gerontocracy aborted a once-thriving reform movement and turned that nation inward upon itself. Nor was any catalytic crisis required to shock Soviet and American leaders into recognizing their mutual dependence upon one another; instead the crises that developed in Eastern Europe in the fall of 1989 shocked Marxist governments throughout that region by demonstrating that they could no longer depend upon Moscow to prop them up. In short, the most serious structuralist effort to forecast the end of the Cold War failed, and failed thoroughly.

I say this not to demean Stephen Rock's attempt. After all, he alone among structuralists (and behavioralists as well) had the courage to venture clear theory-based forecasts of how the Cold War might end. It is a daunting thing to freeze one's vision of the future in the highly-visible and unforgiving medium of cold type; perhaps that is why so many theorists—however confident they may be about the validity of their theories—avoid that exercise altogether. It is also the case that failed forecasts can provide insights into the causes of failure: in that sense, they can be just as valuable as forecasts that succeed. Rock's inability to foresee what turned out to be a very near future reflects, not so much his own shortcomings as an analyst of international politics, but rather a more general weakness in the structuralist approach to theory as a whole, and thus to whatever forecasts might be based upon it.

133. Ibid., p. 153.
134. Ibid., pp. 155–159.
This weakness is the tendency to treat time as a dimension—like length, width, and depth—but not as a process. Structuralists see time as a scale against which to measure events, but they pay little attention to the fact that the passage of time, in and of itself, also shapes events. In this respect, they resemble those pre-Darwinian paleontologists who believed in the immutability of species: despite being surrounded by evidence showing that animals, plants, and even land forms had evolved over time, these scientists simply assumed the absence or the unimportance of evolution and therefore lacked the means to understand, account for, and anticipate structural change.\(^{136}\) Like pre-Darwinian paleontologists, structural theorists of international relations have produced firm and at times startling conclusions; these go well beyond the range of behavioralist analysis, which normally extends from the cautious confirmation of the obvious to the inability to confirm anything at all. But the static character of the structuralists' conclusions—the failure to account for change—left that approach little better equipped than behavioralism to forecast the quite dramatic changes that brought about the Cold War's end.

**EVOLUTIONARY APPROACHES**

"Evolutionists" assume the interaction of behavior and structure in world politics, and incorporate observable and unobservable phenomena into their explanations of how that happens. But their chief distinguishing characteristic—the one that differentiates evolutionists most sharply from other theorists—is the attention they give to changes in behaviors and structures over time. Evolutionists see time itself as influencing what happens, even as it provides the chronological framework we use to make sense of what has happened. A static representation of behavior and structure may work reasonably well when the objects being described are inanimate, or when the organisms being cataloged are incapable of learning from experience.\(^{137}\) But human beings do learn from the past: history allows for the inheritance of acquired characteristics, even if biology does not.\(^{138}\) For this reason, the passage of time, which is the process through which experience accumulates, affects behavior and structure in observable and unobservable ways: it constitutes a third axis along which the search for a theory of international relations must proceed.

Evolutionists disagree, though, on how time produces its effects. Linear evolutionists tend to see historical processes as irreversible: like time itself, history flows in one direction only; a return to prior conditions is as improbable as it would be for an arrow to reverse its course in mid-flight. The future, from this perspective, will not resemble the past; one can nonetheless foresee certain aspects of it by calculating the trajectories of historical trends—or arrows—that seem likely to continue. Cyclical

\(^{136}\) See Gould, *Time's Arrow, Time's Cycle*, pp. 146-149.

\(^{137}\) Although not perfectly well: as Darwin pointed out long ago, natural selection provides a way for even the most primitive organism to "learn" at least indirectly from experiences of the past.

evolutionists believe that although time does indeed move forward and not backward, historical processes may do both: they can reverse themselves even as time proceeds; cycles rather than arrows provide the appropriate metaphor. From this angle of vision, the future will at times resemble, even if it does not precisely replicate, the past; one can foresee certain aspects of it by understanding the frequency, amplitude, and implications of historical cycles.

To be sure, distinctions between linear and cyclical views of history are rarely this sharply drawn in practice. For if the future were completely unlike the past, then we would have no categories with which to characterize it: each morning—indeed each moment—would be totally novel, and forecasting of any kind would be impossible. Conversely, if the future always resembled the past, nothing would be unexpected and there would be no need for forecasting in the first place. Still, evolutionists do tend to work within linear or cyclical frames of reference when they generalize about the past; the choice they make, in turn, affects how they see the future.

**LINEAR EVOLUTION.** The conviction that historical processes operate in a linear manner goes back as far as the ancient Hebrews, but it was Karl Marx who created the most influential theory of irreversible historical change by inverting the Hegelian dialectic to insist that deeply-rooted economic forces—shifts in the "means of production," to use Marx's term—determine the structure of societies and the behavior of states, driving them forward in time in ways that are inexorable and, therefore, largely predictable. The progression from feudalism through capitalism to socialism and ultimately communism was as certain as was the Darwinian process of natural selection, Marx's collaborator Friedrich Engels insisted; individuals could harness these forces only by aligning their own objectives with them. Subsequent history—not least the end of the Cold War—has shown Marx and Engels to have been wrong about the direction in which history was moving: it certainly did not bring about the death of capitalism, the triumph of communism, and the consequent disappearance of the state. Marxism's botched forecasts have by no means disproven the Marxist assumption that underlying historical processes do exist, though, and that they function rather in the way we now know tectonic forces move continents around on the surface of the earth. These processes may operate very slowly, with no visible

140. The above discussion of cycles and arrows has been very much influenced by Gould, *Time's Arrow, Time's Cycle*, a book that shows brilliantly how insights drawn from geology, biology, and paleontology can sharpen one's understanding of history.
consequences for long periods of time. But when their effects do appear, they can be as dramatic as the earthquakes that result from the buildup of strains along geologic fault lines. And once such upheavals happen, they cannot be undone.144

Evolutionists have devised no general theory of linear change in world politics, but they have advanced specific theories based on the workings of irreversible processes in several areas that relate to the problem of how the Cold War would end:

Development. The dismantling of European colonialism in Africa, the Middle East, and Southeast Asia during the 1950s and 1960s created a strong demand for explanations that would not only account for what was happening within a bewildering array of newly-independent states, but also provide a basis for future policies toward them. There emerged, in response, a theory of "development" that purported to show how economic and social evolution shape politics. Based on the assumption that stages of modernization exist, much like Marx's stages of production, this literature sought to identify corresponding political structures; it even attempted to forecast points at which "developing" countries would be most vulnerable to communism's seductive claim that it could accelerate what Walt Rostow liked to call the "takeoff" to mass production and consumption. It was no accident—as the Marxists themselves would have said—that Rostow chose for his influential 1960 book, The Stages of Economic Growth, the sub-title A Non-Communist Manifesto.145

Development theory proved to be of little use in anticipating events in the Third World: it overestimated the appeal of communism and underrated that of nationalism; it failed to foresee the durability of markets as against command economies; and it encouraged a hyperactive interventionism on the part of the United States, which found it necessary to try to "guide" new nations along the path to social stability and geopolitical reliability, at times with disastrous results.146 Particularities of events taking place on several different continents and within dozens of different cultures overwhelmed the capacity of theorists to advance valid generalizations about them. But attempts to link stages of economic growth with political evolution have worked much better when applied to the narrower task of evaluating what was happening within the Soviet Union, Eastern Europe, and China.

As early as 1960 Rostow and other development theorists were predicting that economic modernization without political democratization—the path Marxist-Leninist

146. See Shafer, Deadly Paradigms, especially pp. 276–290.
states were following at the time—was certain to fail. The reason had to do with what Lenin had added to Marx: a rigidly centralized political structure superimposed upon what was supposed to have been a largely spontaneous process of economic development. Authoritarian government might indeed set industrialization in motion, as the Soviet Union’s experience under Stalin had shown. But the effective management of an industrial economy would require mass education; peasants do not automatically become technocrats. Education, though, would raise political consciousness, thereby creating the risk that a politically aware population would not indefinitely accept political repression. The choice Marxism-Leninism would eventually face, then, would be a bleak one: either dismantle authoritarianism in order to save the economy, or ruin the economy in order to save authoritarianism. Marx had the process right but the outcome wrong: it turned out to be communism, not capitalism, that carried within it the seeds of its own destruction.147

Interdependence. Modern industrial economies make their requirements felt within capitalist societies as well; by the mid-1970s these had elicited, in the rise of “interdependence” studies, a second linear evolutionist approach to international relations theory. The emergence of this field reflected widespread dissatisfaction with the “realist” tendency to reduce all of world politics to a simple struggle for power. Such reductionism, critics argued, overlooked the post–World War II expansion in commerce and communications that had already altered the nature of traditional geopolitical competition. No single nation, or group of nations, had set this trend in motion; instead it was the product of something Marx himself might have recognized—a fundamental shift in the means of production with both structural and behavioral consequences. Relationships based on integration and cooperation were becoming at least as important as those conducted according to old-fashioned balance of power rules; collaborative international “regimes” were emerging in certain areas, even as competitive international rivalries continued in others.148

Perhaps because the end of the Cold War seemed so distant during the late 1970s and early 1980s, regime theorists were slow to apply their findings to the study of


that conflict. But the fact that several previously-established patterns of Soviet-American cooperation survived the “era of stagnation” in Moscow and the first Reagan administration in the United States, together with the rapid decline in Cold War tensions that followed the advent of Mikhail Gorbachev in 1985, left little doubt that mutual suspicion was no longer the only force driving the superpower relationship. Meanwhile, new developments in game theory and in the study of corporate behavior were revealing that competitors might well reciprocate cooperative initiatives if they had reason to believe that their competition would continue. Historical and theoretical developments converged, therefore, to show how the passage of time could make possible the evolution of cooperation—which is to say, the emergence of regimes—even under conditions of anarchy. For the first time there appeared to be both a practical and a conceptual way out of the “prisoner’s dilemma” that had for so long confounded those seeking a model for how the Cold War might end.

There was one difficulty, though, in extending interdependence from economics into geopolitics. If in fact the requirements of modern industrial economies linked nations more closely than ever before, then the likelihood of war among them should have diminished: classical liberalism had long argued that nations who traded with one another would have few incentives to fight one another. But security regimes, if understood in the context of the Cold War, grew out of a security dilemma: it was the fear of war, not the desire for profit, that induced cooperation, and if war was improbable, then it was not clear why the Soviet Union and the United States should cooperate, given the infrequency of economic contacts between them. The improvement in Soviet-American relations that was so obviously taking place in the 1980s seemed to require more than the purely economic explanation that development and interdependence theories had provided.

The obsolescence of war. If large-scale and long-term processes were so important in the economic realm, some linear evolutionists wondered, why should comparable mechanisms not also shape social institutions and the actions that take place within

151. These developments are discussed in Axelrod, The Evolution of Cooperation; and in Oye, Cooperation under Anarchy.
153. The argument is clearly made in Rosecrance, The Rise of the Trading State.
them? Historians had long understood that societies can change over time: despite the fact that the keeping of slaves, the denial of education to women, and even the abandonment of children were all ancient traditions that had been socially acceptable for centuries, they were so no longer. Once attitudes shifted against each one of these practices, its future differed quite dramatically from its past. Three different linear evolutionist arguments arose, during the 1980s, suggesting that something like this might be happening to the institution of war itself.

The first of these had to do with the nuclear revolution. The quantum jump in destructive capabilities that had suddenly become available in 1945, many experts argued, revolutionized statecraft as well as warfare by virtually ruling out the use of military force in relations between great powers. Technological innovation had produced a geopolitical shock of the most fundamental proportions, and as a result “nuclear learning” had taken place, so that the world’s most powerful nations were far less inclined than ever before to risk war with one another. Evolution had worked, in this instance, not through the slow accumulation of desirable adaptations, but rather through an abrupt “punctuation” that instantly and irrevocably altered the international environment and the requirements for survival within it.

A second evolutionist argument came to the same conclusion by a different route. War had been well on the way to becoming obsolete before nuclear weapons had been invented, John Mueller insisted in his 1989 book Retreat from Doomsday; even without the bomb, the escalating costs of military operations—because of the increasing lethality of weapons and vulnerability of targets—would have made a war among great powers no more likely in the last half of the twentieth century than it would have been for statesmen from those countries to try to settle their differences through the nineteenth-century expedient of fighting a duel. By this logic, industrialization and modernization, even as they produced instruments of war, became forces for peace.

A third argument for the evolving obsolescence of war stressed the influence of democratization. Building on a suggestion made by Immanuel Kant in 1795, Michael Doyle argued that liberal democracies have strong ideological and psychological inhibitions about fighting one another, quite apart from the quantity and character of the arms they possess. Through careful historical research, Doyle documented an

accelerating trend toward democratic forms of government over the past two centuries; he also pointed out that there has never been a war between two liberal democracies.\footnote{Michael Doyle, “Liberalism and World Politics,” American Political Science Review, Vol. 80, No. 4 (December 1986), pp. 1151–1163. See also Doyle, “Kant, Liberal Legacies, and Foreign Affairs,” passim; also Melvin Small and J. David Singer, “The War-Proneness of Democratic Regimes, 1816–1965,” Jerusalem Journal of International Relations, Vol. 1, No. 3 (Summer 1976), pp. 50–68, a Correlates of War Project study which anticipated Doyle’s findings, but expressed pessimism about “the continuing democratization of the world” (p. 68).} Wars between democracies and non-democratic states were still possible, Doyle acknowledged, but as the former became more numerous and the latter less—a proportion significantly shifted in democracy’s favor by the end of the Cold War—his findings appeared to reinforce what Mueller and the “nuclear learning” theorists have suggested about the diminishing likelihood of great power war.

From these linear evolutionist perspectives, then, a Soviet-American reconciliation should have been an entirely predictable development. The end of the Cold War was “over-determined,” in that several separate historical processes—the invention of nuclear weapons, the steadily-mounting costs of conventional war, and progress toward democratization, as well as the development dilemma of Marxism-Leninism, the trend toward interdependence, and the emergence of regimes—all pointed toward the same outcome. These processes became apparent only along a temporal axis of analysis: the passage of time was required for their effects to appear, but once they did they were as irreversible as time itself. History was like Humpty-Dumpty: old ways of doing things, once broken up, could never be put back together again.

But linear evolutionists in fact came no closer than behavioralists or structuralists to forecasting the actual circumstances that brought the Cold War to an end. One reason, I suspect, is that long-term historical processes are indeed, as Marx suggested, subterranean phenomena. One discovers their existence from the consequences they produce; it often requires an earthquake to determine where a fault line really is.\footnote{Or, as Alexander L. George has put it: “I believe that theory does better in explaining what has happened than in predicting it.” George, “The Transition in U.S.-Soviet Relations, 1985–1990: An Interpretation from the Perspective of International Relations Theory and Political Psychology,” Political Psychology, Vol. 12, No. 3 (September 1991), p. 469.} A second explanation has to do with the familiar problem of compartmentalization: theorists may well identify a particular process and even forecast its consequences, but few if any theories are built on the convergence or intersection of complementary processes or, for that matter, on the potential fratricide of contradictory ones.\footnote{I have tried to elaborate on this problem in The United States and the End of the Cold War, pp. 168–192. The only forecast I have seen that argued explicitly for the possibility of a near-term end to the Cold War is Eric A. Nordlinger, “Prospects and Policies for Soviet-American Reconciliation,” Political Science Quarterly, Vol. 103, No. 3 (Summer 1988), pp. 197–222. But, interestingly, this forecast was a projection of several converging historical trends. In this sense, it resembles the 1966 Karl Deutsch article cited in note 94.}

Finally, linear evolutionists tend to commit what I would call the “Fukuyama fallacy,” named after the political scientist Francis Fukuyama, who chose the summer of 1989 to publish an article arguing that because Western liberal democracy had triumphed over Marxism-Leninism, Hegel’s old vision of an end to history had finally come to
pass. “Centuries of boredom” affording minimal opportunities for “daring, courage, imagination, and idealism” lay ahead, Fukuyama lamented,162 six months before the Berlin Wall came down, a year before an unprecedented international effort to liberate Kuwait began, and two years before Boris Yeltsin and a few of his supporters, through the sheer force of their moral and political authority, so thoroughly humiliated the KGB, the Soviet government, and the Communist Party of the Soviet Union as to call into question the very survival of those institutions.

The Fukuyama fallacy is the tendency for those who advance propositions about irreversible forces in history to conclude that history will stop with them. Hegel, for a time, believed that history had ended with Napoleon. Marx committed a similar error when he made the proletarian revolution the final stage in historical development;163 and so too, although to a less egregious extent, have more recent linear evolutionists. Certain that they have exposed an engine that drives history forward, they never seem to ask whether there might be others, or whether the one they have focused on might also operate in reverse. Confident that they have identified a direction in which history is proceeding, they rarely tell us how they have determined what the ultimate destination actually is. A flea creeping along the inside of a hula hoop might well see its progress as linear, purposeful, and irreversible: curved surfaces often appear flat to those with limited horizons. Or, as Mark Twain once warned: “The past does not repeat itself, but it rhymes.”164

CYCLICAL EVOLUTION. Cyclical evolutionism is a useful corrective to the Fukuyama fallacy. Its antecedents go back at least to the ancient Greeks; certainly they were implicit in Thucydides’s hope that “these words of mine [will be] judged useful by those who want to understand clearly the events which happened in the past and which (human nature being what it is) will, at some time or other and in much the same ways, be repeated in the future.”165 Modern interest in historical cycles has grown largely out of the field of economics, where recurring patterns exist at several different levels of analysis.166 Evolutionary theorists of international relations have used cyclical approaches to explain—and make forecasts about—the course of revolutions, alternations between democratic and authoritarian forms of government and, most extensively, the relationship between war, peace, and national power over extended periods of time.167

167. Strictly speaking, a cyclical view of history would appear to rule out evolution: if everything
Revolutions. One of the most fruitful efforts to employ historical cycles in forecasting has had to do with the phenomenon of revolution, and why it has so rarely produced the results Marx anticipated. Marx himself, along with Lenin, Trotsky, and the other architects of the 1917 upheaval in Russia, recalled very vividly how the French Revolution of 1789 had fallen into an autocratic "Bonapartist" phase; they worried that a similar gap between intentions and consequences might arise as socialism supplanted capitalism. That concern did not prevent the rise of Stalin, but his totalitarian rule did provoke a good deal of thought during the 1930s and 1940s about what causes revolutions to go astray. Trotsky made significant contributions to this analysis prior to his assassination; so too did his biographer, Isaac Deutscher. But it was the historian Crane Brinton who provided the most durable explanation of how revolutions originate, evolve, and eventually degenerate in his 1938 book, *The Anatomy of Revolution*.

Basing his findings on a comparative study of the English civil war and the American, French, and Russian Revolutions, Brinton identified a cycle through which such disruptions tend to proceed: the collapse of the old regime, the euphoria of revolution itself, the failure of moderates to match ideals with accomplishments, the rise of extremists, their use of—but ultimately consumption by—terror, and finally the reassertion of a central authority whose oppressiveness might well exceed anything that existed under the old regime in the first place. Brinton claimed no scientific rigor for this model, and refused to regard it as a basis for theory. But as another historian, Theodore S. Hamerow, showed half a century later, Brinton’s cycles of revolutionary evolution came remarkably close to anticipating what would happen to Marxism-Leninism, not just inside the Soviet Union, but also in Eastern Europe, China, Vietnam, and Cuba during the Cold War: they explain how once vigorous revolutions lose their momentum, ossify, and eventually turn into old regimes themselves, vulnerable to new revolutionary challenges.

Brinton’s work parallels—and in terms of predictive potential holds up considerably better than—Marx’s own use of linear evolutionist analysis to forecast the overthrow of capitalism a century earlier. From Brinton’s vantage point one might well have repeats, how can anything change? But as the Mark Twain quotation in the text suggests, the argument is not that everything repeats but that some things do. Once certain processes are set in motion—like revolutions, reforms, wars, and the building of empires—certain patterns tend to recur, even as time (as always) moves on.

170. Crane Brinton, *The Anatomy of Revolution*, rev. ed. (New York: Prentice Hall, 1952), passim. Brinton’s inclusion of the American Revolution has always struck critics as having strained his argument, which would have held up just as well without this peculiar case.
171. Ibid., p. 18. However, Brinton did see himself as following “scientific methods” in his study.
172. Hamerow, *From the Finland Station*, passim.
173. See also, on Marx’s failures as a forecaster, Theda Skocpol, *States and Social Revolutions: A
foreseen, in a way that no behavioralist, structuralist, or Marxist perspective would have allowed one to foresee, the otherwise unexpected combination of petrification and fragility that has come to characterize once-revolutionary regimes in our time, and that accounts, to a large degree, for the asymmetrical manner in which the Cold War ended.174

Liberalism and authoritarianism.175 One should not assume, though, that democracies are exempt from the kind of cyclical evolution that afflicts revolutionary regimes. Our understanding of how democratic governments rise and decline has not advanced as far as our knowledge of how revolutions evolve; but we have more than enough historical evidence to know that democratization is by no means an irreversible process. Athens lost its democracy and Rome its republic; fascism and communism originated, during and after World War I, in states that had appeared to be well on the way to representative constitutional government. The second half of this century has indeed seen a remarkable expansion of democracy throughout the world; certainly that ideology has proven to be more durable than its Marxist-Leninist alternative. But there is no clear guarantee that this process will continue;176 hence the importance of attempting to determine whether the present movement toward liberalism really is irreversible, or whether it simply alternates, over long periods of time, with authoritarianism.

Recent work by the sociologist John A. Hall provides a starting point for such an undertaking. Hall accepts the linear evolutionist view that democratization is necessary to sustain economic development; but he does not conclude from this that liberalism is necessarily the wave of the future.177 For one thing, governments may conclude that the danger of losing their authority exceeds the costs of political repression and of resulting economic regression: presumably this is what happened in China in 1989. More significant in the long run, though, is the possibility that Marx may have been partially right after all: that capitalism and the liberalism it generates do carry within them the seeds of their own periodic decline, if not destruction altogether. Societies do not determine qualities of life solely by calculating economic advantage. Spiritual, psychological, and emotional needs have to be satisfied as well, and liberalism—depending as it does upon rationality—is often ill-equipped for that


174. "The ideas, the promises of orthodox Marxism as now embodied in Stalin's Russia," Brinton wrote in the revised edition of The Anatomy of Revolution in 1952, "may well prove in the next few years almost as embarrassing in Russian internal politics as useful in Russian external politics. The Marxist heaven on earth will do as a mere promise in Indonesia or Iran, for a while, but in Moscow, it has got pretty soon to become in part visible—or the whole doctrine must undergo a still unpredictable transformation" (p. 248.)

175. I am using the term "liberalism" here in its original sense, that is, one that emphasizes the value of individual liberties and seeks to minimize government control.


Where did fascism and communism come from, after all, if not from the disillusionment their followers felt with late nineteenth-century liberal capitalism?

Threats to contemporary liberalism are already becoming apparent, even as that ideology consolidates its victory in the Cold War. Religious, linguistic, and ethnic tensions have risen dramatically in Central and Eastern Europe and even within the former Soviet Union itself as the heavy hand of Moscow's authority has disappeared: these provide infertile ground for the growth of democratic institutions. The resurgence of religious fundamentalism in the Middle East has already shown that the creation of wealth and indulgence in consumption do not always ensure democratic politics. The lowering of barriers to trade and immigration within the European Community and North America is causing protectionist and restrictionist pressures to build in those parts of the world; improvements in transportation have also facilitated the spread of illicit drugs and AIDS; economic development, we now understand, can bring about ecological dangers not just in the form of pollution but also ozone holes, disappearing rain forests, and rising ocean levels. And in the United States, an uneasy compromise tolerates the existence of an economic and social "underclass," a deteriorating physical and educational infrastructure, corporate greed, ballooning deficits, and vapid politics in return for the short-term gratifications of minimally-intrusive government and low taxes.

From these perspectives, it is not all that difficult to see how late twentieth-century laissez-faire liberalism could give rise to a collective alienation comparable to that induced by its late nineteenth-century counterpart. It may be, then, that neither liberalism nor authoritarianism is foreordained, but rather that a dialectical relationship exists between them in which the excesses of one create opportunities for the other. The end of the Cold War could turn out to be the precursor of something worse.

War and peace. Theories of cyclical evolution are most fully developed with respect to the issue of war and peace, where there has been a major effort over the past two decades to determine whether conflict in the international system really is like earthquakes along fault lines: a recurring phenomenon brought about by the accumulating pressures of underlying economic, social, and geopolitical forces. Proponents of

"long cycle" or "power transition" theory accept Marx's view that uneven rates of economic and technological development cause shifts from one phase in history to another. But where Marx saw these phases as linear progressions in forms of economic organization, scholars in this field have seen them as part of a cyclical process—extending over periods of anywhere from 100 to 150 years—by which rising powers challenge dominant "hegemons" for control of the international system.

Such challenges, according to the theory, produce a "hegemonic" war from which a single superpower emerges: the most recent examples have been Great Britain after the Napoleonic Wars and the United States after World War II. The new hegemon need not have initiated the challenge that overthrew its predecessor; it does not even have to be the strongest nation in the postwar international arena. It is, however, the state best positioned to establish and maintain a worldwide system of international economic and political relationships, and it does this as much by eliciting the cooperation of other nations as by intimidating them. The resulting hegemonic management produces, for a time, a long peace. Eventually, though, the rise of other states that have chosen to follow the hegemon's example—together with the hegemon's own exhaustion, bureaucratization, and consequent loss of imagination—creates instabilities that lead to major war and to the emergence of a new hegemon, thereby starting the cycle all over again.

The Cold War, from this angle of vision, was a brief, unsuccessful, and not even particularly interesting challenge by the Soviet Union to the hegemonic position the United States established for itself in world politics after 1945. Predictably, the challenge failed, not just because of the economic and technological backwardness of the USSR, but also because international systemic conditions themselves worked against a successful challenge to the dominant hegemon at such an early point in a historical long cycle. Washington wrote the "rules" for the international "game" that emerged from World War II: it was hardly surprising that the deck was stacked against Moscow.

183. Witness the extent to which some theorists of hegemonic stability neglect Cold War history altogether. For more on this, see Gaddis, ibid., pp. 173–176.
184. Adherents to the "world system" approach to international affairs would argue that it is not just the United States but capitalism in general that has "stacked the deck" against both the Second and Third Worlds, severely inhibiting progress toward social and economic development in those regions. See, for example, Immanuel Wallerstein, The Capitalist World-Economy (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1979); and Wallerstein, The Politics of the World-Economy: The States, the Movements, and the Civilizations (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1984); also the discussion in Ole R. Holst, "Models of International Relations and Foreign Policy," Diplomatic History, Vol. 12, No. 1 (Winter 1989), pp. 27–29. But this approach is a crude form of static structuralism which allows no role whatever for particularities of history, personality, politics,
Long cycle theorists have had less to say about the end of the Cold War than about the possibility that the United States may have already begun the gradual decline in power that eventually afflicts all hegemons, and that more serious challenges than the one the Soviet Union posed are likely to arise in the twenty-first century. Future historians may find it odd that this concern over “decline” should have intensified during the late 1980s, the very point at which the United States was emerging as the world’s sole surviving superpower. But long cycle theory never saw the Soviet Union as a credible competitor with the United States in anything other than brute military strength, and that capability, the theorists would argue, is of relatively little importance in maintaining hegemonic control. The real threat to American predominance lies, they believe, in what the United States is doing to itself by failing to maintain its competitive edge in the global economy, together with what new competitors like Japan and the European Community are doing to exploit the opportunities thereby handed them.  

No cyclical theorist would claim that cycles—long-term, short-term, or in between—repeat themselves precisely. Some linear evolution always takes place: cycles may operate but time pushes them forward as they do, thereby subjecting them to modification by non-cyclical forces. Robert Gilpin has explicitly raised the possibility, for example, that a linear development—the invention of nuclear weapons—may have broken the old cycle of recurring hegemonic wars; Mueller and Doyle have implicitly suggested a similar effect as the result of shifting social consciousness and growing political awareness. But this is what makes forecasting from a cyclical evolutionist perspective difficult. Long cycle theory provides no very good way of determining the extent to which linear progression has modified cyclical patterns, and the longer the cycles are, the harder it is to resolve this question: it is frustrating to lack the means of verifying one’s vision of the future other than by awaiting completion of the next historical cycle. Only history, by this logic, can confirm theory, and that may take a while.

Decline. Late in 1987, a surprise best-seller brought the implications of long cycle theory to the attention of a mass audience in a way that the theorists themselves could never have managed; indeed Paul Kennedy’s The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers may well have had as great an impact on American society during the final stages of the Cold War as did Edward Gibbon’s The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire at the time of its publication in Great Britain during the War for American Independence.
The condition of being a great power is in fact transitory, Kennedy argued; the United States can no more exempt itself from the historical cycle of ascendency and enfeeblement than any other powerful state has ever been able to do. “It simply has not been given to any one society to remain permanently ahead of all the others, because that would imply a freezing of the differentiated pattern of growth rates, technological advance, and military developments which has existed since time immemorial.”

The resulting uproar—for it was nothing short of that—over Kennedy’s thesis reflected the transition to the post-Cold War world that was already beginning to develop within the American public consciousness. Previous outbreaks of anxiety over national inadequacies, most notably the one that occurred in the wake of the Sputnik launch in 1957, had focused on what the United States had to do to keep up with the Russians. But the Soviet Union hardly figured in the “declinism” debate of the late 1980s: Kennedy himself had seen its power as eroding even more rapidly than that of the United States, and most of his readers no doubt worried more about Japan as a potential challenger to the American position in the world than they did about the Soviet Union.

Kennedy did warn, though, along with many others, that the disintegration of Soviet authority would be a dangerous thing. His argument is worth quoting in full, because it reflects views that were almost universally held prior to the revolutionary year 1989:

There is nothing in the character or tradition of the Russian state to suggest that it could ever accept imperial decline gracefully. Indeed, historically, none of the over-extended, multinational empires which have been dealt with in this survey—the Ottoman, the Spanish, the Napoleonic, the British—ever retreated to their own ethnic base until they had been defeated in a Great Power war, or (as with Britain after 1945), were so weakened by war that an imperial withdrawal was politically unavoidable. Those who rejoice at the present-day difficulties of the Soviet Union and who look forward to the collapse of that empire might wish to recall that such transformations normally occur at very great cost, and not always in a predictable manner.

Whatever the accuracy of Kennedy’s views on American “decline,” it is clear now that he was quite wrong—as was almost everyone else—in failing to foresee how suddenly, how thoroughly, and how peacefully the Soviet Union would relinquish its position as a superpower, indeed its own existence as a state. History contains no

precedent for so striking an example of abrupt but amicable collapse. Either the world has been extraordinarily lucky, or linear evolution has pushed familiar cycles of war, peace, and decline into a new and wholly unfamiliar environment. How does one account for—and how might one have anticipated—this development?

One obvious answer is that we give too little thought to how cyclical and linear patterns interact with one another. Some attention to what development and interdependence theorists were saying about the Soviet economy, combined with what the “nuclear learning” theorists, Mueller, and Doyle were suggesting about shifts in collective social consciousness, might have hinted that old habits of using force to repress change would no longer work. Certainly Kennedy’s materialist analysis of the nature of power did not give sufficient weight to the role immaterial forces have played in this situation: the Cold War ended as much because of what people believed as because of what they possessed. As one of Kennedy’s most thoughtful critics, Joseph S. Nye, Jr., has pointed out, new “soft” forms of power are emerging, especially in the form of culture, education, and mass communications, the nature of which cannot be calculated according to traditional geopolitical equations.194

It is also the case that we tend to bias our historical and our theoretical analyses too much toward continuity. Despite our awareness that abrupt change occurs frequently in history and in personal experience, despite our understanding that intellectual breakthroughs more often result from sudden flashes of insight than from the diligent piling up of evidence,195 we rarely find a way to introduce discontinuities into theory, or to attempt to determine what causes them to happen. This is another area in which social scientists could learn from recent developments in mathematics and the “hard” sciences, where a new understanding of complexity, chaos and catastrophe is providing ways to anticipate otherwise unexpected shifts in what had seemed to be gradual evolutionary processes. The circumstances surrounding the end of the Cold War may not be all that different, at least by way of analogy, from the sudden die-offs that occur among animal species under certain conditions, or the unexpected collapse of bridges due to metal fatigue, or wild fluctuations in markets, or even the transition from regular to turbulent flow that happens every time we turn on a water tap.196

194. See Joseph S. Nye, Jr., “Soft Power,” Foreign Policy, No. 80 (Fall 1990), pp. 153–171; also Nye, Bound to Lead, passim.

195. Kuhn, The Structure of Scientific Revolutions, has become the classic text on this subject.

The geological and biological sciences, from which the idea of evolution arose in the first place, have always allowed for the integration of linear, cyclical, and even catastrophic phenomena: landforms rise up and collapse but never in exactly the same way; ontogeny recapitulates phylogeny but genetically-unique individuals (almost) always result from the process; violent eruptions and abrupt extinctions periodically occur. It is odd that the evolutionary approach to international relations theory—which will have to incorporate both pattern and particularity if it is ever to provide a basis for forecasting—seems to find these kinds of juxtapositions so difficult to manage.

**Conclusion**

“If you are a student, switch from political science to history.” Such was the blunt reply of Robert Conquest, the distinguished Anglo-American historian of the Soviet Union, when asked to draw lessons from the abortive coup against Mikhail Gorbachev in August 1991. Conquest is hardly a neutral observer, but he does have a point. The efforts theorists have made to create a “science” of politics that would forecast the future course of world events have produced strikingly unimpressive results: none of the three general approaches to theory that have evolved since 1945 came anywhere close to anticipating how the Cold War would end.

It will not do to claim that forecasting was never an objective of these theories in the first place, because the theorists repeatedly set that task for themselves. Nor was the “case” in question an insignificant one: the end of the Cold War brought about nothing less than the collapse of an international system, something that has happened in modern history only once before—if one accepts structuralism’s emphasis on the shift from multipolarity to bipolarity at the end of World War II. Nor is the test at issue here an unfair one: after all, more than one generation of theorists made the Cold War their central preoccupation. If their forecasts failed so completely to anticipate so large an event as that conflict’s termination, then one has to wonder about the theories upon which they were based. Either those theories were themselves artifacts of the Cold War, in which case they lacked the universal applicability so often claimed for them; or they were universally applicable, in which case they were simply wrong.

This failure of international relations theory arose primarily, I believe, because of a methodological passing of ships in the night. The social sciences, seeking objectivity,
legitimacy, and predictability, set out to embrace the traditional methods of the physical and natural sciences. But they did so at a time when physicists, biologists, and mathematicians, concerned about disparities between their theories and the reality they were supposed to characterize, were abandoning old methods in favor of new ones that accommodated indeterminacy, irregularity, and unpredictability—precisely the qualities the social sciences were trying to leave behind. To put it another way, the "soft" sciences became "harder" just as the "hard" sciences were becoming "softer."

The old Newtonian vision of a totally deterministic science—one that could not only account for but predict all phenomena—had begun to fade as early as the beginning of the twentieth century: "He could not affirm with confidence, even to himself," a worried Henry Adams wrote of himself at the time, "that his 'largest synthesis' would turn out to be chaos, since he would be equally obliged to deny the chaos." And yet, Einstein's physics was already making time, like space, a relative concept; another element of certainty dropped away with Heisenberg's unsettling discovery, in 1927, that the very act of observing certain particles altered them, so that the precise measurement of one characteristic obscured others. By the 1960s, it was becoming apparent that this entanglement of observation with reality extended across a very broad spectrum indeed: two whole classes of phenomena existed, one of which lent itself to prediction, and one that did not. Prediction was possible where one or two variables interacted under known or controlled conditions. But if the number of variables increased even slightly, or if the conditions under which they operated changed even a little, all bets were off. One was into Adams's feared realm of chaos, and although there is much that one can say about the boundaries and behavior of chaotic systems, one cannot predict the specific actions of their specific parts at any specific time.

The classical scientific method had been to generate laws, and hence predictions, from experiments that limited the number of variables involved and that controlled—sometimes quite arbitrarily—the conditions within which they operated. Newton's laws of motion, for example, assumed perfectly smooth balls rolling down frictionless inclines with no air resistance, a condition never actually encountered in the real world. Generations of students were taught that feathers and stones fall to earth at the same speed, despite the fact that they never really do. Predictability was achieved by removing the object being studied from its origins and its surroundings: one gained a vision of the future by shutting one's eyes to the past and the present. But the more one observed past and present, the more Heisenberg's principle came into play, and the less confidence one could have in the forecasts one made.

Theorists of international relations are using the methods of classical science when they conduct their investigations exclusively along a behavioral, structural, or—within the evolutionary approach—a linear or cyclical axis of analysis. They are excluding other variables and controlling conditions in order to produce theories from which they can forecast events. They know that if they do not impose such exclusions and controls, complications will quickly overwhelm their calculations, and predictability will suffer. Exercises of this kind can yield useful insights: so too can simple experiments in freshman physics. But generalizations of this kind perform badly when applied to the real world, which functions along behavioral, structural, and evolutionary axes simultaneously.\(^{(203)}\) The generation of theory—at least in the traditional scientific method—requires departures from reality; if forecasts derived from theory are to succeed, however, they must also account for reality. That is the paradox that theorists of international relations have been struggling, with such lack of success, to resolve. Theorists in the "hard" sciences gave up on resolving it some time ago.

The "predictability paradox" is not the only difficulty that confronts theorists of international relations, though: they face another that no physicist in a laboratory has ever had to worry about. It has to do with the fact, as Stanley Hoffmann once reminded his colleagues, that human beings are not "gases or pistons."\(^{(204)}\) They are conscious entities capable of reacting to, and often modifying, the variables and conditions they encounter. They can at times see the future taking shape; they can devise, within limits, measures to hasten, retard, or even reverse trends. If molecules had minds of their own, chemists would be much less successful in predicting their behavior.\(^{(205)}\) It is no wonder that the effort to devise a "molecular" approach to the study of politics did not work out.\(^{(206)}\)

The simple persistence of values in politics ought to be another clue that one is dealing here with objects more complicated than billiard balls. Not only does this kind of "input" into political behavior resist expression in scientific terms; it also means that the "scientists" themselves—because they are human—can never be totally objective about what they are studying.\(^{(207)}\) A biological scientist must view battles between viruses and antigens with strict impartiality; otherwise his or her career will suffer.\(^{(208)}\) Political scientists who fail to achieve that standard survive quite comfortably, which suggests that the science they do is of a rather different character.


\(^{(204)}\) Hoffmann, "The Long Road to Theory," p. 429.


\(^{(207)}\) For a good discussion of this point, Ferguson and Mansbach, *The Elusive Quest*, pp. 32–48; also Njølstad, "Learning from History?" pp. 222–225.

\(^{(208)}\) This is a point that several prominent biological scientists have recently discovered.
One might—at least as a thought experiment—construct a model capable of simulating human behavior in all of its complexity, but it would have to be of such complexity itself as to render it indistinguishable from the object being modeled.209 Even then it might not predict behavior: identical twins do not have identical personalities, and there is no reason to expect that clones would either. In practice, therefore, we “model” human actions by falling back upon the only known simulative technique that successfully integrates the general and the specific, the regular and the irregular, the predictable and the unpredictable: we construct narratives.210 But that is also what novelists and historians do.

We come, therefore, full circle: the “scientific” approach to the study of international relations appears to work no better, in forecasting the future, than do the old-fashioned methods it set out long ago to replace.211 Novelists and historians make forecasts all the time, but they do so more by analogy than by scientific theory. They assume, in what seems to social scientists a distressingly imprecise way, that if a particular occurrence is “like” something that has already happened, and if the surrounding circumstances are much the same, then the chances are it will produce a similar result. But then again it may not.212 The track record for this kind of forecasting is, as one might expect, mixed. For all of its insights into the nature of authoritarianism, George Orwell’s 1948 vision of 1984 could hardly have been less accurate; and the historiographical landscape is now littered with the failed predictions of historians, my own included,213 who thought that the Soviet Union would never peacefully tolerate its own collapse. “Stranger things have happened,” George F. Kennan commented years ago when discussing this possibility, “though not much stranger.”214

211. “We are arguing for a new research agenda that will explore the evolution, overlapping, and interaction of authority patterns and attendant human loyalties from past to present. Such analysis will necessarily identify dominant and competing patterns, as well as continuities and changes over time, and attempt to explain both the reasons for the patterns observed and the important consequences that have flowed from them.” Yale H. Ferguson and Richard W. Mansbach, “Between Celebration and Despair: Constructive Suggestions for Future International Relations Theory,” International Studies Quarterly, Vol. 35, No. 4 (December 1991), p. 382. Perhaps a historian might be pardoned for asking: isn’t that what we have been doing all along?
212. Neustadt and May, Thinking in Time, provides the best guide to how to do forecasting by analogy responsibly, but also to how easily things can go wrong. See also Ernest R. May, “Lessons” of the Past: The Use and Misuse of History in American Foreign Policy (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973); and Yuen Foong Khong, Analogies at War: Korea, Munich, Dien Bien Phu, and the Vietnam Decisions of 1965 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), especially pp. 255–257, which is more pessimistic than Neustadt and May about the possibility of training policymakers to use analogies wisely.
But novelists and historians never advertised their forecasting abilities with the frequency and self-confidence once common among political scientists. Their chief concern was rather to make sense out of the past and, if possible, the present; if in the process they shed a little light in the direction of the future, then so much the better. This does sometimes happen: insights derived from careful narration and thoughtful analogy—not from an excessive deference to a now outmoded scientific method—can illuminate even quite distant futures. Brinton’s cycles of revolution were one such example; Kennedy’s cycles of great power rise and fall may yet turn out to be another. And consider, as a third example, this observation from the historian James Billington, buried on page 594 of his 1966 book, *The Icon and the Axe*:

That the phantasmagoria of Soviet construction seems to us the most real thing about Soviet history may only be a reflection of our own essentially materialist conception of reality. The Russians, on the other hand, have always been a visionary and ideological people, uniquely appreciative of the ironic perspectives on reality offered in such works as . . . Shakespeare’s *Tempest*. It may be that only those who have lived through the tempest of Stalinism will be able, like Prospero, to look on it as “the baseless fabric of a vision”; to see in “the cloud-capped towers, the gorgeous palaces, the solemn temples” only an “insubstantial pageant faded,” and to find fresh meaning in Prospero’s final affirmation that man is, indeed, “such stuff as dreams are made on.”

Or, for that matter, an even earlier insight, also drawn from a literary analogy, that occurs in the most basic of all Cold War texts, Kennan’s 1947 article on “The Sources of Soviet Conduct”:

Observing that human institutions often show the greatest outward brilliance at a moment when inner decay is in reality farthest advanced, [Thomas Mann] compared the Buddenbrook family, in the days of its greatest glamor, to one of those stars whose light shines most brightly on this world when in reality it has long since ceased to exist. And who can say with assurance that the strong light still cast by the Kremlin on the dissatisfied peoples of the western world is not the powerful afterglow of a constellation which is in actuality on the wane?

These observations hardly qualify as forecasts. They were vague, impressionistic, and would certainly have been maddeningly elusive for anyone trying to pin down exactly what they were anticipating or when it would occur. Still, it is not at all clear that Conquest’s student would have been any less well off, in seeking to foresee the events of 1989–91, had she or he avoided the reading of theory altogether, and concentrated instead on the admittedly imprecise and necessarily intuitive insights that can be drawn from well-constructed narratives.

My point, though, is not to suggest that we jettison the scientific approach to the study of international relations; only that we bring it up to date by recognizing that

good scientists, like good novelists and good historians, make use of all the tools at their disposal in trying to anticipate the future. That includes not just theory, observation, and rigorous calculation, but also narrative, analogy, paradox, irony, intuition, imagination, and—not least in importance—style. If today's physical and natural sciences can benefit from, and even enrich themselves by, a recognition of how imperfectly the old scientific method "modeled" the real world, then surely the social sciences can do the same. We may not gain greater clairvoyance as a result. But we will learn more about the limits of our vision, and hence more about ourselves.

217. It is interesting to note that some of our best literary stylists these days are "hard" scientists: the names of Stephen Jay Gould, Stephen W. Hawking, Lewis Thomas, Philip Morrison, and the late Heinz Pagels come to mind. How many social scientists write as well, or have as many readers?
The Level-of-Analysis Problem in International Relations

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THE LEVEL-OF-ANALYSIS PROBLEM
IN INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

By J. DAVID SINGER

In any area of scholarly inquiry, there are always several ways in which the phenomena under study may be sorted and arranged for purposes of systemic analysis. Whether in the physical or social sciences, the observer may choose to focus upon the parts or upon the whole, upon the components or upon the system. He may, for example, choose between the flowers or the garden, the rocks or the quarry, the trees or the forest, the houses or the neighborhood, the cars or the traffic jam, the delinquents or the gang, the legislators or the legislative, and so on.\(^1\) Whether he selects the micro- or macro-level of analysis is ostensibly a mere matter of methodological or conceptual convenience. Yet the choice often turns out to be quite difficult, and may well become a central issue within the discipline concerned. The complexity and significance of these level-of-analysis decisions are readily suggested by the long-standing controversies between social psychology and sociology, personality-oriented and culture-oriented anthropology, or micro- and macro-economics, to mention but a few. In the vernacular of general systems theory, the observer is always confronted with a system, its sub-systems, and their respective environments, and while he may choose as his system any cluster of phenomena from the most minute organism to the universe itself, such choice cannot be merely a function of whim or caprice, habit or familiarity.\(^2\) The responsible scholar must be prepared to evaluate the relative utility—conceptual and methodological—of the various alternatives open to him, and to appraise the manifold implications of the level of analysis finally selected. So it is with international relations.

But whereas the pros and cons of the various possible levels of analysis have been debated exhaustively in many of the social sciences, the issue has scarcely been raised among students of our emerging

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\(^1\) As Kurt Lewin observed in his classic contribution to the social sciences: “The first prerequisite of a successful observation in any science is a definite understanding about what size of unit one is going to observe at a given time.” Field Theory in Social Science, New York, 1951, p. 157.

Such tranquillity may be seen by some as a reassuring indication that the issue is not germane to our field, and by others as evidence that it has already been resolved, but this writer perceives the quietude with a measure of concern. He is quite persuaded of its relevance and certain that it has yet to be resolved. Rather, it is contended that the issue has been ignored by scholars still steeped in the intuitive and artistic tradition of the humanities or enmeshed in the web of "practical" policy. We have, in our texts and elsewhere, roamed up and down the ladder of organizational complexity with remarkable abandon, focusing upon the total system, international organizations, regions, coalitions, extra-national associations, nations, domestic pressure groups, social classes, elites, and individuals as the needs of the moment required. And though most of us have tended to settle upon the nation as our most comfortable resting place, we have retained our propensity for vertical drift, failing to appreciate the value of a stable point of focus. Whether this lack of concern is a function of the relative infancy of the discipline or the nature of the intellectual traditions from whence it springs, it nevertheless remains a significant variable in the general sluggishness which characterizes the development of theory in the study of relations among nations. It is the purpose of this paper to raise the issue, articulate the alternatives, and examine the theoretical implications and consequences of two of the more widely employed levels of analysis: the international system and the national sub-systems.

I. THE REQUIREMENTS OF AN ANALYTICAL MODEL

Prior to an examination of the theoretical implications of the level of analysis or orientation employed in our model, it might be worthwhile to discuss the uses to which any such model might be put, and the requirements which such uses might expect of it.

Obviously, we would demand that it offer a highly accurate description of the phenomena under consideration. Therefore the scheme must present as complete and undistorted a picture of these phenomena as is possible; it must correlate with objective reality and coincide with our empirical referents to the highest possible degree. Yet we know that

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3 An important pioneering attempt to deal with some of the implications of one's level of analysis, however, is Kenneth N. Waltz, *Man, the State, and War*, New York, 1959. But Waltz restricts himself to a consideration of these implications as they impinge on the question of the causes of war. See also this writer's review of Waltz, "International Conflict: Three Levels of Analysis," *World Politics*, xii (April 1960), pp. 453-61.

4 Even during the debate between "realism" and "idealism" the analytical implications of the various levels of analysis received only the scantiest attention; rather the emphasis seems to have been at the two extremes of pragmatic policy and speculative metaphysics.
such accurate representation of a complex and wide-ranging body of phenomena is extremely difficult. Perhaps a useful illustration may be borrowed from cartography; the oblate spheroid which the planet earth most closely represents is not transferable to the two-dimensional surface of a map without some distortion. Thus, the Mercator projection exaggerates distance and distorts direction at an increasing rate as we move north or south from the equator, while the polar gnomonic projection suffers from these same debilities as we move toward the equator. Neither offers therefore a wholly accurate presentation, yet each is true enough to reality to be quite useful for certain specific purposes. The same sort of tolerance is necessary in evaluating any analytical model for the study of international relations; if we must sacrifice total representational accuracy, the problem is to decide where distortion is least dysfunctional and where such accuracy is absolutely essential.

These decisions are, in turn, a function of the second requirement of any such model—a capacity to explain the relationships among the phenomena under investigation. Here our concern is not so much with accuracy of description as with validity of explanation. Our model must have such analytical capabilities as to treat the causal relationships in a fashion which is not only valid and thorough, but parsimonious; this latter requirement is often overlooked, yet its implications for research strategy are not inconsequential.\(^6\) It should be asserted here that the primary purpose of theory is to explain, and when descriptive and explanatory requirements are in conflict, the latter ought to be given priority, even at the cost of some representational inaccuracy.

Finally, we may legitimately demand that any analytical model offer the promise of reliable prediction. In mentioning this requirement last, there is no implication that it is the most demanding or difficult of the three. Despite the popular belief to the contrary, prediction demands less of one's model than does explanation or even description. For example, any informed layman can predict that pressure on the

\(^6\)For example, one critic of the decision-making model formulated by Richard C. Snyder, H. W. Bruck, and Burton Sapin, in *Decision-Making as an Approach to the Study of International Politics* (Princeton, N.J., 1954), points out that no single researcher could deal with all the variables in that model and expect to complete more than a very few comparative studies in his lifetime. See Herbert McClosky, "Concerning Strategies for a Science of International Politics," *World Politics,* viii (January 1956), pp. 281-95. In defense, however, one might call attention to the relative ease with which many of Snyder's categories could be collapsed into more inclusive ones, as was apparently done in the subsequent case study (see note 11 below). Perhaps a more telling criticism of the monograph is McClosky's comment that "Until a greater measure of theory is introduced into the proposal and the relations among variables are specified more concretely, it is likely to remain little more than a setting-out of categories and, like any taxonomy, fairly limited in its utility" (p. 291).
accelerator of a slowly moving car will increase its speed; that more or less of the moon will be visible tonight than last night; or that the normal human will flinch when confronted with an impending blow. These predictions do not require a particularly elegant or sophisticated model of the universe, but their explanation demands far more than most of us carry around in our minds. Likewise, we can predict with impressive reliability that any nation will respond to military attack in kind, but a description and understanding of the processes and factors leading to such a response are considerably more elusive, despite the gross simplicity of the acts themselves.

Having articulated rather briefly the requirements of an adequate analytical model, we might turn now to a consideration of the ways in which one's choice of analytical focus impinges upon such a model and affects its descriptive, explanatory, and predictive adequacy.

II. THE INTERNATIONAL SYSTEM AS LEVEL OF ANALYSIS

Beginning with the systemic level of analysis, we find in the total international system a partially familiar and highly promising point of focus. First of all, it is the most comprehensive of the levels available, encompassing the totality of interactions which take place within the system and its environment. By focusing on the system, we are enabled to study the patterns of interaction which the system reveals, and to generalize about such phenomena as the creation and dissolution of coalitions, the frequency and duration of specific power configurations, modifications in its stability, its responsiveness to changes in formal political institutions, and the norms and folklore which it manifests as a societal system. In other words, the systemic level of analysis, and only this level, permits us to examine international relations in the whole, with a comprehensiveness that is of necessity lost when our focus is shifted to a lower, and more partial, level. For descriptive purposes, then, it offers both advantages and disadvantages; the former flow from its comprehensiveness, and the latter from the necessary dearth of detail.

As to explanatory capability, the system-oriented model poses some genuine difficulties. In the first place, it tends to lead the observer into a position which exaggerates the impact of the system upon the national actors and, conversely, discounts the impact of the actors on the system. This is, of course, by no means inevitable; one could conceivably look upon the system as a rather passive environment in which dynamic states act out their relationships rather than as a socio-political entity with a dynamic of its own. But there is a natural tendency to endow that upon which we focus our attention with somewhat greater
potential than it might normally be expected to have. Thus, we tend to move, in a system-oriented model, away from notions implying much national autonomy and independence of choice and toward a more deterministic orientation.

Secondly, this particular level of analysis almost inevitably requires that we postulate a high degree of uniformity in the foreign policy operational codes of our national actors. By definition, we allow little room for divergence in the behavior of our parts when we focus upon the whole. It is no coincidence that our most prominent theoretician—and one of the very few text writers focusing upon the international system—should "assume that [all] statesmen think and act in terms of interest defined as power."6 If this single-minded behavior be interpreted literally and narrowly, we have a simplistic image comparable to economic man or sexual man, and if it be defined broadly, we are no better off than the psychologist whose human model pursues "self-realization" or "maximization of gain"; all such gross models suffer from the same fatal weakness as the utilitarian's "pleasure-pain" principle. Just as individuals differ widely in what they deem to be pleasure and pain, or gain and loss, nations may differ widely in what they consider to be the national interest, and we end up having to break down and refine the larger category. Moreover, Professor Morgenthau finds himself compelled to go still further and disavow the relevance of both motives and ideological preferences in national behavior, and these represent two of the more useful dimensions in differentiating among the several nations in our international system. By eschewing any empirical concern with the domestic and internal variations within the separate nations, the system-oriented approach tends to produce a sort of "black box" or "billiard ball" concept of the national actors.7

By discounting—or denying—the differences among nations, or by

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7 The "black box" figure comes from some of the simpler versions of S-R psychology, in which the observer more or less ignores what goes on within the individual and concentrates upon the correlation between stimulus and response; these are viewed as empirically verifiable, whereas cognition, perception, and other mental processes have to be imputed to the individual with a heavy reliance on these assumed "intervening variables." The "billiard ball" figure seems to carry the same sort of connotation, and is best employed by Arnold Wolfers in "The Actors in International Politics" in William T. R. Fox, ed., *Theoretical Aspects of International Relations*, Notre Dame, Ind., 1959, pp. 83-106. See also, in this context, Richard C. Snyder, "International Relations Theory—Continued," *World Politics*, XI (January 1961), pp. 300-12; and J. David Singer, "Theorizing About Theory in International Politics," *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, IV (December 1960), pp. 431-42. Both are review articles dealing with the Fox anthology.
posing the near-impossibility of observing many of these differences at work within them, one concludes with a highly homogenized image of our nations in the international system. And though this may be an inadequate foundation upon which to base any causal statements, it offers a reasonably adequate basis for correlative statements. More specifically, it permits us to observe and measure correlations between certain forces or stimuli which seem to impinge upon the nation and the behavior patterns which are the apparent consequence of these stimuli. But one must stress the limitations implied in the word “apparent”; what is thought to be the consequence of a given stimulus may only be a coincidence or artifact, and until one investigates the major elements in the causal link—no matter how persuasive the deductive logic—one may speak only of correlation, not of consequence.

Moreover, by avoiding the multitudinous pitfalls of intra-nation observation, one emerges with a singularly manageable model, requiring as it does little of the methodological sophistication or onerous empiricism called for when one probes beneath the behavioral externalities of the actor. Finally, as has already been suggested in the introduction, the systemic orientation should prove to be reasonably satisfactory as a basis for prediction, even if such prediction is to extend beyond the characteristics of the system and attempt anticipatory statements regarding the actors themselves; this assumes, of course, that the actors are characterized and their behavior predicted in relatively gross and general terms.

These, then, are some of the more significant implications of a model which focuses upon the international system as a whole. Let us turn now to the more familiar of our two orientations, the national state itself.

III. The National State as Level of Analysis

The other level of analysis to be considered in this paper is the national state—our primary actor in international relations. This is clearly the traditional focus among Western students, and is the one which dominates almost all of the texts employed in English-speaking colleges and universities.

Its most obvious advantage is that it permits significant differentiation among our actors in the international system. Because it does not require the attribution of great similarity to the national actors, it encour-

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8 Morgenthau observes, for example, that it is “futile” to search for motives because they are “the most illusive of psychological data, distorted as they are, frequently beyond recognition, by the interests and emotions of actor and observer alike” (op.cit., p. 6).
ages the observer to examine them in greater detail. The favorable results of such intensive analysis cannot be overlooked, as it is only when the actors are studied in some depth that we are able to make really valid generalizations of a comparative nature. And though the systemic model does not necessarily preclude comparison and contrast among the national sub-systems, it usually eventuates in rather gross comparisons based on relatively crude dimensions and characteristics. On the other hand, there is no assurance that the nation-oriented approach will produce a sophisticated model for the comparative study of foreign policy; with perhaps the exception of the Haas and Whiting study, none of our major texts makes a serious and successful effort to describe and explain national behavior in terms of most of the significant variables by which such behavior might be comparatively analyzed. But this would seem to be a function, not of the level of analysis employed, but of our general unfamiliarity with the other social sciences (in which comparison is a major preoccupation) and of the retarded state of comparative government and politics, a field in which most international relations specialists are likely to have had some experience.

But just as the nation-as-actor focus permits us to avoid the inaccurate homogenization which often flows from the systemic focus, it also may lead us into the opposite type of distortion—a marked exaggeration of the differences among our sub-systemic actors. While it is evident that neither of these extremes is conducive to the development of a sophisticated comparison of foreign policies, and such comparison requires a balanced preoccupation with both similarity and difference, the danger seems to be greatest when we succumb to the tendency to overdifferentiate; comparison and contrast can proceed only from observed uniformities.

One of the additional liabilities which flow in turn from the pressure to overdifferentiate is that of Ptolemaic parochialism. Thus, in overemphasizing the differences among the many national states, the observer is prone to attribute many of what he conceives to be virtues to his own nation and the vices to others, especially the adversaries of the moment. That this ethnocentrism is by no means an idle fear is borne out by perusal of the major international relations texts published

9 Ernst B. Haas and Allen S. Whiting, *Dynamics of International Relations*, New York, 1956.
10 A frequent by-product of this tendency to overdifferentiate is what Waltz calls the “second-image fallacy,” in which one explains the peaceful or bellicose nature of a nation’s foreign policy exclusively in terms of its domestic economic, political, or social characteristics (*op.cit.*, chs. 4 and 5).
in the United States since 1945. Not only is the world often perceived through the prism of the American national interest, but an inordinate degree of attention (if not spleen) is directed toward the Soviet Union; it would hardly be amiss to observe that most of these might qualify equally well as studies in American foreign policy. The scientific inadequacies of this sort of “we-they” orientation hardly require elaboration, yet they remain a potent danger in any utilization of the national actor model.

Another significant implication of the sub-systemic orientation is that it is only within its particular framework that we can expect any useful application of the decision-making approach.\(^\text{11}\) Not all of us, of course, will find its inapplicability a major loss; considering the criticism which has been leveled at the decision-making approach, and the failure of most of us to attempt its application, one might conclude that it is no loss at all. But the important thing to note here is that a system-oriented model would not offer a hospitable framework for such a detailed and comparative approach to the study of international relations, no matter what our appraisal of the decision-making approach might be.

Another and perhaps more subtle implication of selecting the nation as our focus or level of analysis is that it raises the entire question of goals, motivation, and purpose in national policy.\(^\text{12}\) Though it may well be a peculiarity of the Western philosophical tradition, we seem to exhibit, when confronted with the need to explain individual or collective behavior, a strong proclivity for a goal-seeking approach. The question of whether national behavior is purposive or not seems to require discussion in two distinct (but not always exclusive) dimensions.

Firstly, there is the more obvious issue of whether those who act on behalf of the nation in formulating and executing foreign policy consciously pursue rather concrete goals. And it would be difficult to deny for example, that these role-fulfilling individuals envisage certain specific outcomes which they hope to realize by pursuing a particular

\(^{11}\) Its most well-known and successful statement is found in Snyder et al., op.cit. Much of this model is utilized in the text which Snyder wrote with Edgar S. Furniss, Jr., American Foreign Policy: Formulation, Principles, and Programs, New York 1954. A more specific application is found in Snyder and Glenn D. Paige, “The United States Decision to Resist Aggression in Korea: The Application of an Analytica Scheme,” Administrative Science Quarterly, 11 (December 1958), pp. 341-78. For those interested in this approach, very useful is Paul Wasserman and Fred S. Silander Decision-Making: An Annotated Bibliography, Ithaca, N.Y., 1958.

\(^{12}\) And if the decision-making version of this model is employed, the issue is unavoidable. See the discussion of motivation in Snyder, Bruck, and Sapin, op.cit., pp. 92-117 note that 25 of the 49 pages on “The Major Determinants of Action” are devoted to motives.
strategy. In this sense, then, nations may be said to be goal-seeking organisms which exhibit purposive behavior.

However, purposiveness may be viewed in a somewhat different light, by asking whether it is not merely an intellectual construct that man imputes to himself by reason of his vain addiction to the free-will doctrine as he searches for characteristics which distinguish him from physical matter and the lower animals. And having attributed this conscious goal-pursuing behavior to himself as an individual, it may be argued that man then proceeds to project this attribute to the social organizations of which he is a member. The question would seem to distill down to whether man and his societies pursue goals of their own choosing or are moved toward those imposed upon them by forces which are primarily beyond their control. Another way of stating the dilemma would be to ask whether we are concerned with the ends which men and nations strive for or the ends toward which they are impelled by the past and present characteristics of their social and physical milieu. Obviously, we are using the terms “ends,” “goals,” and “purpose” in two rather distinct ways; one refers to those which are consciously envisaged and more or less rationally pursued, and the other to those of which the actor has little knowledge but toward which he is nevertheless propelled.

Taking a middle ground in what is essentially a specific case of the free will vs. determinism debate, one can agree that nations move toward outcomes of which they have little knowledge and over which they have less control, but that they nevertheless do prefer, and therefore select, particular outcomes and attempt to realize them by conscious formulation of strategies.

Also involved in the goal-seeking problem when we employ the nation-oriented model is the question of how and why certain nations pursue specific sorts of goals. While the question may be ignored in the system-oriented model or resolved by attributing identical goals to all national actors, the nation-as-actor approach demands that we investigate the processes by which national goals are selected, the internal and external factors that impinge on those processes, and the institutional framework from which they emerge. It is worthy of note that despite the strong predilection for the nation-oriented model in most

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13 A highly suggestive, but more abstract treatment of this teleological question is in Talcott Parsons, *The Structure of Social Action*, 2nd ed., Glencoe, Ill., 1949, especially in his analysis of Durkheim and Weber. It is interesting to note that for Parsons an act implies, _inter alia_, “a future state of affairs toward which the process of action is oriented,” and he therefore comments that “in this sense and this sense only, the schema of action is inherently teleological” (p. 44).
of our texts, empirical or even deductive analyses of these processes are conspicuously few. Among the exceptions are Haas and Whiting, op. cit., chs. 2 and 3; and some of the chapters in Roy C. Macridis, ed., Foreign Policy in World Politics, Englewood Cliffs, N.J., 1958, especially that on West Germany by Karl Deutsch and Lewis Edinger.

As early as 1934, Edith E. Ware noted that "...the study of international relations is no longer entirely a subject for political science or law, but that economics, history, sociology, geography—all the social sciences—are called upon to contribute towards the understanding...of the international system." See The Study of International Relations in the United States, New York, 1934, p. 172. For some contemporary suggestions, see Karl Deutsch, "The Place of Behavioral Sciences in Graduate Training in International Relations," Behavioral Science, iii (July 1958), pp. 278-84; and J. David Singer, "The Relevance of the Behavioral Sciences to the Study of International Relations," ibid., vi (October 1961), pp. 324-35.

The father of phenomenological philosophy is generally acknowledged to be Edmund Husserl (1859-1938), author of Ideas: General Introduction to Pure Phenomenology, New York, 1931, trans. by W. R. Boyce Gibson; the original was published in 1913 under the title Ideen zu einer reinen Phänomenologie und Phänomenologischen Philosophie. Application of this approach to social psychology has come primarily through the work of Koffka and Lewin.
for that actor, and those that do exist do so only in the fashion in which they are perceived. Though it is difficult to accept the position that an individual, a group, or a nation is affected by such forces as climate, distance, or a neighbor’s physical power only insofar as they are recognized and appraised, one must concede that perceptions will certainly affect the manner in which such forces are responded to. As has often been pointed out, an individual will fall to the ground when he steps out of a tenth-story window regardless of his perception of gravitational forces, but on the other hand such perception is a major factor in whether or not he steps out of the window in the first place. The point here is that if we embrace a phenomenological view of causation, we will tend to utilize a phenomenological model for explanatory purposes.

The second assumption which bears on one’s predilection for the phenomenological approach is more restricted, and is primarily a methodological one. Thus, it may be argued that any description of national behavior in a given international situation would be highly incomplete were it to ignore the link between the external forces at work upon the nation and its general foreign policy behavior. Furthermore, if our concern extends beyond the mere description of “what happens” to the realm of explanation, it could be contended that such omission of the cognitive and the perceptual linkage would be ontologically disastrous. How, it might be asked, can one speak of “causes” of a nation’s policies when one has ignored the media by which external conditions and factors are translated into a policy decision? We may observe correlations between all sorts of forces in the international system and the behavior of nations, but their causal relationship must remain strictly deductive and hypothetical in the absence of empirical investigation into the causal chain which allegedly links the two. Therefore, even if we are satisfied with the less-than-complete descriptive capabilities of a non-phenomenological model, we are still drawn to it if we are to make any progress in explanation.

The contrary view would hold that the above argument proceeds from an erroneous comprehension of the nature of explanation in social science. One is by no means required to trace every perception, transmission, and receipt between stimulus and response or input and output in order to explain the behavior of the nation or any other human group. Furthermore, who is to say that empirical observation—subject

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17 This issue has been raised from time to time in all of the social sciences, but for an excellent discussion of it in terms of the present problem, see Harold and Margaret Sprout, Man-Milieu Relationship Hypotheses in the Context of International Politics, Princeton University, Center of International Studies, 1956, pp. 63-71.
as it is to a host of errors—is any better a basis of explanation than informed deduction, inference, or analogy? Isn't an explanation which flows logically from a coherent theoretical model just as reliable as one based upon a misleading and elusive body of data, most of which is susceptible to analysis only by techniques and concepts foreign to political science and history?

This leads, in turn, to the third of the premises relevant to one's stand on the phenomenological issue: are the dimensions and characteristics of the policy-makers' phenomenal field empirically discernible? Or, more accurately, even if we are convinced that their perceptions and beliefs constitute a crucial variable in the explanation of a nation's foreign policy, can they be observed in an accurate and systematic fashion? Furthermore, are we not required by the phenomenological model to go beyond a classification and description of such variables, and be drawn into the tangled web of relationships out of which they emerge? If we believe that these phenomenal variables are systematically observable, are explainable, and can be fitted into our explanation of a nation's behavior in the international system, then there is a further tendency to embrace the phenomenological approach. If not, or if we are convinced that the gathering of such data is inefficient or uneconomical, we will tend to shy clear of it.

The fourth issue in the phenomenological dispute concerns the very nature of the nation as an actor in international relations. Who or what is it that we study? Is it a distinct social entity with well-defined boundaries—a unity unto itself? Or is it an agglomeration of individuals, institutions, customs, and procedures? It should be quite evident that those who view the nation or the state as an integral social unit could not attach much utility to the phenomenological approach, particularly if they are prone to concretize or reify the abstraction. Such abstractions are incapable of perception, cognition, or anticipation (unless, of course, the reification goes so far as to anthropomorphize and assign to the abstraction such attributes as will, mind, or personality). On the other hand, if the nation or state is seen as a group of individuals operating within an institutional framework, then it makes perfect sense to focus on the phenomenal field of those individuals who participate in the policy-making process. In other words, people are capable of experiences, images, and expectations, while insti-

18This is another of the criticisms leveled at the decision-making approach which, almost by definition, seems compelled to adopt some form of the phenomenological model. For a comprehensive treatment of the elements involved in human perception, see Karl Zener et al., eds., "Inter-relationships Between Perception and Personality: A Symposium," Journal of Personality, xviii (1949), pp. 1-266.
tutional abstractions are not, except in the metaphorical sense. Thus, if our actor cannot even have a phenomenal field, there is little point in employing a phenomenological approach.\(^\text{19}\)

These, then, are some of the questions around which the phenomenological issue would seem to revolve. Those of us who think of social forces as operative regardless of the actor’s awareness, who believe that explanation need not include all of the steps in a causal chain, who are dubious of the practicality of gathering phenomenal data, or who visualize the nation as a distinct entity apart from its individual members, will tend to reject the phenomenological approach.\(^\text{20}\) Logically, only those who disagree with each of the above four assumptions would be compelled to adopt the approach. Disagreement with any one would be sufficient grounds for so doing.

The above represent some of the more significant implications and fascinating problems raised by the adoption of our second model. They seem to indicate that this sub-systemic orientation is likely to produce richer description and more satisfactory (from the empiricist’s point of view) explanation of international relations, though its predictive power would appear no greater than the systemic orientation. But the descriptive and explanatory advantages are achieved only at the price of considerable methodological complexity.

IV. Conclusion

Having discussed some of the descriptive, explanatory, and predictive capabilities of these two possible levels of analysis, it might now be useful to assess the relative utility of the two and attempt some general statement as to their prospective contributions to greater theoretical growth in the study of international relations.

In terms of description, we find that the systemic level produces a more comprehensive and total picture of international relations than does the national or sub-systemic level. On the other hand, the atomized and less coherent image produced by the lower level of analysis is somewhat balanced by its richer detail, greater depth, and more intensive portrayal.\(^\text{21}\) As to explanation, there seems little doubt that the sub-

\(^{19}\) Many of these issues are raised in the ongoing debate over “methodological individualism,” and are discussed cogently in Ernest Nagel, The Structure of Science, New York, 1961, pp. 535-46.

\(^{20}\) Parenthetically, holders of these specific views should also be less inclined to adopt the national or sub-systemic model in the first place.

\(^{21}\) In a review article dealing with two of the more recent and provocative efforts toward theory (Morton A. Kaplan, System and Process in International Politics, New York, 1957, and George Liska, International Equilibrium, Cambridge, Mass., 1957), Charles P. Kindleberger adds a further—if not altogether persuasive—argument in favor
systemic or actor orientation is considerably more fruitful, permitting as it does a more thorough investigation of the processes by which foreign policies are made. Here we are enabled to go beyond the limitations imposed by the systemic level and to replace mere correlation with the more significant causation. And in terms of prediction, both orientations seem to offer a similar degree of promise. Here the issue is a function of what we seek to predict. Thus the policy-maker will tend to prefer predictions about the way in which nation \( x \) or \( y \) will react to a contemplated move on his own nation's part, while the scholar will probably prefer either generalized predictions regarding the behavior of a given class of nations or those regarding the system itself.

Does this summary add up to an overriding case for one or another of the two models? It would seem not. For a staggering variety of reasons the scholar may be more interested in one level than another at any given time and will undoubtedly shift his orientation according to his research needs. So the problem is really not one of deciding which level is most valuable to the discipline as a whole and then demanding that it be adhered to from now unto eternity.\(^{22}\) Rather, it is one of realizing that there is this preliminary conceptual issue and that it must be temporarily resolved prior to any given research undertaking. And it must also be stressed that we have dealt here only with two of the more common orientations, and that many others are available and perhaps even more fruitful potentially than either of those selected here. Moreover, the international system gives many indications of prospective change, and it may well be that existing institutional forms will take on new characteristics or that new ones will appear to take their place. As a matter of fact, if incapacity to perform its functions leads to the transformation or decay of an institution, we may expect a steady deterioration and even ultimate disappearance of the national state as a significant actor in the world political system.

However, even if the case for one or another of the possible levels of analysis cannot be made with any certainty, one must nevertheless maintain a continuing awareness as to their use. We may utilize one level here and another there, but we cannot afford to shift our orientation in the midst of a study. And when we do in fact make an original

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\(^{22}\) It should also be kept in mind that one could conceivably develop a theoretical model which successfully embraces both of these levels of analysis without sacrificing conceptual clarity and internal consistency. In this writer's view, such has not been done to date, though Kaplan's *System and Process in International Politics* seems to come fairly close.
selection or replace one with another at appropriate times, we must do so with a full awareness of the descriptive, explanatory, and predictive implications of such choice.

A final point remains to be discussed. Despite this lengthy exegesis, one might still be prone to inquire whether this is not merely a sterile exercise in verbal gymnastics. What, it might be asked, is the difference between the two levels of analysis if the empirical referents remain essentially the same? Or, to put it another way, is there any difference between international relations and comparative foreign policy? Perhaps a few illustrations will illuminate the subtle but important differences which emerge when one's level of analysis shifts. One might, for example, postulate that when the international system is characterized by political conflict between two of its most powerful actors, there is a strong tendency for the system to bipolarize. This is a systemic-oriented proposition. A sub-systemic proposition, dealing with the same general empirical referents, would state that when a powerful actor finds itself in political conflict with another of approximate parity, it will tend to exert pressure on its weaker neighbors to join its coalition. Each proposition, assuming it is true, is theoretically useful by itself, but each is verified by a different intellectual operation. Moreover—and this is the crucial thing for theoretical development—one could not add these two kinds of statements together to achieve a cumulative growth of empirical generalizations.

To illustrate further, one could, at the systemic level, postulate that when the distribution of power in the international system is highly diffused, it is more stable than when the discernible clustering of well-defined coalitions occurs. And at the sub-systemic or national level, the same empirical phenomena would produce this sort of proposition: when a nation’s decision-makers find it difficult to categorize other nations readily as friend or foe, they tend to behave toward all in a more uniform and moderate fashion. Now, taking these two sets of propositions, how much cumulative usefulness would arise from attempting to merge and codify the systemic proposition from the first illustration with the sub-systemic proposition from the second, or vice versa? Representing different levels of analysis and couched in different frames of reference, they would defy theoretical integration; one may well be a corollary of the other, but they are not immediately combinable. A prior translation from one level to another must take place.

This, it is submitted, is quite crucial for the theoretical development of our discipline. With all of the current emphasis on the need for more empirical and data-gathering research as a prerequisite to theory-build-
ing, one finds little concern with the relationship among these separate and discrete data-gathering activities. Even if we were to declare a moratorium on deductive and speculative research for the next decade, and all of us were to labor diligently in the vineyards of historical and contemporary data, the state of international relations theory would probably be no more advanced at that time than it is now, unless such empirical activity becomes far more systematic. And “systematic” is used here to indicate the cumulative growth of inductive and deductive generalizations into an impressive array of statements conceptually related to one another and flowing from some common frame of reference. What that frame of reference should be, or will be, cannot be said with much certainty, but it does seem clear that it must exist. As long as we evade some of these crucial a priori decisions, our empiricism will amount to little more than an ever-growing potpourri of discrete, disparate, non-comparable, and isolated bits of information or extremely low-level generalizations. And, as such, they will make little contribution to the growth of a theory of international relations.
REALIST THOUGHT AND NEOREALIST THEORY

by Kenneth N. Waltz

Exploring various ways to forward the study of international politics was one of William T.R. Fox's many interests. In 1957, he organized a series of seminars that brought together a number of established scholars, among them Paul Nitze, Hans Morgenthau and Charles Kindleberger, along with such younger scholars as Robert W. Tucker, Morton Kaplan and Martin Wight, to discuss problems in the study of international-political theory and its relation to the behavior of states. A volume edited and co-authored by Bill was the tangible product of the colloquium. As one of the many students and colleagues who benefitted from Bill's ideas, encouragement, and support, I offer this essay as a small contribution toward clarifying some problems in the framing and applying of international political theory.

I begin by looking at a theoretical breakthrough in a related field: economics. Realists and neorealists represent two of the major theoretical approaches followed by students of international politics in the past half century or so. They encountered problems similar to those the Physiocrats began to solve in France in the middle of the eighteenth century. Students of international politics have had an extraordinarily difficult time casting their subject in theoretical terms. Looking first at an example of comparable difficulties surmounted in a related field may be instructive.

How Economic Theory Became Possible

Difficulties common to earlier economists and twentieth-century political scientists are revealed by examining Sir Josiah Child's A New Discourse, written mainly in the years 1668 to 1670. Child dealt with a striking question. Why, he wondered, did the prosperity of the Dutch surpass that of the English? In casting about for an answer, he seized on what seemed to be a compelling fact: namely, that the Dutch rate of interest had been lower than the English rate. The reasoning used to

1. I should like to thank David Schleicher for his help on this paper
Kenneth N. Waltz

establish the causal role of the rate of interest is correlative and sequential. Child tried to show that the prosperity of various countries varies inversely with prevailing rates of interest. He then established the causal direction by arguing that the expected changes in the level of prosperity followed upon changes in rates of interest.

Child's work is the kind of pre-theoretical effort that provides stimulus to, and material for, later theories. That is its merit. It is, however, the kind of work that can neither provide satisfactory explanations nor lead to the construction of theory. We can profit by noticing why this is so. Child tried to establish a necessary relation between the rate of interest and the level of prosperity. Other economists picked different factors as their favorite causes—the accumulation of bullion, the fertility of the population or the soil, the industry of the people, the level of rents, or whatever. But none was able to show why the relation between the chosen factor or factors and the condition to be accounted for necessarily held. Child, for example, could not supply an answer to this now obvious question: Why doesn't a rise in interest rates attract capital, ultimately lowering its price as with commodities? He could not say whether the association he claimed to have found was causal or coincidental. He could not say whether other factors in play may have caused interest rates and national prosperity to move in opposite directions. Innumerable explanations for the observed relation were available. Pre-physiocratic economists could only cast about for sequences and associations that seemed to pertain within or across countries. They could at best hope to formulate plausible explanations of particular outcomes. They had no way of relating the parts of an economy to one another and to the economy as a whole.

The first step forward was, as it had to be, to invent the concept of an economy as distinct from the society and the polity in which it is embedded. Some will always complain that it is artificial to think of an economy separate from its society and polity. Such critics are right. Yet the critics miss the point. Theory is artifice. A theory is an intellectual construction by which we select facts and interpret them. The challenge is to bring theory to bear on facts in ways that permit explanation and prediction. That can only be accomplished by distinguishing between theory and fact. Only if this distinction is made can theory be used to examine and interpret facts.

In the pre-theoretic era of economics, more and more information became available in the form of reported, or purported, facts, and more and more attempts were made to account for them. But differences of explanation remained unreconciled and explanations of particular processes and outcomes did not add up to an understanding of how a
national economy works. In a remarkable survey in which the historical development, the sociological setting, and the scientific qualities of economic thought are brought together, Joseph Schumpeter described the best economic literature of that earlier time as having "all the freshness and fruitfulness of direct observation." But, he added, it also "shows all the helplessness of mere observation by itself." Information accumulated, but arguments, even perceptive ones about propositions that might have been developed as theories, did not add up to anything more than ideas about particulars occasioned by current controversies.

Child was better than most economists of his day, although not as good as the best. The most creative economists were frustrated by the condition that Schumpeter described. The seventeenth-century economist Sir William Petty, for example, felt the frustration. Schumpeter described him as creating "for himself theoretical tools with which he tried to force a way through the undergrowth of facts." To eliminate useless and misleading "facts" was an important endeavor, but not a sufficient one. What blocked the progress of economic understanding was neither too little nor too much knowledge but rather the lack of a certain kind of knowledge.

The answers to factual questions pose puzzles that theory may hope to solve and provide materials for theorists to work with. But the work begins only when theoretical questions are posed. Theory cannot be fashioned from the answers to such factual questions as: What follows upon, or is associated with, what. Instead, answers have to be sought to such theoretical questions as these: How does this thing work? How does it all hang together? These questions cannot usefully be asked unless one has some idea of what the "thing" or the "it" might be. Theory becomes possible only if various objects and processes, movements and events, acts and interactions, are viewed as forming a domain that can be studied in its own right. Clearing away useless facts was not enough; something new had to be created. An invention was needed that would permit economic phenomena to be seen as distinct processes, that would permit an economy to be viewed as a realm of affairs marked off from social and political life.

This the Physiocrats first achieved. Francois Quesnay's famous economic table is a picture depicting the circulation of wealth among the productive and unproductive classes of society, but it is a picture of the

unseen and the unseeable.6 Certain cycles are well-known facts of economic life—cycles of sowing and harvesting, of mining, refining, forging, and manufacturing. But such a direct simplification of observable processes is not what Quesnay's table presents. It presents, instead, the essential qualities of an economy in picture form. The Physiocrats were the first to think of an economy as a self-sustaining whole made up of interacting parts and repeated activities. To do so, they had to make radical simplifications—for example, by employing a psychology that saw people simply as seeking the greatest satisfaction from the least effort. They invented the concepts they needed. Their notion of a "social product" can well be described as the intellectual creation of the unobservable and the nonexistent. No one can point to a social product. It is not an identifiable quantity of goods but is instead a concept whose validity can be established only through its role in a theory that yields an improved understanding of the economy.

The Physiocrats developed concepts comprising innumerable particularities and contingencies without examining them. Among these concepts were the durable notions of distribution and circulation. The quaint and crude appearance of some physiocratic ideas should not obscure the radical advance that their theory represented. Economists had found it hard to get a theoretical hold on their subject. In pre-physiocratic economics, as Schumpeter said, "the connecting link of economic causality and an insight into the inner necessities and the general character of economics were missing. It was possible to consider the individual acts of exchange, the phenomenon of money, and the question of protective tariffs as economic problems, but it was impossible to see the total process which unfolds itself in a particular economic period. Before the Physiocrats appeared on the scene, only local symptoms on the economic body, as it were, had been perceived." Only the parts of an economy could be dealt with. It was therefore necessary again in Schumpeter's words, "to derive an explanatory principle from each separate complex of facts—as it were in a gigantic struggle with them—and it was at best possible merely to sense the great general contexts."7

International Politics: Beyond the Theoretical Pale

What the Physiocrats did for economics is exactly what Raymond Aron and Hans Morgenthau, two of the most theoretically self-conscious

6. François Quesnay was the foremost Physiocrat. His Tableau Oeconomique was published in 1758.
traditional realists, believed to be impossible for students of international politics to accomplish. Aron drew a sharp distinction between the study of economics and the study of international politics. The latter he assigned to the category of history, which deals with unique events and situations, and of sociology, which deals with non-logical actions and searches for general relations among them. In contrast to economics, Aron said international politics suffers from the following difficulties:

- Innumerable factors affect the international system and no distinction can be made between those that are internal and those that are external to it.
- States, the principal international actors, cannot be endowed with a single aim.
- No distinction can be drawn between dependent and independent variables.
- No accounting identities—such as investment equals savings—can be devised.
- No mechanism exists for the restoration of a disrupted equilibrium.
- There is no possibility of prediction and manipulation with identified means leading to specified goals.8

Do the reasons cited eliminate the possibility of devising a theory of international politics? If so, then economics would have been similarly hampered. Aron did not relate obvious differences between economics and politics to the requirements of theory construction. He merely identified differences, in the confident belief that because of them no international-political theory is possible.

Morgenthau’s theoretical stance is similar to Aron’s. Morgenthau dealt persuasively with major problems and with issues of enduring importance. He had the knack of singling out salient facts and constructing causal analyses around them. He sought “to paint a picture of foreign policy” that would present its “rational essence,” abstracting from personality and prejudice, and, especially in democracies, from the importunities of popular opinion that “impair the rationality of foreign policy.”9 He was engaged, as it were, “in a gigantic struggle” with the facts, seeking “to derive an explanatory principle” from them. Like Petty, he forged concepts that might help him “force a way through the undergrowth of facts,” such concepts as “national interest” and “interest

defined as power.” Like Child, Morgenthau and other realists failed to take the fateful step beyond developing concepts to the fashioning of a recognizable theory.

Morgenthau described his purpose as being “to present a theory of international politics.” Elements of a theory are presented, but never a theory. Morgenthau at once believed in “the possibility of developing a rational theory” and remained deeply skeptical about that possibility. Without a concept of the whole, he could only deal with the parts. As is rather commonly done, he confused the problem of explaining foreign policy with the problem of developing a theory of international politics. He then concluded that international political theory is difficult if not impossible to contrive. He was fond of repeating Blaise Pascal’s remark that the history of the world would have been different had Cleopatra’s nose been a bit shorter, and then asking, “how do you systemize that?”

His appreciation of the role of the accidental and the occurrence of the unexpected in politics dampened his theoretical aspirations.

Neorealism’s response is that, while difficulties abound, some that seem most daunting lie in misapprehensions about theory. Theory obviously cannot explain the accidental or account for unexpected events. Theories deal in regularities and repetitions and are possible only if these can be identified. As a realist, Morgenthau maintained “the autonomy of politics,” but he failed to develop the concept and apply it to international politics. A theory is a depiction of the organization of a domain and of the connections among its parts. A theory indicates that some factors are more important than others and specifies relations among them. In reality, everything is related to everything else, and one domain cannot be separated from others. Theory isolates one realm from all others in order to deal with it intellectually. To isolate a realm is a precondition to developing a theory that will explain what goes on within it. The theoretical ambitions of Morgenthau, as of Aron, were forestalled by his belief that the international political domain cannot be marked off from others for the purpose of constructing a theory.

10. Ibid., p.3.
In summarizing Aron’s argument, I have put the first three points in sequence because they are closely interrelated. The single word “complexity” suggests the impediment that concerns him. If “economic, political, and social variables” enter into the international system, as surely they do, if states have not one but many goals, as surely they have, if separating dependent from independent variables and distinguishing effects from causes is an uncertain undertaking, as surely it is—then one can never hope to fashion a theory.

Complexity, however, does not work against theory. Rather, theory is a means of dealing with complexity. Economists can deal with it because they long ago solved Aron’s first problem. Given the concept of a market—a bounded economic domain—they have been able to develop further concepts and draw connections among them. Because realists did not solve the first problem, they could not satisfactorily deal with the next two. Men have many motives. If all or very many of them must always be taken into account, economic theory becomes impossible. “Economic man” was therefore created. Men were assumed to be single-minded, economic maximizers. An assumption or a set of assumptions is necessary. In making assumptions about men’s (or states’) motivations, the world must be drastically simplified; subtleties must be rudely pushed aside, and reality must be grossly distorted. Descriptions strive for accuracy; assumptions are brazenly false. The assumptions on which theories are built are radical simplifications of the world and are useful only because they are such. Any radical simplification conveys a false impression of the world.

Aron’s second and third points must be amended. Actors cannot realistically be endowed with a single aim, but we can only know by trying whether or not they can usefully be so endowed for purposes of constructing a theory. Political studies are not different from other studies in the realm of human affairs. We can make bold assumptions about motives, we can guess which few of many factors are salient, we can arbitrarily specify relations of dependence and independence among variables. We may even expect that the more complex and intricate the matters being studied are the stronger the urge “to be simple-minded” would become.16

If international politics is a recalcitrant realm for the theorist, then its special difficulties lie elsewhere than in the first three of Aron’s points. Are they perhaps found in the last three? As the fourth of Aron’s

impediments to theory, I have listed the absence of “accounting identities” or, as others have put it, the lack of a unit of measure and a medium of exchange in which goals can be valued and instruments comparatively priced. Political capability and political effect, whether or not conceived of simply in terms of power, cannot be expressed in units, such as dollars, that would have clear meaning and be applicable to different instruments and ends. Yet one finds in Adam Smith, for example, no numbers that are essential to his theory. Indeed, one finds hardly any numbers at all, and thus no “accounting identities.” That supply equals demand or that investment equals savings are general propositions or purported laws that theory may explain. Stating the laws does not depend on counting, weighing, or measuring anything. As Frank Knight well and rightly wrote:

Pure theory, in economics as in any field, is abstract; it deals with forms only, in complete abstraction from content. On the individual side, economic theory takes men with (a) any wants whatever, (b) any resources whatever, and (c) any system of technology whatever, and develops principles of economic behaviour. The validity of its “laws” does not depend on the actual conditions or data, with respect to any of these three elementary phases of economic action.17

In politics, not everything can be counted or measured, but some things can be. That may be helpful in the application of theories but has nothing to do with their construction.

The fifth and sixth difficulties discovered by Aron seem to tell us something substantive about politics rather than about its amenability to theory and its status as science. In classical economic theory, no mechanism—that is, no agent or institution—restores a lost equilibrium. Classical and neoclassical economists were microtheorists—market and exchange relations emerge from the exercise of individual choice. The economy is produced by the interaction of persons and firms; it cannot be said to have goals or purposes of its own.18 Governments may, of course, act to restore a lost equilibrium. So may powerful persons or firms within the economy. But at this point we leave the realm of theory and enter the realm of practice—or “sociology” as Aron uses the term. “Any concrete study of international relations is sociological,” he avers.19 The

characteristic attaches to concrete studies and not simply to the study of international politics.

Aron identifies science with the ability to predict and control. Yet theories of evolution predict nothing in particular. Astronomers do predict (although without controlling), but what entitles astronomy to be called a science is not the ability to predict but the ability to specify causes, to state the theories and laws by which the predictions are made. Economic theory is impressive even when economists show themselves to be unreliable in prediction and prescription alike. Since theory abstracts from much of the complication of the world in an effort to explain it, the application of theory in any realm is a perplexing and uncertain matter.

Aron's first three problems can be solved, although in the realm of theory all solutions are tentative. Aron's last three difficulties are not impediments to the construction of theory but rather to its application and testing.

International Politics: Within the Theoretical Pale

The new realism, in contrast to the old, begins by proposing a solution to the problem of distinguishing factors internal to international political systems from those that are external. Theory isolates one realm from others in order to deal with it intellectually. By depicting an international-political system as a whole, with structural and unit levels at once distinct and connected, neorealism establishes the autonomy of international politics and thus makes a theory about it possible. Neorealism develops the concept of a system's structure which at once bounds the domain that students of international politics deal with and enables them to see how the structure of the system, and variations in it, affect the interacting units and the outcomes they produce. International structure emerges from the interaction of states and then constrains them from taking certain actions while propelling them toward others.

The concept of structure is based on the fact that units differently juxtaposed and combined behave differently and in interacting produce different outcomes. International structures are defined, first, by the ordering principle of the system, in our case anarchy, and second, by the distribution of capabilities across units. In an anarchic realm, structures are defined in terms of their major units. International structures vary with significant changes in the number of great powers. Great powers

21. Neorealism is sometimes referred to as structural realism. Throughout this essay I refer to my own formulation of neorealist theory. See esp. chs. 5-6 of Theory of International Politics (Reading, MA. Addison-Wesley, 1979).
Kenneth N. Waltz

are marked off from others by the combined capabilities (or power) they command. When their number changes consequentially, the calculations and behaviors of states, and the outcomes their interactions produce, vary.

The idea that international politics can be thought of as a system with a precisely defined structure is neorealism’s fundamental departure from traditional realism. The spareness of the definition of international structure has attracted criticism. Robert Keohane asserts that neorealist theory “can be modified progressively to attain closer correspondence with reality.”22 In the most sensitive and insightful essay on neorealism that I have read, Barry Buzan asks whether the logic of neorealism completely captures “the main features of the international political system.” He answers this way:

“The criticisms of Ruggie, Keohane, and others suggest that it does not, because their concerns with factors such as dynamic density, information richness, communication facilities, and such like do not obviously fit into Waltz’s ostensibly ‘systemic’ theory.”23

One wonders whether such factors as these can be seen as concepts that might become elements of a theory? “Dynamic density” would seem to be the most promising candidate. Yet dynamic density is not a part of a theory about one type of society or another. Rather it is a condition that develops in greater or lesser degree within and across societies. If the volume of transactions grows sufficiently, it will disrupt a simple society and transform it into a complex one. Dynamic density is not part of a theory of any society. Rather it is a social force developing in society that under certain circumstances may first disrupt and then transform it. The “such likes” mentioned by Buzan would not fit into any theory. Can one imagine how demographic trends, information richness and international institutions could be thrown into a theory? No theory can contain the “such likes,” but if a theory is any good, it helps us to understand and explain them, to estimate their significance and to gauge their effects. Moreover, any theory leaves some things unexplained, and no theory enables one to move directly and easily from theory to application. Theories, one must add, are not useful merely because they may help one

to understand, explain, and sometimes predict the trend of events. Equally important, they help one to understand how a given system works.

To achieve "closeness of fit" would negate theory. A theory cannot fit the facts or correspond with the events it seeks to explain. The ultimate closeness of fit would be achieved by writing a finely detailed description of the world that interests us. Nevertheless, neorealism continues to be criticized for its omissions. A theory can be written only by leaving out most matters that are of practical interest. To believe that listing the omissions of a theory constitutes a valid criticism is to misconstrue the theoretical enterprise.

The question of omissions arises because I limit the second term that defines structure to the distribution of power across nations. Now and then critics point out that logically many factors other than power, such as governmental form or national ideology, can be cast in distributional terms. Obviously so, but logic alone does not write theories. The question is not what does logic permit, but what does this theory require? Considerations of power dominate considerations of ideology. In a structural theory, states are differently placed by their power and differences in placement help to explain both their behavior and their fates. In any political system, the distribution of the unit's capabilities is a key to explanation. The distribution of power is of special explanatory importance in self-help political systems because the units of the system are not formally differentiated with distinct functions specified as are the parts of hierarchic orders.

Barry Buzan raises questions about the adequacy "of defining structure within the relatively narrow sectoral terms of politics." It may be that a better theory could be devised by differently drawing the borders of the domain to which it will apply, by adding something to the theory, by subtracting something from it, or by altering assumptions and rearranging the relations among a theory's concepts. But doing any or all of these things requires operations entirely different from the mere listing of omissions. Theory, after all, is mostly omissions. What is omitted cannot be added without thoroughly reworking the theory and turning it into a different one. Should one broaden the perspective of international-political theory to include economics? An international political-economic theory would presumably be twice as good as a theory of international politics alone. To fashion such a theory, one would have to show how the international political-economic domain can be marked off from others. One would first have to define its structures and then develop a theory to explain actions and outcomes within it. A political-

Kenneth N. Waltz

economic theory would represent a long step toward a general theory of international relations, but no one has shown how to take it.

Those who want to disaggregate power as defined in neorealist theory are either calling for a new theory, while failing to provide one, or are pointing to some of the knotty problems that arise in the testing and application of theory. In the latter case, they, like Aron, confuse difficulties in testing and applying theory with the problem of constructing one. Critics of neorealist theory fail to understand that a theory is not a statement about everything that is important in international-political life, but rather a necessarily slender explanatory construct. Adding elements of practical importance would carry us back from a neorealist theory to a realist approach. The rich variety and wondrous complexity of international life would be reclaimed at the price of extinguishing theory.

Neorealism breaks with realism in four major ways. The first and most important one I have examined at some length. The remaining three I shall treat more briefly. They follow from, and are made possible by, the first one. Neorealism departs from traditional realism in the following additional ways: Neorealism produces a shift in causal relations, offers a different interpretation of power, and treats the unit level differently.

**Theory and Reality**

*Causal Directions*

Constructing theories according to different suppositions alters the appearance of whole fields of inquiry. A new theory draws attention to new objects of inquiry, interchanges causes and effects, and addresses different worlds. When John Hobson cast economics in macrotheoretical terms, he baffled his fellow economists. The London Extension Board would not allow him to offer courses on political economy because an economics professor who had read Hobson’s book thought it “equivalent in rationality to an attempt to prove the flatness of the earth.” Hobson’s figure was apt. Microtheory, the economic orthodoxy of the day, portrayed a world different from the one that Hobson’s macrotheory revealed.

Similarly, the neorealist’s world looks different from the one that earlier realists had portrayed. For realists, the world addressed is one of interacting states. For neorealists, interacting states can be adequately

studied only by distinguishing between structural and unit-level causes and effects. Structure becomes a new object of inquiry, as well as an occasion for argument. In the light of neorealist theory, means and ends are differently viewed, as are causes and effects. Realists think of causes running in one direction, from interacting states to the outcomes their acts and interactions produce. This is clearly seen in Morgenthau’s “Six Principles of Political Realism,” which form the substance of a chapter headed “A Realist Theory of International Politics.” 28 Strikingly, one finds much said about foreign policy and little about international politics. The principles develop as Morgenthau searches for his well-known “rational outline, a map that suggests to us the possible meanings of foreign policy.” 29 The principles are about human nature, about interest and power, and about questions of morality. Political realism offers the perspective in which the actions of statesmen are to be understood and judged. Morgenthau’s work was in harmony with the developing political science of his day, although at the time this was not seen. Methodological presuppositions shape the conduct of inquiry. The political-science paradigm was becoming deeply entrenched. Its logic is preeminently behavioral. The established paradigm of any field indicates what facts to scrutinize and how they are interconnected. Behavioral logic explains political outcomes through examining the constituent parts of political systems. When Aron and other traditionalists insist that theorists’ categories be consonant with actors’ motives and perceptions, they are affirming the preeminently behavioral logic that their inquiries follow. 30 The characteristics and the interactions of behavioral units are taken to be the direct causes of political events, whether in the study of national or of international politics. Aron, Morgenthau and other realists tried to understand and explain international outcomes by examining the actions and interactions of the units, the states that populate the international arena and those who guide their policies. Realism’s approach is primarily inductive. Neorealism is more heavily deductive.

Like classical economists before them, realists were unable to account for a major anomaly. Classical theory held that disequilibria would be righted by the working of market forces without need for governmental intervention. Hobson’s, and later in fuller form John Maynard Keynes’s, macroeconomic theory explained why in the natural course of events recovery from depressions was such a long time coming. 31 A similarly

29. Ibid., p. 5.
31. In his General Theory, Keynes gives Hobson full credit for setting forth the basic concepts of macroeconomic theory.
big anomaly in realist theory is seen in the attempt to explain alternations of war and peace. Like most students of international politics, realists infer outcomes from the salient attributes of the actors producing them. Governmental forms, economic systems, social institutions, political ideologies—these are but a few examples of where the causes of war and peace have been found. Yet, although causes are specifically assigned, we know that states with every imaginable variation of economic institution, social custom, and political ideology have fought wars. If an indicated condition seems to have caused a given war, one must wonder what accounts for the repetition of wars even as their causes vary. Variations in the quality of the units are not linked directly to the outcomes their behaviors produce, nor are variations in patterns of interaction. Many, for example, have claimed that World War I was caused by the interaction of two opposed and closely balanced coalitions. But then many have claimed that World War II was caused by the failure of some states to right an imbalance of power by combining to counter an existing alliance. Over the centuries, the texture of international life has remained impressively, or depressingly, uniform even while profound changes were taking place in the composition of states which, according to realists, account for national behavior and international outcomes. Realists cannot explain the disjunction between supposed causes and observed effects. Neorealists can.

Neorealism contends that international politics can be understood only if the effects of structure are added to traditional realism's unit-level explanations. More generally, neorealism reconceives the causal link between interacting units and international outcomes. Neorealist theory shows that causes run not in one direction, from interacting units to outcomes produced, but rather in two directions. One must believe that some causes of international outcomes are located at the level of the interacting units. Since variations in unit-level causes do not correspond to variations in observed outcomes, one has to believe that some causes are located at the structural level of international politics as well. Realists cannot handle causation at a level above states because they fail to conceive of structure as a force that shapes and shoves the units. Causes at the level of units interact with those at the level of the structure and because they do so explanation at the level of units alone is bound to mislead. If one's theory allows for the handling of both unit-level and structure-level causes, then it can cope with both the changes and the continuities that occur in a system.

**Power as Means and End**

For many realists, the desire for power is rooted in the nature of man. Morgenthau recognized that given competition for scarce goods with no
one to serve as arbiter, a struggle for power will ensue among the competitors, and that consequently the struggle for power can be explained without reference to the evil born in men. The struggle for power arises because people want things and not necessarily because of the evil in their desires. This he labels one of the two roots of conflict, but even while discussing it he pulls toward the "other root of conflict and concomitant evil"—the animus dominandi, the desire for power. He often considers man's drive for power as a datum more basic than the chance conditions under which struggles for power occur.32

The reasoning is faithful to Hobbes for whom the three causes of quarrels were competition, diffidence (i.e., distrust), and glory. Competition leads to fighting for gain, diffidence to fighting to keep what has been gained, glory to fighting for reputation. Because some hunger for power, it behooves others to cultivate their appetites.33 For Morgenthau, as for Hobbes, even if one has plenty of power and is secure in its possession, more power is nevertheless wanted. As Morgenthau put it:

Since the desire to attain a maximum of power is universal, all nations must always be afraid that their own miscalculations and the power increases of other nations might add up to an inferiority for themselves which they must at all costs try to avoid.34

Both Hobbes and Morgenthau see that conflict is in part situationally explained, but both believe that even were it not so, pride, lust, and the quest for glory would cause the war of all against all to continue indefinitely. Ultimately, conflict and war are rooted in human nature.

The preoccupation with the qualities of man is understandable in view of the purposes Hobbes and Morgenthau entertain. Both are interested in understanding the state. Hobbes seeks a logical explanation of its emergence; Morgenthau seeks to explain how it behaves internationally. Morgenthau thought of the "rational" statesman as striving ever to accumulate more and more power. Power is seen as an end in itself. Nations at times may act aside from considerations of power. When they do, Morgenthau insists, their actions are not "of a political nature."35 The claim that "the desire to attain a maximum of power is universal" among nations is one of Morgenthau's "objective laws that have their roots in human nature."36 Yet much of the behavior of nations contradicts it. Morgenthau does not explain why other desires fail to moderate or

33. Thomas Hobbes, Leviathan.
34. Morgenthau (1972), op. cit., p.208.
35. Ibid., p.27.
36. Ibid.
outweigh the fear states may have about miscalculation of their relative power. His opinions about power are congenial to realism. They are easily slipped into because the effort to explain behavior and outcomes by the characteristics of units leads realists to assign to them attributes that seem to accord with behavior and outcomes observed. Unable to conceive of international politics as a self-sustaining system, realists concentrate on the behavior and outcomes that seem to follow from the characteristics they have attributed to men and states. Neorealists, rather than viewing power as an end in itself, see power as a possibly useful means, with states running risks if they have either too little or too much of it. Weakness may invite an attack that greater strength would dissuade an adversary from launching. Excessive strength may prompt other states to increase their arms and pool their efforts. Power is a possibly useful means, and sensible statesmen try to have an appropriate amount of it. In crucial situations, the ultimate concern of states is not for power but for security. This is an important revision of realist theory.

A still more important one is neorealism's use of the concept of power as a defining characteristic of structure. Power in neorealist theory is simply the combined capability of a state. Its distribution across states, and changes in that distribution, help to define structures and changes in them as explained above. Some complaints have been made about the absence of efforts on the part of neorealists to devise objective measures of power. Whatever the difficulties of measurement may be, they are not theoretical difficulties but practical ones encountered when moving from theory to its practical application.

**Interacting Units**

For realists, anarchy is a general condition rather than a distinct structure. Anarchy sets the problem that states have to cope with. Once this is understood, the emphasis of realists shifts to the interacting units. States are unlike one another in form of government, character of rulers, types of ideology, and in many other ways. For both realists and neorealists, differently constituted states behave differently and produce different outcomes. For neorealists, however, states are made functionally similar by the constraints of structure, with the principal differences among them defined according to capabilities. For neorealists, moreover, structure mediates the outcomes that states produce. As internal and external circumstances change, structures and states may bear more or less causal weight. The question of the relative importance of different levels cannot be abstractly or definitively answered. Ambiguity cannot be resolved since structures affect units even as units affect structures. Some have thought that this is a defect of neorealist theory. It is so, however, only if factors at the unit level or at the structural level...
determine, rather than merely affect, outcomes. Theories cannot remove the uncertainty of politics, but only help us to comprehend it.

Neorealists concentrate their attention on the central, previously unanswered question in the study of international politics: How can the structure of an international-political system be distinguished from its interacting parts? Once that question is answered, attention shifts to the effects of structure on interacting units. Theorists concerned with structural explanations need not ask how variations in units affect outcomes, even though outcomes find their causes at both structural and unit levels. Neorealists see states as like units; each state "is like all other states in being an autonomous political unit." Autonomy is the unit-level counterpart of anarchy at the structural level. A theory of international politics can leave aside variation in the composition of states and in the resources and technology they command because the logic of anarchy does not vary with its content. Realists concentrate on the heterogeneity of states because they believe that differences of behavior and outcomes proceed directly from differences in the composition of units. Noticing that the proposition is faulty, neorealists offer a theory that explains how structures affect behavior and outcomes.

The logic of anarchy obtains whether the system is composed of tribes, nations, oligopolistic firms, or street gangs. Yet systems populated by units of different sorts in some ways perform differently, even though they share the same organizing principle. More needs to be said about the status and role of units in neorealist theory. More also needs to be said about changes in the background conditions against which states operate. Changes in the industrial and military technologies available to states, for example, may change the character of systems but do not change the theory by which their operation is explained. These are subjects for another essay. Here I have been concerned not to deny the many connections between the old and the new realism but to emphasize the most important theoretical changes that neorealism has wrought. I have been all the more concerned to do this since the influence of realist and behavioral logic lingers in the study of international politics, as in political science generally.

37. On page 95 of Theory of International Politics, I slipped into using "sovereignty" for "autonomy." Sovereignty, Ruggie points out, is particular to the modern state. See his "Continuity and Transformation," in Keohane, ed., op. cit., pp.142-148
Some students of international politics believe that realism is obsolete. They argue that, although realism’s concepts of anarchy, self-help, and power balancing may have been appropriate to a bygone era, they have been displaced by changed conditions and eclipsed by better ideas. New times call for new thinking. Changing conditions require revised theories or entirely different ones.

True, if the conditions that a theory contemplated have changed, the theory no longer applies. But what sorts of changes would alter the international political system so profoundly that old ways of thinking would no longer be relevant? Changes of the system would do it; changes in the system would not. Within-system changes take place all the time, some important, some not. Big changes in the means of transportation, communication, and war fighting, for example, strongly affect how states and other agents interact. Such changes occur at the unit level. In modern history, or perhaps in all of history, the introduction of nuclear weaponry was the greatest of such changes. Yet in the nuclear era, international politics remains a self-help arena. Nuclear weapons decisively change how some states provide for their own and possibly for others’ security; but nuclear weapons have not altered the anarchic structure of the international political system.

Changes in the structure of the system are distinct from changes at the unit level. Thus, changes in polarity also affect how states provide for their security. Significant changes take place when the number of great powers reduces to two or one. With more than two, states rely for their security both on their

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own internal efforts and on alliances they may make with others. Competition in multipolar systems is more complicated than competition in bipolar ones because uncertainties about the comparative capabilities of states multiply as numbers grow, and because estimates of the cohesiveness and strength of coalitions are hard to make.

Both changes of weaponry and changes of polarity were big ones with ramifications that spread through the system, yet they did not transform it. If the system were transformed, international politics would no longer be international politics, and the past would no longer serve as a guide to the future. We would begin to call international politics by another name, as some do. The terms “world politics” or “global politics,” for example, suggest that politics among self-interested states concerned with their security has been replaced by some other kind of politics or perhaps by no politics at all.

What changes, one may wonder, would turn international politics into something distinctly different? The answer commonly given is that international politics is being transformed and realism is being rendered obsolete as democracy extends its sway, as interdependence tightens its grip, and as institutions smooth the way to peace. I consider these points in successive sections. A fourth section explains why realist theory retains its explanatory power after the Cold War.

**Democracy and Peace**

The end of the Cold War coincided with what many took to be a new democratic wave. The trend toward democracy combined with Michael Doyle’s rediscovery of the peaceful behavior of liberal democratic states inter se contributes strongly to the belief that war is obsolescent, if not obsolete, among the advanced industrial states of the world.²

The democratic peace thesis holds that democracies do not fight democracies. Notice that I say “thesis,” not “theory.” The belief that democracies constitute a zone of peace rests on a perceived high correlation between governmental form and international outcome. Francis Fukuyama thinks that the correlation is perfect: Never once has a democracy fought another democracy. Jack Levy says that it is “the closest thing we have to an empirical law

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in the study of international relations.” But, if it is true that democracies rest reliably at peace among themselves, we have not a theory but a purported fact begging for an explanation, as facts do. The explanation generally runs this way: Democracies of the right kind (i.e., liberal ones) are peaceful in relation to one another. This was Immanuel Kant’s point. The term he used was Rechtsstaat or republic, and his definition of a republic was so restrictive that it was hard to believe that even one of them could come into existence, let alone two or more. And if they did, who can say that they would continue to be of the right sort or continue to be democracies at all? The short and sad life of the Weimar Republic is a reminder. And how does one define what the right sort of democracy is? Some American scholars thought that Wilhelmine Germany was the very model of a modern democratic state with a wide suffrage, honest elections, a legislature that controlled the purse, competitive parties, a free press, and a highly competent bureaucracy. But in the French, British, and American view after August of 1914, Germany turned out not to be a democracy of the right kind. John Owen tried to finesse the problem of definition by arguing that democracies that perceive one another to be liberal democracies will not fight. That rather gives the game away. Liberal democracies have at times prepared for wars against other liberal democracies and have sometimes come close to fighting them. Christopher Layne shows that some wars between democracies were averted not because of the reluctance of democracies to fight each other but for fear of a third party—a good realist reason. How, for example, could Britain and France fight each other over Fashoda in 1898 when Germany lurked in the background? In emphasizing the international political reasons for democracies not fighting each other, Layne gets to the heart of the matter. Conformity of countries to a prescribed

political form may eliminate some of the causes of war; it cannot eliminate all of them. The democratic peace thesis will hold only if all of the causes of war lie inside of states.

**THE CAUSES OF WAR**

To explain war is easier than to understand the conditions of peace. If one asks what may cause war, the simple answer is "anything." That is Kant’s answer: The natural state is the state of war. Under the conditions of international politics, war recurs; the sure way to abolish war, then, is to abolish international politics.

Over the centuries, liberals have shown a strong desire to get the politics out of politics. The ideal of nineteenth-century liberals was the police state, that is, the state that would confine its activities to catching criminals and enforcing contracts. The ideal of the laissez-faire state finds many counterparts among students of international politics with their yen to get the power out of power politics, the national out of international politics, the dependence out of interdependence, the relative out of relative gains, the politics out of international politics, and the structure out of structural theory.

Proponents of the democratic peace thesis write as though the spread of democracy will negate the effects of anarchy. No causes of conflict and war will any longer be found at the structural level. Francis Fukuyama finds it "perfectly possible to imagine anarchic state systems that are nonetheless peaceful." He sees no reason to associate anarchy with war. Bruce Russett believes that, with enough democracies in the world, it "may be possible in part to supersede the ‘realist’ principles (anarchy, the security dilemma of states) that have dominated practice . . . since at least the seventeenth century." Thus the structure is removed from structural theory. Democratic states would be so confident of the peace-preserving effects of democracy that they would no longer fear that another state, so long as it remained democratic, would do it wrong. The guarantee of the state’s proper external behavior would derive from its admirable internal qualities.

This is a conclusion that Kant would not sustain. German historians at the turn of the nineteenth century wondered whether peacefully inclined states could be planted and expected to grow where dangers from outside pressed daily upon them. Kant a century earlier entertained the same worry. The

seventh proposition of his “Principles of the Political Order” avers that establishment of the proper constitution internally requires the proper ordering of the external relations of states. The first duty of the state is to defend itself, and outside of a juridical order none but the state itself can define the actions required. “Lesion of a less powerful country,” Kant writes, “may be involved merely in the condition of a more powerful neighbor prior to any action at all; and in the State of Nature an attack under such circumstances would be warrantable.”

In the state of nature, there is no such thing as an unjust war. Every student of international politics is aware of the statistical data supporting the democratic peace thesis. Everyone has also known at least since David Hume that we have no reason to believe that the association of events provides a basis for inferring the presence of a causal relation. John Mueller properly speculates that it is not democracy that causes peace but that other conditions cause both democracy and peace. Some of the major democracies—Britain in the nineteenth century and the United States in the twentieth century—have been among the most powerful states of their eras. Powerful states often gain their ends by peaceful means where weaker states either fail or have to resort to war. Thus, the American government deemed the democratically elected Juan Bosch of the Dominican Republic too weak to bring order to his country. The United States toppled his government by sending 23,000 troops within a week, troops whose mere presence made fighting a war unnecessary. Salvador Allende, democratically elected ruler of Chile, was systematically and effectively undermined by the United States, without the open use of force, because its leaders thought that his government was taking a wrong turn. As Henry Kissinger put it: “I don’t see why we need to stand by and watch a country go Communist due to the irresponsibility of its own people.”

That is the way it is with democracies—their people may show bad judgment. “Wayward” democracies are especially tempting objects of intervention by other democracies that wish to save them. American policy may have been wise in both cases, but its actions surely cast doubt on the democratic peace thesis. So do the instances when a democracy did fight another democ-

racy. So do the instances in which democratically elected legislatures have clamored for war, as has happened for example in Pakistan and Jordan.

One can of course say, yes, but the Dominican Republic and Chile were not liberal democracies nor perceived as such by the United States. Once one begins to go down that road, there is no place to stop. The problem is heightened because liberal democracies, as they prepare for a war they may fear, begin to look less liberal and will look less liberal still if they begin to fight one. I am tempted to say that the democratic peace thesis in the form in which its proponents cast it is irrefutable. A liberal democracy at war with another country is unlikely to call it a liberal democracy.

Democracies may live at peace with democracies, but even if all states became democratic, the structure of international politics would remain anarchic. The structure of international politics is not transformed by changes internal to states, however widespread the changes may be. In the absence of an external authority, a state cannot be sure that today’s friend will not be tomorrow’s enemy. Indeed, democracies have at times behaved as though today’s democracy is today’s enemy and a present threat to them. In Federalist Paper number six, Alexander Hamilton asked whether the thirteen states of the Confederacy might live peacefully with one another as freely constituted republics. He answered that there have been “almost as many popular as royal wars.” He cited the many wars fought by republican Sparta, Athens, Rome, Carthage, Venice, Holland, and Britain. John Quincy Adams, in response to James Monroe’s contrary claim, averred “that the government of a Republic was as capable of intriguing with the leaders of a free people as neighboring monarchs.” In the latter half of the nineteenth century, as the United States and Britain became more democratic, bitterness grew between them, and the possibility of war was at times seriously entertained on both sides of the Atlantic. France and Britain were among the principal adversaries in the great power politics of the nineteenth century, as they were earlier. Their becoming democracies did not change their behavior toward each other. In 1914, democratic England and France fought democratic Germany, and doubts about the latter’s democratic standing merely illustrate the problem of definition. Indeed, the democratic pluralism of Germany was an underlying cause of the war. In response to domestic interests, Germany followed


policies bound to frighten both Britain and Russia. And today if a war that a few have feared were fought by the United States and Japan, many Americans would say that Japan was not a democracy after all, but merely a one-party state.

What can we conclude? Democracies rarely fight democracies, we might say, and then add as a word of essential caution that the internal excellence of states is a brittle basis of peace.

**Democratic Wars**

Democracies coexist with undemocratic states. Although democracies seldom fight democracies, they do, as Michael Doyle has noted, fight at least their share of wars against others.\(^\text{16}\) Citizens of democratic states tend to think of their countries as good, aside from what they do, simply because they are democratic. Thus former Secretary of State Warren Christopher claimed that “democratic nations rarely start wars or threaten their neighbors.”\(^\text{17}\) One might suggest that he try his proposition out in Central or South America. Citizens of democratic states also tend to think of undemocratic states as bad, aside from what they do, simply because they are undemocratic. Democracies promote war because they at times decide that the way to preserve peace is to defeat nondemocratic states and make them democratic.

During World War I, Walter Hines Page, American ambassador to England, claimed that there “is no security in any part of the world where people cannot think of a government without a king and never will be.” During the Vietnam War, Secretary of State Dean Rusk claimed that the “United States cannot be secure until the total international environment is ideologically safe.”\(^\text{18}\) Policies aside, the very existence of undemocratic states is a danger to others. American political and intellectual leaders have often taken this view. Liberal interventionism is again on the march. President Bill Clinton and his national security adviser, Anthony Lake, urged the United States to take measures to enhance democracy around the world. The task, one fears, will be taken up by the American military with some enthusiasm. Former Army Chief of Staff General Gordon Sullivan, for example, favored a new military “model,” replacing the negative aim of containment with a positive one: “To promote democracy,

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regional stability, and economic prosperity.” Other voices urge us to enter into a “struggle to ensure that people are governed well.” Having apparently solved the problem of justice at home, “the struggle for liberal government becomes a struggle not simply for justice but for survival.” As R.H. Tawney said: “Either war is a crusade, or it is a crime.” Crusades are frightening because crusaders go to war for righteous causes, which they define for themselves and try to impose on others. One might have hoped that Americans would have learned that they are not very good at causing democracy abroad. But, alas, if the world can be made safe for democracy only by making it democratic, then all means are permitted and to use them becomes a duty. The war fervor of people and their representatives is at times hard to contain. Thus Hans Morgenthau believed that “the democratic selection and responsibility of government officials destroyed international morality as an effective system of restraint.”

Since, as Kant believed, war among self-directed states will occasionally break out, peace has to be contrived. For any government, doing so is a difficult task, and all states are at times deficient in accomplishing it, even if they wish to. Democratic leaders may respond to the fervor for war that their citizens sometimes display, or even try to arouse it, and governments are sometimes constrained by electoral calculations to defer preventive measures. Thus British Prime Minister Stanley Baldwin said that if he had called in 1935 for British rearmament against the German threat, his party would have lost the next election. Democratic governments may respond to internal political imperatives when they should be responding to external ones. All governments have their faults, democracies no doubt fewer than others, but that is not good enough to sustain the democratic peace thesis.

That peace may prevail among democratic states is a comforting thought. The obverse of the proposition—that democracy may promote war against undemocratic states—is disturbing. If the latter holds, we cannot even say for sure that the spread of democracy will bring a net decrease in the amount of war in the world.

With a republic established in a strong state, Kant hoped the republican form would gradually take hold in the world. In 1795, America provided the hope. Two hundred years later, remarkably, it still does. Ever since liberals first expressed their views, they have been divided. Some have urged liberal states to work to uplift benighted peoples and bring the benefits of liberty, justice, and prosperity to them. John Stuart Mill, Giuseppe Mazzini, Woodrow Wilson, and Bill Clinton are all interventionist liberals. Other liberals, Kant and Richard Cobden, for example, while agreeing on the benefits that democracy can bring to the world, have emphasized the difficulties and the dangers of actively seeking its propagation.

If the world is now safe for democracy, one has to wonder whether democracy is safe for the world. When democracy is ascendant, a condition that in the twentieth century attended the winning of hot wars and cold ones, the interventionist spirit flourishes. The effect is heightened when one democratic state becomes dominant, as the United States is now. Peace is the noblest cause of war. If the conditions of peace are lacking, then the country with a capability of creating them may be tempted to do so, whether or not by force. The end is noble, but as a matter of right, Kant insists, no state can intervene in the internal arrangements of another. As a matter of fact, one may notice that intervention, even for worthy ends, often brings more harm than good. The vice to which great powers easily succumb in a multipolar world is inattention; in a bipolar world, overreaction; in a unipolar world, overextension.

Peace is maintained by a delicate balance of internal and external restraints. States having a surplus of power are tempted to use it, and weaker states fear their doing so. The laws of voluntary federations, to use Kant’s language, are disregarded at the whim of the stronger, as the United States demonstrated a decade ago by mining Nicaraguan waters and by invading Panama. In both cases, the United States blatantly violated international law. In the first, it denied the jurisdiction of the International Court of Justice, which it had previously accepted. In the second, it flaunted the law embodied in the Charter of the Organization of American States, of which it was a principal sponsor. If the democratic peace thesis is right, structural realist theory is wrong. One may believe, with Kant, that republics are by and large good states and that unbalanced power is a danger no matter who wields it. Inside of, as well as outside of, the circle of democratic states, peace depends on a precarious balance of forces. The causes of war lie not simply in states or in the state system; they are found in both. Kant understood this. Devotees of the democratic peace thesis overlook it.
The Weak Effects of Interdependence

If not democracy alone, may not the spread of democracy combined with the tightening of national interdependence fulfill the prescription for peace offered by nineteenth-century liberals and so often repeated today? To the supposedly peaceful inclination of democracies, interdependence adds the propulsive power of the profit motive. Democratic states may increasingly devote themselves to the pursuit of peace and profits. The trading state is replacing the political-military state, and the power of the market now rivals or surpasses the power of the state, or so some believe.

Before World War I, Norman Angell believed that wars would not be fought because they would not pay, yet Germany and Britain, each other’s second-best customers, fought a long and bloody war. Interdependence in some ways promotes peace by multiplying contacts among states and contributing to mutual understanding. It also multiplies the occasions for conflicts that may promote resentment and even war. Close interdependence is a condition in which one party can scarcely move without jostling others; a small push ripples through society. The closer the social bonds, the more extreme the effect becomes, and one cannot sensibly pursue an interest without taking others’ interests into account. One country is then inclined to treat another country’s acts as events within its own polity and to attempt to control them.

That interdependence promotes war as well as peace has been said often enough. What requires emphasis is that, either way, among the forces that shape international politics, interdependence is a weak one. Interdependence within modern states is much closer than it is across states. The Soviet economy was planned so that its far-flung parts would be not just interdependent but integrated. Huge factories depended for their output on products exchanged

with others. Despite the tight integration of the Soviet economy, the state fell apart. Yugoslavia provides another stark illustration. Once external political pressure lessened, internal economic interests were too weak to hold the country together. One must wonder whether economic interdependence is more effect than cause. Internally, interdependence becomes so close that integration is the proper word to describe it. Interdependence becomes integration because internally the expectation that peace will prevail and order will be preserved is high. Externally, goods and capital flow freely where peace among countries appears to be reliably established. Interdependence, like integration, depends on other conditions. It is more a dependent than an independent variable. States, if they can afford to, shy away from becoming excessively dependent on goods and resources that may be denied them in crises and wars. States take measures, such as Japan’s managed trade, to avoid excessive dependence on others.28

The impulse to protect one’s identity—cultural and political as well as economic—from encroachment by others is strong. When it seems that “we will sink or swim together,” swimming separately looks attractive to those able to do it. From Plato onward, utopias were set in isolation from neighbors so that people could construct their collective life uncontaminated by contact with others. With zero interdependence, neither conflict nor war is possible. With integration, international becomes national politics.29 The zone in between is a gray one with the effects of interdependence sometimes good, providing the benefits of divided labor, mutual understanding, and cultural enrichment, and sometimes bad, leading to protectionism, mutual resentment, conflict, and war.

The uneven effects of interdependence, with some parties to it gaining more, others gaining less, are obscured by the substitution of Robert Keohane’s and Joseph Nye’s term “asymmetric interdependence” for relations of dependence and independence among states.30 Relatively independent states are in a stronger position than relatively dependent ones. If I depend more on you than you depend on me, you have more ways of influencing me and affecting my

fate than I have of affecting yours. Interdependence suggests a condition of roughly equal dependence of parties on one another. Omitting the word “dependence” blunts the inequalities that mark the relations of states and makes them all seem to be on the same footing. Much of international, as of national, politics is about inequalities. Separating one “issue area” from others and emphasizing that weak states have advantages in some of them reduces the sense of inequality. Emphasizing the low fungibility of power furthers the effect. If power is not very fungible, weak states may have decisive advantages on some issues. Again, the effects of inequality are blunted. But power, not very fungible for weak states, is very fungible for strong ones. The history of American foreign policy since World War II is replete with examples of how the United States used its superior economic capability to promote its political and security interests.31

In a 1970 essay, I described interdependence as an ideology used by Americans to camouflage the great leverage the United States enjoys in international politics by making it seem that strong and weak, rich and poor nations are similarly entangled in a thick web of interdependence.32 In her recent book, The Retreat of the State, Susan Strange reached the same conclusion, but by an odd route. Her argument is that “the progressive integration of the world economy, through international production, has shifted the balance of power away from states and toward world markets.” She advances three propositions in support of her argument: (1) power has “shifted upward from weak states to stronger ones” having global or regional reach; (2) power has “shifted sideways from states to markets and thus to non-state authorities deriving power from their market shares”; and (3) some power has “evaporated” with no one exercising it.33 In international politics, with no central authority, power does sometimes slip away and sometimes move sideways to markets. When serious slippage occurs, however, stronger states step in to reverse it, and firms of the stronger states control the largest market shares anyway. One may doubt whether markets any more escape the control of major states now than they

33. Strange, Retreat of the State, pp. 46, 189.
did in the nineteenth century or earlier—perhaps less so since the competence of states has increased at least in proportion to increases in the size and complications of markets. Anyone, realist or not, might think Strange’s first proposition is the important one. Never since the Roman Empire has power been so concentrated in one state. Despite believing that power has moved from states to markets, Strange recognized reality. She observed near the beginning of her book that the “authority—the ‘power over’ global outcomes enjoyed by American society, and therefore indirectly by the United States government—is still superior to that of any other society or any other government.” And near the end, she remarked that the “authority of governments tends to over-rule the caution of markets.” If one wondered which government she had in mind, she answered immediately: “The fate of Mexico is decided in Washington more than Wall Street. And the International Monetary Fund (IMF) is obliged to follow the American lead, despite the misgivings of Germany or Japan.”

The history of the past two centuries has been one of central governments acquiring more and more power. Alexis de Tocqueville observed during his visit to the United States in 1831 that “the Federal Government scarcely ever interferes in any but foreign affairs; and the governments of the states in reality direct society in America.” After World War II, governments in Western Europe disposed of about a quarter of their peoples’ income. The proportion now is more than half. At a time when Americans, Britons, Russians, and Chinese were decrying the control of the state over their lives, it was puzzling to be told that states were losing control over their external affairs. Losing control, one wonders, as compared to when? Weak states have lost some of their influence and control over external matters, but strong states have not lost theirs. The patterns are hardly new ones. In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the strongest state with the longest reach intervened all over the globe and built history’s most extensive empire. In the twentieth century, the strongest state with the longest reach repeated Britain’s interventionist behavior and, since the end of the Cold War, on an ever widening scale, without building an empire. The absence of empire hardly means, however, that the extent of America’s influence and control over the actions of others is of lesser moment. The withering away of the power of the state, whether inter-

34. Ibid., pp. 25, 192.
nally or externally, is more of a wish and an illusion than a reality in most of the world.

Under the Pax Britannica, the interdependence of states became unusually close, which to many portended a peaceful and prosperous future. Instead, a prolonged period of war, autarky, and more war followed. The international economic system, constructed under American auspices after World War II and later amended to suit its purposes, may last longer, but then again it may not. The character of international politics changes as national interdependence tightens or loosens. Yet even as relations vary, states have to take care of themselves as best they can in an anarchic environment. Internationally, the twentieth century for the most part was an unhappy one. In its last quarter, the clouds lifted a little, but twenty-five years is a slight base on which to ground optimistic conclusions. Not only are the effects of close interdependence problematic, but so also is its durability.

The Limited Role of International Institutions

One of the charges hurled at realist theory is that it depreciates the importance of institutions. The charge is justified, and the strange case of NATO’s (the North Atlantic Treaty Organization’s) outliving its purpose shows why realists believe that international institutions are shaped and limited by the states that found and sustain them and have little independent effect. Liberal institutionalists paid scant attention to organizations designed to buttress the security of states until, contrary to expectations inferred from realist theories, NATO not only survived the end of the Cold War but went on to add new members and to promise to embrace still more. Far from invalidating realist theory or casting doubt on it, however, the recent history of NATO illustrates the subordination of international institutions to national purposes.

EXPLAINING INTERNATIONAL INSTITUTIONS
The nature and purposes of institutions change as structures vary. In the old multipolar world, the core of an alliance consisted of a small number of states of comparable capability. Their contributions to one another’s security were of crucial importance because they were of similar size. Because major allies were closely interdependent militarily, the defection of one would have made its partners vulnerable to a competing alliance. The members of opposing alliances before World War I were tightly knit because of their mutual dependence. In the new bipolar world, the word “alliance” took on a different meaning. One country, the United States or the Soviet Union, provided most of the
security for its bloc. The withdrawal of France from NATO’s command structure and the defection of China from the Soviet bloc failed even to tilt the central balance. Early in the Cold War, Americans spoke with alarm about the threat of monolithic communism arising from the combined strength of the Soviet Union and China, yet the bloc’s disintegration caused scarcely a ripple. American officials did not proclaim that with China’s defection, America’s defense budget could safely be reduced by 20 or 10 percent or even be reduced at all. Similarly, when France stopped playing its part in NATO’s military plans, American officials did not proclaim that defense spending had to be increased for that reason. Properly speaking, NATO and the WTO (Warsaw Treaty Organization) were treaties of guarantee rather than old-style military alliances.\textsuperscript{36}

Glenn Snyder has remarked that “alliances have no meaning apart from the adversary threat to which they are a response.”\textsuperscript{37} I expected NATO to dwindle at the Cold War’s end and ultimately to disappear.\textsuperscript{38} In a basic sense, the expectation has been borne out. NATO is no longer even a treaty of guarantee because one cannot answer the question, guarantee against whom? Functions vary as structures change, as does the behavior of units. Thus the end of the Cold War quickly changed the behavior of allied countries. In early July of 1990, NATO announced that the alliance would “elaborate new force plans consistent with the revolutionary changes in Europe.”\textsuperscript{39} By the end of July, without waiting for any such plans, the major European members of NATO unilaterally announced large reductions in their force levels. Even the pretense of continuing to act as an alliance in setting military policy disappeared.

With its old purpose dead, and the individual and collective behavior of its members altered accordingly, how does one explain NATO’s survival and expansion? Institutions are hard to create and set in motion, but once created, institutionalists claim, they may take on something of a life of their own; they may begin to act with a measure of autonomy, becoming less dependent on the wills of their sponsors and members. NATO supposedly validates these thoughts.

Organizations, especially big ones with strong traditions, have long lives. The March of Dimes is an example sometimes cited. Having won the war


against polio, its mission was accomplished. Nevertheless, it cast about for a new malady to cure or contain. Even though the most appealing ones—cancer, diseases of the heart and lungs, multiple sclerosis, and cystic fibrosis—were already taken, it did find a worthy cause to pursue, the amelioration of birth defects. One can fairly claim that the March of Dimes enjoys continuity as an organization, pursuing an end consonant with its original purpose. How can one make such a claim for NATO?

The question of purpose may not be a very important one; create an organization and it will find something to do.\(^\text{40}\) Once created, and the more so once it has become well established, an organization becomes hard to get rid of. A big organization is managed by large numbers of bureaucrats who develop a strong interest in its perpetuation. According to Gunther Hellmann and Reinhard Wolf, in 1993 NATO headquarters was manned by 2,640 officials, most of whom presumably wanted to keep their jobs.\(^\text{41}\) The durability of NATO even as the structure of international politics has changed, and the old purpose of the organization has disappeared, is interpreted by institutionalists as evidence strongly arguing for the autonomy and vitality of institutions.

The institutionalist interpretation misses the point. NATO is first of all a treaty made by states. A deeply entrenched international bureaucracy can help to sustain the organization, but states determine its fate. Liberal institutionalists take NATO’s seeming vigor as confirmation of the importance of international institutions and as evidence of their resilience. Realists, noticing that as an alliance NATO has lost its major function, see it mainly as a means of maintaining and lengthening America’s grip on the foreign and military policies of European states. John Kornblum, U.S. senior deputy to the undersecretary of state for European affairs, neatly described NATO’s new role. “The Alliance,” he wrote, “provides a vehicle for the application of American power and vision to the security order in Europe.”\(^\text{42}\) The survival and expansion of NATO tell us much about American power and influence and little about institutions as multilateral entities. The ability of the United States to extend the life of a moribund institution nicely illustrates how international institutions are created and maintained by stronger states to serve their perceived or misperceived interests.

\(^{40}\) Joseph A. Schumpeter, writing of armies, put it this way: “created by wars that required it, the machine now created the wars it required.” “The Sociology of Imperialism,” in Schumpeter, Imperialism and Social Classes (New York: Meridian Books, 1955), p. 25 (emphasis in original).


The Bush administration saw, and the Clinton administration continued to see, NATO as the instrument for maintaining America’s domination of the foreign and military policies of European states. In 1991, U.S. Undersecretary of State Reginald Bartholomew’s letter to the governments of European members of NATO warned against Europe’s formulating independent positions on defense. France and Germany had thought that a European security and defense identity might be developed within the EU and that the Western European Union, formed in 1954, could be revived as the instrument for its realization. The Bush administration quickly squelched these ideas. The day after the signing of the Maastricht Treaty in December of 1991, President George Bush could say with satisfaction that “we are pleased that our Allies in the Western European Union . . . decided to strengthen that institution as both NATO’s European pillar and the defense component of the European Union.”

The European pillar was to be contained within NATO, and its policies were to be made in Washington. Weaker states have trouble fashioning institutions to serve their own ends in their own ways, especially in the security realm. Think of the defeat of the European Defense Community in 1954, despite America’s support of it, and the inability of the Western European Union in the more than four decades of its existence to find a significant role independent of the United States. Realism reveals what liberal institutionalist “theory” obscures: namely, that international institutions serve primarily national rather than international interests. Robert Keohane and Lisa Martin, replying to John Mearsheimer’s criticism of liberal institutionalism, ask: How are we “to account for the willingness of major states to invest resources in expanding international institutions if such institutions are lacking in significance?” If the answer were not already obvious, the expansion of NATO would make it so: to serve what powerful states believe to be their interests.

With the administration’s Bosnian policy in trouble, Clinton needed to show himself an effective foreign policy leader. With the national heroes Lech Walesa and Vaclav Havel clamoring for their countries’ inclusion, foreclosing NATO membership would have handed another issue to the Republican Party in the

congressional elections of 1994. To tout NATO’s eastward march, President Clinton gave major speeches in Milwaukee, Cleveland, and Detroit, cities with significant numbers of East European voters. Votes and dollars are the lifeblood of American politics. New members of NATO will be required to improve their military infrastructure and to buy modern weapons. The American arms industry, expecting to capture its usual large share of a new market, has lobbied heavily in favor of NATO’s expansion.

The reasons for expanding NATO are weak. The reasons for opposing expansion are strong. It draws new lines of division in Europe, alienates those left out, and can find no logical stopping place west of Russia. It weakens those Russians most inclined toward liberal democracy and a market economy. It strengthens Russians of the opposite inclination. It reduces hope for further large reductions of nuclear weaponry. It pushes Russia toward China instead of drawing Russia toward Europe and America. NATO, led by America, scarcely considered the plight of its defeated adversary. Throughout modern history, Russia has been rebuffed by the West, isolated and at times surrounded. Many Russians believe that, by expanding, NATO brazenly broke promises it made in 1990 and 1991 that former WTO members would not be allowed to join NATO. With good reason, Russians fear that NATO will not only admit additional old members of the WTO but also former republics of the Soviet Union. In 1997, NATO held naval exercises with Ukraine in the Black Sea, with more joint exercises to come, and announced plans to use a military testing ground in western Ukraine. In June of 1998, Zbigniew Brzezinski went to Kiev with the message that Ukraine should prepare itself to join NATO by the year 2010. The farther NATO intrudes into the Soviet Union’s old arena, the more Russia is forced to look to the east rather than to the west.

The expansion of NATO extends its military interests, enlarges its responsibilities, and increases its burdens. Not only do new members require NATO’s protection, they also heighten its concern over destabilizing events near their

borders. Thus Balkan eruptions become a NATO and not just a European concern. In the absence of European initiative, Americans believe they must lead the way because the credibility of NATO is at stake. Balkan operations in the air and even more so on the ground exacerbate differences of interest among NATO members and strain the alliance. European members marvel at the surveillance and communications capabilities of the United States and stand in awe of the modern military forces at its command. Aware of their weaknesses, Europeans express determination to modernize their forces and to develop their ability to deploy them independently. Europe’s reaction to America’s Balkan operations duplicates its determination to remedy deficiencies revealed in 1991 during the Gulf War, a determination that produced few results.

Will it be different this time? Perhaps, yet if European states do achieve their goals of creating a 60,000 strong rapid reaction force and enlarging the role of the WEU, the tension between a NATO controlled by the United States and a NATO allowing for independent European action will again be bothersome. In any event, the prospect of militarily bogging down in the Balkans tests the alliance and may indefinitely delay its further expansion. Expansion buys trouble, and mounting troubles may bring expansion to a halt.

European conditions and Russian opposition work against the eastward extension of NATO. Pressing in the opposite direction is the momentum of American expansion. The momentum of expansion has often been hard to break, a thought borne out by the empires of Republican Rome, of Czarist Russia, and of Liberal Britain.

One is often reminded that the United States is not just the dominant power in the world but that it is a liberal dominant power. True, the motivations of the artificers of expansion—President Clinton, National Security Adviser Anthony Lake, and others—were to nurture democracy in young, fragile, long-suffering countries. One may wonder, however, why this should be an American rather than a European task and why a military rather than a political-economic organization should be seen as the appropriate means for carrying it out. The task of building democracy is not a military one. The military security of new NATO members is not in jeopardy; their political development and economic well-being are. In 1997, U.S. Assistant Secretary of Defense Franklin D. Kramer told the Czech defense ministry that it was spending too little on defense.50 Yet investing in defense slows economic growth. By common calculation, defense spending stimulates economic growth

50. Ibid., p. 72.
about half as much as direct investment in the economy. In Eastern Europe, economic not military security is the problem and entering a military alliance compounds it.

Using the example of NATO to reflect on the relevance of realism after the Cold War leads to some important conclusions. The winner of the Cold War and the sole remaining great power has behaved as unchecked powers have usually done. In the absence of counterweights, a country’s internal impulses prevail, whether fueled by liberal or by other urges. The error of realist predictions that the end of the Cold War would mean the end of NATO arose not from a failure of realist theory to comprehend international politics, but from an underestimation of America’s folly. The survival and expansion of NATO illustrate not the defects but the limitations of structural explanations. Structures shape and shove; they do not determine the actions of states. A state that is stronger than any other can decide for itself whether to conform its policies to structural pressures and whether to avail itself of the opportunities that structural change offers, with little fear of adverse affects in the short run.

Do liberal institutionalists provide better leverage for explaining NATO’s survival and expansion? According to Keohane and Martin, realists insist “that institutions have only marginal effects.” On the contrary, realists have noticed that whether institutions have strong or weak effects depends on what states intend. Strong states use institutions, as they interpret laws, in ways that suit them. Thus Susan Strange, in pondering the state’s retreat, observes that “international organization is above all a tool of national government, an instrument for the pursuit of national interest by other means.”

Interestingly, Keohane and Martin, in their effort to refute Mearsheimer’s trenchant criticism of institutional theory, in effect agree with him. Having claimed that his realism is “not well specified,” they note that “institutional theory conceptualizes institutions both as independent and dependent variables.” Dependent on what?—on “the realities of power and interest.” Institutions, it turns out, “make a significant difference in conjunction with power realities.” Yes! Liberal institutionalism, as Mearsheimer says, “is no longer a clear alternative to realism, but has, in fact, been swallowed up by it.” Indeed, it never was an alternative to realism. Institutionalist theory, as Keohane has

52. Strange, Retreat of the State, p. xiv; and see pp. 192–193. Cf. Carr, The Twenty Years’ Crisis, p. 107: “international government is, in effect, government by that state which supplies the power necessary for the purpose of governing.”
54. Ibid., p. 42.
stressed, has as its core structural realism, which Keohane and Nye sought “to broaden.” The institutional approach starts with structural theory, applies it to the origins and operations of institutions, and unsurprisingly ends with realist conclusions.

Alliances illustrate the weaknesses of institutionalism with special clarity. Institutional theory attributes to institutions causal effects that mostly originate within states. The case of NATO nicely illustrates this shortcoming. Keohane has remarked that “alliances are institutions, and both their durability and strength . . . may depend in part on their institutional characteristics.” In part, I suppose, but one must wonder in how large a part. The Triple Alliance and the Triple Entente were quite durable. They lasted not because of alliance institutions, there hardly being any, but because the core members of each alliance looked outward and saw a pressing threat to their security. Previous alliances did not lack institutions because states had failed to figure out how to construct bureaucracies. Previous alliances lacked institutions because in the absence of a hegemonic leader, balancing continued within as well as across alliances. NATO lasted as a military alliance as long as the Soviet Union appeared to be a direct threat to its members. It survives and expands now not because of its institutions but mainly because the United States wants it to.

NATO’s survival also exposes an interesting aspect of balance-of-power theory. Robert Art has argued forcefully that without NATO and without American troops in Europe, European states will lapse into a “security competition” among themselves. As he emphasizes, this is a realist expectation. In his view, preserving NATO, and maintaining America’s leading role in it, are required in order to prevent a security competition that would promote conflict within, and impair the institutions of, the European Union. NATO now is an anomaly; the dampening of intra-alliance tension is the main task left, and it is a task not for the alliance but for its leader. The secondary task of an alliance, intra-alliance management, continues to be performed by the United States even though the primary task, defense against an external enemy, has disappeared. The point is worth pondering, but I need to say here only that it

further illustrates the dependence of international institutions on national decisions. Balancing among states is not inevitable. As in Europe, a hegemonic power may suppress it. As a high-level European diplomat put it, “it is not acceptable that the lead nation be European. A European power broker is a hegemonic power. We can agree on U.S. leadership, but not on one of our own.”59 Accepting the leadership of a hegemonic power prevents a balance of power from emerging in Europe, and better the hegemonic power should be at a distance than next door.

Keohane believes that “avoiding military conflict in Europe after the Cold War depends greatly on whether the next decade is characterized by a continuous pattern of institutionalized cooperation.”60 If one accepts the conclusion, the question remains: What or who sustains the ”pattern of institutionalized cooperation”? Realists know the answer.

INTERNATIONAL INSTITUTIONS AND NATIONAL AIDS
What is true of NATO holds for international institutions generally. The effects that international institutions may have on national decisions are but one step removed from the capabilities and intentions of the major state or states that gave them birth and sustain them. The Bretton Woods system strongly affected individual states and the conduct of international affairs. But when the United States found that the system no longer served its interests, the Nixon shocks of 1971 were administered. International institutions are created by the more powerful states, and the institutions survive in their original form as long as they serve the major interests of their creators, or are thought to do so. “The nature of institutional arrangements,” as Stephen Krasner put it, “is better explained by the distribution of national power capabilities than by efforts to solve problems of market failure”61—or, I would add, by anything else.

Either international conventions, treaties, and institutions remain close to the underlying distribution of national capabilities or they court failure.62 Citing examples from the past 350 years, Krasner found that in all of the instances “it was the value of strong states that dictated rules that were applied in a

59. Quoted in ibid., p. 36.
discriminating fashion only to the weak."\textsuperscript{63} The sovereignty of nations, a universally recognized international institution, hardly stands in the way of a strong nation that decides to intervene in a weak one. Thus, according to a senior official, the Reagan administration "debated whether we had the right to dictate the form of another country’s government. The bottom line was yes, that some rights are more fundamental than the right of nations to nonintervention. . . . We don’t have the right to subvert a democracy but we do have the right against an undemocratic one."\textsuperscript{64} Most international law is obeyed most of the time, but strong states bend or break laws when they choose to.

\textit{Balancing Power: Not Today but Tomorrow}

With so many of the expectations that realist theory gives rise to confirmed by what happened at and after the end of the Cold War, one may wonder why realism is in bad repute.\textsuperscript{65} A key proposition derived from realist theory is that international politics reflects the distribution of national capabilities, a proposition daily borne out. Another key proposition is that the balancing of power by some states against others recurs. Realist theory predicts that balances disrupted will one day be restored. A limitation of the theory, a limitation common to social science theories, is that it cannot say when. William Wohlforth argues that though restoration will take place, it will be a long time coming.\textsuperscript{66} Of necessity, realist theory is better at saying what will happen than in saying when it will happen. Theory cannot say when "tomorrow" will come because international political theory deals with the pressures of structure on states and not with how states will respond to the pressures. The latter is a task for theories about how national governments respond to pressures on them and take advantage of opportunities that may be present. One does, however, observe balancing tendencies already taking place.

Upon the demise of the Soviet Union, the international political system became unipolar. In the light of structural theory, unipolarity appears as the least durable of international configurations. This is so for two main reasons.

One is that dominant powers take on too many tasks beyond their own borders, thus weakening themselves in the long run. Ted Robert Gurr, after examining 336 polities, reached the same conclusion that Robert Wesson had reached earlier: "Imperial decay is . . . primarily a result of the misuse of power which follows inevitably from its concentration." The other reason for the short duration of unipolarity is that even if a dominant power behaves with moderation, restraint, and forbearance, weaker states will worry about its future behavior. America's founding fathers warned against the perils of power in the absence of checks and balances. Is unbalanced power less of a danger in international than in national politics? Throughout the Cold War, what the United States and the Soviet Union did, and how they interacted, were dominant factors in international politics. The two countries, however, constrained each other. Now the United States is alone in the world. As nature abhors a vacuum, so international politics abhors unbalanced power. Faced with unbalanced power, some states try to increase their own strength or they ally with others to bring the international distribution of power into balance. The reactions of other states to the drive for dominance of Charles V, Hapsburg ruler of Spain, of Louis XIV and Napoleon I of France, of Wilhelm II and Adolph Hitler of Germany, illustrate the point.

**THE BEHAVIOR OF DOMINANT POWERS**

Will the preponderant power of the United States elicit similar reactions? Unbalanced power, whoever wields it, is a potential danger to others. The powerful state may, and the United States does, think of itself as acting for the sake of peace, justice, and well-being in the world. These terms, however, are defined to the liking of the powerful, which may conflict with the preferences and interests of others. In international politics, overwhelming power repels and leads others to try to balance against it. With benign intent, the United States has behaved and, until its power is brought into balance, will continue to behave in ways that sometimes frighten others.

For almost half a century, the constancy of the Soviet threat produced a constancy of American policy. Other countries could rely on the United States for protection because protecting them seemed to serve American security interests. Even so, beginning in the 1950s, Western European countries and,

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beginning in the 1970s, Japan had increasing doubts about the reliability of the American nuclear deterrent. As Soviet strength increased, Western European countries began to wonder whether the United States could be counted on to use its deterrent on their behalf, thus risking its own cities. When President Jimmy Carter moved to reduce American troops in South Korea, and later when the Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan and strengthened its forces in the Far East, Japan developed similar worries.

With the disappearance of the Soviet Union, the United States no longer faces a major threat to its security. As General Colin Powell said when he was chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff: “I’m running out of demons. I’m running out of enemies. I’m down to Castro and Kim Il Sung.” Constancy of threat produces constancy of policy; absence of threat permits policy to become capricious. When few if any vital interests are endangered, a country’s policy becomes sporadic and self-willed.

The absence of serious threats to American security gives the United States wide latitude in making foreign policy choices. A dominant power acts internationally only when the spirit moves it. One example is enough to show this. When Yugoslavia’s collapse was followed by genocidal war in successor states, the United States failed to respond until Senator Robert Dole moved to make Bosnia’s peril an issue in the forthcoming presidential election; and it acted not for the sake of its own security but to maintain its leadership position in Europe. American policy was generated not by external security interests, but by internal political pressure and national ambition.

Aside from specific threats it may pose, unbalanced power leaves weaker states feeling uneasy and gives them reason to strengthen their positions. The United States has a long history of intervening in weak states, often with the intention of bringing democracy to them. American behavior over the past century in Central America provides little evidence of self-restraint in the absence of countervailing power. Contemplating the history of the United States and measuring its capabilities, other countries may well wish for ways to fend off its benign ministrations. Concentrated power invites distrust because it is so easily misused. To understand why some states want to bring power into a semblance of balance is easy, but with power so sharply skewed, what country or group of countries has the material capability and the political will to bring the “unipolar moment” to an end?

BALANCING POWER IN A UNIPOLAR WORLD

The expectation that following victory in a great war a new balance of power will form is firmly grounded in both history and theory. The last four grand coalitions (two against Napoleon and one in each of the world wars of the twentieth century) collapsed once victory was achieved. Victories in major wars leave the balance of power badly skewed. The winning side emerges as a dominant coalition. The international equilibrium is broken; theory leads one to expect its restoration.

Clearly something has changed. Some believe that the United States is so nice that, despite the dangers of unbalanced power, others do not feel the fear that would spur them to action. Michael Mastanduno, among others, believes this to be so, although he ends his article with the thought that “eventually, power will check power.”69 Others believe that the leaders of states have learned that playing the game of power politics is costly and unnecessary. In fact, the explanation for sluggish balancing is a simple one. In the aftermath of earlier great wars, the materials for constructing a new balance were readily at hand. Previous wars left a sufficient number of great powers standing to permit a new balance to be rather easily constructed. Theory enables one to say that a new balance of power will form but not to say how long it will take. National and international conditions determine that. Those who refer to the unipolar moment are right. In our perspective, the new balance is emerging slowly; in historical perspectives, it will come in the blink of an eye.

I ended a 1993 article this way: “One may hope that America’s internal preoccupations will produce not an isolationist policy, which has become impossible, but a forbearance that will give other countries at long last the chance to deal with their own problems and make their own mistakes. But I would not bet on it.”70 I should think that few would do so now. Charles Kegley has said, sensibly, that if the world becomes multipolar once again, realists will be vindicated.71 Seldom do signs of vindication appear so promptly.

The candidates for becoming the next great powers, and thus restoring a balance, are the European Union or Germany leading a coalition, China, Japan, and in a more distant future, Russia. The countries of the European Union have

70. Waltz, “The Emerging Structure of International Politics,” p. 79.
been remarkably successful in integrating their national economies. The achievement of a large measure of economic integration without a corresponding political unity is an accomplishment without historical precedent. On questions of foreign and military policy, however, the European Union can act only with the consent of its members, making bold or risky action impossible. The European Union has all the tools—population, resources, technology, and military capabilities—but lacks the organizational ability and the collective will to use them. As Jacques Delors said when he was president of the European Commission: "It will be for the European Council, consisting of heads of state and government . . . , to agree on the essential interests they share and which they will agree to defend and promote together." Policies that must be arrived at by consensus can be carried out only when they are fairly inconsequential. Inaction as Yugoslavia sank into chaos and war signaled that Europe will not act to stop wars even among near neighbors. Western Europe was unable to make its own foreign and military policies when its was an organization of six or nine states living in fear of the Soviet Union. With less pressure and more members, it has even less hope of doing so now. Only when the United States decides on a policy have European countries been able to follow it.

Europe may not remain in its supine position forever, yet signs of fundamental change in matters of foreign and military policy are faint. Now as earlier, European leaders express discontent with Europe’s secondary position, chafe at America’s making most of the important decisions, and show a desire to direct their own destiny. French leaders often vent their frustration and pine for a world, as Foreign Minister Hubert Védrine recently put it, “of several poles, not just a single one.” President Jacques Chirac and Prime Minister Lionel Jospin call for a strengthening of such multilateral institutions as the International Monetary Fund and the United Nations, although how this would diminish America’s influence is not explained. More to the point, Védrine complains that since President John Kennedy, Americans have talked of a European pillar for the alliance, a pillar that is never built.73 German and British leaders now more often express similar discontent. Europe, however, will not be able to claim a louder voice in alliance affairs unless it builds a platform for giving it expression. If Europeans ever mean to write a tune to go with their libretto, they will have to develop the unity in foreign and military affairs that they are achieving in economic matters. If French and

British leaders decided to merge their nuclear forces to form the nucleus of a European military organization, the United States and the world will begin to treat Europe as a major force.

The European Economic Community was formed in 1957 and has grown incrementally to its present proportions. But where is the incremental route to a European foreign and military policy to be found? European leaders have not been able to find it or even have tried very hard to do so. In the absence of radical change, Europe will count for little in international politics for as far ahead as the eye can see, unless Germany, becoming impatient, decides to lead a coalition.

INTERNATIONAL STRUCTURE AND NATIONAL RESPONSES

Throughout modern history, international politics centered on Europe. Two world wars ended Europe’s dominance. Whether Europe will somehow, someday emerge as a great power is a matter for speculation. In the meantime, the all-but-inevitable movement from unipolarity to multipolarity is taking place not in Europe but in Asia. The internal development and the external reaction of China and Japan are steadily raising both countries to the great power level. China will emerge as a great power even without trying very hard so long as it remains politically united and competent. Strategically, China can easily raise its nuclear forces to a level of parity with the United States if it has not already done so. China has five to seven intercontinental missiles (DF-5s) able to hit almost any American target and a dozen or more missiles able to reach the west coast of the United States (DF-4s). Liquid fueled, immobile missiles are vulnerable, but would the United States risk the destruction of, say, Seattle, San Francisco, and San Diego if China happens to have a few more DF-4s than the United States thinks or if it should fail to destroy all of them on the ground? Deterrence is much easier to contrive than most Americans have surmised. Economically, China’s growth rate, given its present stage of economic development, can be sustained at 7 to 9 percent for another decade or more. Even during Asia’s near economic collapse of the 1990s, China’s growth rate remained approximately in that range. A growth rate of 7 to 9 percent doubles a country’s economy every ten to eight years.

74. The following four pages are adapted from Waltz, “The Emerging Structure of International Politics.”
75. Nuclear parity is reached when countries have second-strike forces. It does not require quantitative or qualitative equality of forces. See Waltz, “Nuclear Myths and Political Realities,” *American Political Science Review*, Vol. 84, No. 3 (September 1990).
Unlike China, Japan is obviously reluctant to assume the mantle of a great power. Its reluctance, however, is steadily though slowly waning. Economically, Japan’s power has grown and spread remarkably. The growth of a country’s economic capability to the great power level places it at the center of regional and global affairs. It widens the range of a state’s interests and increases their importance. The high volume of a country’s external business thrusts it ever more deeply into world affairs. In a self-help system, the possession of most but not all of the capabilities of a great power leaves a state vulnerable to others that have the instruments that the lesser state lacks. Even though one may believe that fears of nuclear blackmail are misplaced, one must wonder whether Japan will remain immune to them.

Countries have always competed for wealth and security, and the competition has often led to conflict. Historically, states have been sensitive to changing relations of power among them. Japan is made uneasy now by the steady growth of China’s military budget. Its nearly 3 million strong army, undergoing modernization, and the gradual growth of its sea- and air-power projection capabilities, produce apprehension in all of China’s neighbors and add to the sense of instability in a region where issues of sovereignty and disputes over territory abound. The Korean peninsula has more military forces per square kilometer than any other portion of the globe. Taiwan is an unending source of tension. Disputes exist between Japan and Russia over the Kurile Islands, and between Japan and China over the Senkaku or Diaoyu Islands. Cambodia is a troublesome problem for both Vietnam and China. Half a dozen countries lay claim to all or some of the Spratly Islands, strategically located and supposedly rich in oil. The presence of China’s ample nuclear forces, combined with the drawdown of American military forces, can hardly be ignored by Japan, the less so because economic conflicts with the United States cast doubt on the reliability of American military guarantees. Reminders of Japan’s dependence and vulnerability multiply in large and small ways. For example, as rumors about North Korea’s developing nuclear capabilities gained credence, Japan became acutely aware of its lack of observation satellites. Uncomfortable dependencies and perceived vulnerabilities have led Japan to acquire greater military capabilities, even though many Japanese may prefer not to.

Given the expectation of conflict, and the necessity of taking care of one’s interests, one may wonder how any state with the economic capability of a great power can refrain from arming itself with the weapons that have served so well as the great deterrent. For a country to choose not to become a great power is a structural anomaly. For that reason, the choice is a difficult one to sustain. Sooner or later, usually sooner, the international status of countries has
risen in step with their material resources. Countries with great power economies have become great powers, whether or not reluctantly. Some countries may strive to become great powers; others may wish to avoid doing so. The choice, however, is a constrained one. Because of the extent of their interests, larger units existing in a contentious arena tend to take on systemwide tasks. Profound change in a country’s international situation produces radical change in its external behavior. After World War II, the United States broke with its centuries-long tradition of acting unilaterally and refusing to make long-term commitments. Japan’s behavior in the past half century reflects the abrupt change in its international standing suffered because of its defeat in war. In the previous half century, after victory over China in 1894–95, Japan pressed for preeminence in Asia, if not beyond. Does Japan once again aspire to a larger role internationally? Its concerted regional activity, its seeking and gaining prominence in such bodies as the IMF and the World Bank, and its obvious pride in economic and technological achievements indicate that it does. The behavior of states responds more to external conditions than to internal habit if external change is profound.

When external conditions press firmly enough, they shape the behavior of states. Increasingly, Japan is being pressed to enlarge its conventional forces and to add nuclear ones to protect its interests. India, Pakistan, China, and perhaps North Korea have nuclear weapons capable of deterring others from threatening their vital interests. How long can Japan live alongside other nuclear states while denying itself similar capabilities? Conflicts and crises are certain to make Japan aware of the disadvantages of being without the military instruments that other powers command. Japanese nuclear inhibitions arising from World War II will not last indefinitely; one may expect them to expire as generational memories fade.

Japanese officials have indicated that when the protection of America’s extended deterrent is no longer thought to be sufficiently reliable, Japan will equip itself with a nuclear force, whether or not openly. Japan has put itself politically and technologically in a position to do so. Consistently since the mid-1950s, the government has defined all of its Self-Defense Forces as conforming to constitutional requirements. Nuclear weapons purely for defense would be deemed constitutional should Japan decide to build some. As a secret report of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs put it in 1969: “For the time

being, we will maintain the policy of not possessing nuclear weapons. However, regardless of joining the NPT [Non-Proliferation Treaty] or not, we will keep the economic and technical potential for the production of nuclear weapons, while seeing to it that Japan will not be interfered with in this regard.\textsuperscript{78} In March of 1988, Prime Minister Noboru Takeshita called for a defensive capability matching Japan’s economic power.\textsuperscript{79} Only a balanced conventional-nuclear military capability would meet this requirement. In June of 1994, Prime Minister Tsutumu Hata mentioned in parliament that Japan had the ability to make nuclear weapons.\textsuperscript{80}

Where some see Japan as a “global civilian power” and believe it likely to remain one, others see a country that has skillfully used the protection the United States has afforded and adroitly adopted the means of maintaining its security to its regional environment.\textsuperscript{81} Prime Minister Shigeru Yoshida in the early 1950s suggested that Japan should rely on American protection until it had rebuilt its economy as it gradually prepared to stand on its own feet.\textsuperscript{82} Japan has laid a firm foundation for doing so by developing much of its own weaponry instead of relying on cheaper imports. Remaining months or moments away from having a nuclear military capability is well designed to protect the country’s security without unduly alarming its neighbors.

The hostility of China, of both Koreas, and of Russia combines with inevitable doubts about the extent to which Japan can rely on the United States to protect its security.\textsuperscript{83} In the opinion of Masanori Nishi, a defense official, the main cause of Japan’s greater “interest in enhanced defense capabilities” is its belief that America’s interest in “maintaining regional stability is shaky.”\textsuperscript{84} Whether reluctantly or not, Japan and China will follow each other on the route

to becoming great powers. China has the greater long-term potential. Japan, with the world’s second or third largest defense budget and the ability to produce the most technologically advanced weaponry, is closer to great power status at the moment.

When Americans speak of preserving the balance of power in East Asia through their military presence, the Chinese understandably take this to mean that they intend to maintain the strategic hegemony they now enjoy in the absence of such a balance. When China makes steady but modest efforts to improve the quality of its inferior forces, Americans see a future threat to their and others’ interests. Whatever worries the United States has and whatever threats it feels, Japan has them earlier and feels them more intensely. Japan has gradually reacted to them. China then worries as Japan improves its airlift and sealift capabilities and as the United States raises its support level for forces in South Korea. The actions and reactions of China, Japan, and South Korea, with or without American participation, are creating a new balance of power in East Asia, which is becoming part of the new balance of power in the world.

Historically, encounters of East and West have often ended in tragedy. Yet, as we know from happy experience, nuclear weapons moderate the behavior of their possessors and render them cautious whenever crises threaten to spin out of control. Fortunately, the changing relations of East to West, and the changing relations of countries within the East and the West, are taking place in a nuclear context. The tensions and conflicts that intensify when profound changes in world politics take place will continue to mar the relations of nations, while nuclear weapons keep the peace among those who enjoy their protection.

America’s policy of containing China by keeping 100,000 troops in East Asia and by providing security guarantees to Japan and South Korea is intended to keep a new balance of power from forming in Asia. By continuing to keep 100,000 troops in Western Europe, where no military threat is in sight, and by extending NATO eastward, the United States pursues the same goal in Europe. The American aspiration to freeze historical development by working to keep the world unipolar is doomed. In the not very long run, the task will exceed America’s economic, military, demographic, and political resources; and the very effort to maintain a hegemonic position is the surest way to undermine

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it. The effort to maintain dominance stimulates some countries to work to overcome it. As theory shows and history confirms, that is how balances of power are made. Multipolarity is developing before our eyes. Moreover, it is emerging in accordance with the balancing imperative.

American leaders seem to believe that America’s preeminent position will last indefinitely. The United States would then remain the dominant power without rivals rising to challenge it—a position without precedent in modern history. Balancing, of course, is not universal and omnipresent. A dominant power may suppress balancing as the United States has done in Europe. Whether or not balancing takes place also depends on the decisions of governments. Stephanie Neuman’s book, *International Relations Theory and the Third World*, abounds in examples of states that failed to mind their own security interests through internal efforts or external arrangements, and as one would expect, suffered invasion, loss of autonomy, and dismemberment. States are free to disregard the imperatives of power, but they must expect to pay a price for doing so. Moreover, relatively weak and divided states may find it impossible to concert their efforts to counter a hegemonic state despite ample provocation. This has long been the condition of the Western Hemisphere.

In the Cold War, the United States won a telling victory. Victory in war, however, often brings lasting enmities. Magnanimity in victory is rare. Winners of wars, facing few impediments to the exercise of their wills, often act in ways that create future enemies. Thus Germany, by taking Alsace and most of Lorraine from France in 1871, earned its lasting enmity; and the Allies’ harsh treatment of Germany after World War I produced a similar effect. In contrast, Bismarck persuaded the kaiser not to march his armies along the road to Vienna after the great victory at Königgrätz in 1866. In the Treaty of Prague, Prussia took no Austrian territory. Thus Austria, having become Austria-Hungary, was available as an alliance partner for Germany in 1879. Rather than learning from history, the United States is repeating past errors by extending its influence over what used to be the province of the vanquished. This alienates Russia and nudges it toward China instead of drawing it toward Europe and the United States. Despite much talk about the “globalization” of international politics, American political leaders to a dismaying extent think of East or West rather than of their interaction. With a history of conflict

along a 2,600 mile border, with ethnic minorities sprawling across it, with a mineral-rich and sparsely populated Siberia facing China’s teeming millions, Russia and China will find it difficult to cooperate effectively, but the United States is doing its best to help them do so. Indeed, the United States has provided the key to Russian-Chinese relations over the past half century. Feeling American antagonism and fearing American power, China drew close to Russia after World War II and remained so until the United States seemed less, and the Soviet Union more, of a threat to China. The relatively harmonious relations the United States and China enjoyed during the 1970s began to sour in the late 1980s when Russian power visibly declined and American hegemony became imminent. To alienate Russia by expanding NATO, and to alienate China by lecturing its leaders on how to rule their country, are policies that only an overwhelmingly powerful country could afford, and only a foolish one be tempted, to follow. The United States cannot prevent a new balance of power from forming. It can hasten its coming as it has been earnestly doing.

In this section, the discussion of balancing has been more empirical and speculative than theoretical. I therefore end with some reflections on balancing theory. Structural theory, and the theory of balance of power that follows from it, do not lead one to expect that states will always or even usually engage in balancing behavior. Balancing is a strategy for survival, a way of attempting to maintain a state’s autonomous way of life. To argue that bandwagoning represents a behavior more common to states than balancing has become a bit of a fad. Whether states bandwagon more often than they balance is an interesting question. To believe that an affirmative answer would refute balance-of-power theory is, however, to misinterpret the theory and to commit what one might call “the numerical fallacy” — to draw a qualitative conclusion from a quantitative result. States try various strategies for survival. Balancing is one of them; bandwagoning is another. The latter may sometimes seem a less demanding and a more rewarding strategy than balancing, requiring less effort and extracting lower costs while promising concrete rewards. Amid the uncertainties of international politics and the shifting pressures of domestic politics, states have to make perilous choices. They may hope to avoid war by appeasing adversaries, a weak form of bandwagoning, rather than by rearming and realigning to thwart them. Moreover, many states have insufficient resources for balancing and little room for maneuver. They have to jump on the wagon only later to wish they could fall off.

Balancing theory does not predict uniformity of behavior but rather the strong tendency of major states in the system, or in regional subsystems, to resort to balancing when they have to. That states try different strategies of
survival is hardly surprising. The recurrent emergence of balancing behavior, and the appearance of the patterns the behavior produces, should all the more be seen as impressive evidence supporting the theory.

Conclusion

Every time peace breaks out, people pop up to proclaim that realism is dead. That is another way of saying that international politics has been transformed. The world, however, has not been transformed; the structure of international politics has simply been remade by the disappearance of the Soviet Union, and for a time we will live with unipolarity. Moreover, international politics was not remade by the forces and factors that some believe are creating a new world order. Those who set the Soviet Union on the path of reform were old Soviet apparatchiks trying to right the Soviet economy in order to preserve its position in the world. The revolution in Soviet affairs and the end of the Cold War were not brought by democracy, interdependence, or international institutions. Instead the Cold War ended exactly as structural realism led one to expect. As I wrote some years ago, the Cold War “is firmly rooted in the structure of postwar international politics and will last as long as that structure endures.” 89 So it did, and the Cold War ended only when the bipolar structure of the world disappeared.

Structural change affects the behavior of states and the outcomes their interactions produce. It does not break the essential continuity of international politics. The transformation of international politics alone could do that. Transformation, however, awaits the day when the international system is no longer populated by states that have to help themselves. If the day were here, one would be able to say who could be relied on to help the disadvantaged or endangered. Instead, the ominous shadow of the future continues to cast its pall over interacting states. States’ perennial uncertainty about their fates presses governments to prefer relative over absolute gains. Without the shadow, the leaders of states would no longer have to ask themselves how they will get along tomorrow as well as today. States could combine their efforts cheerfully and work to maximize collective gain without worrying about how each might fare in comparison to others.

Occasionally, one finds the statement that governments in their natural, anarchic condition act myopically—that is, on calculations of immediate inter-

est—while hoping that the future will take care of itself. Realists are said
to suffer from this optical defect.\textsuperscript{90} Political leaders may be astigmatic, but
responsible ones who behave realistically do not suffer from myopia. Robert
Axelrod and Robert Keohane believe that World War I might have been
averted if certain states had been able to see how long the future’s shadow
was.\textsuperscript{91} Yet, as their own discussion shows, the future was what the major
states were obsessively worried about. The war was prompted less by consid-
erations of present security and more by worries about how the balance
might change later. The problems of governments do not arise from their
short time horizons. They see the long shadow of the future, but they
have trouble reading its contours, perhaps because they try to look too far
ahead and see imaginary dangers. In 1914, Germany feared Russia’s rapid
industrial and population growth. France and Britain suffered from the same
fear about Germany, and in addition Britain worried about the rapid growth
of Germany’s navy. In an important sense, World War I was a preventive war
all around. Future fears dominated hopes for short-term gains. States do not
live in the happiest of conditions that Horace in one of his odes imagined for
man:

\begin{quotation}
Happy the man, and happy he alone, who can say,
Tomorrow do thy worst, for I have lived today.\textsuperscript{92}
\end{quotation}

Robert Axelrod has shown that the “tit-for-tat” tactic, and no other, maxi-
mizes collective gain over time. The one condition for success is that the game
be played under the shadow of the future.\textsuperscript{93} Because states coexist in a self-help
system, they may, however, have to concern themselves not with maximizing
collective gain but with lessening, preserving, or widening the gap in welfare
and strength between themselves and others. The contours of the future’s
shadow look different in hierarchic and anarchic systems. The shadow may
facilitate cooperation in the former; it works against it in the latter. Worries

\textsuperscript{92} My revision.
about the future do not make cooperation and institution building among nations impossible; they do strongly condition their operation and limit their accomplishment. Liberal institutionalists were right to start their investigations with structural realism. Until and unless a transformation occurs, it remains the basic theory of international politics.
The False Promise of International Institutions

Since the Cold War ended, Western policymakers have sought to create security arrangements in Europe, as well as in other regions of the globe, that are based on international institutions. In doing so, they explicitly reject balance-of-power politics as an organizing concept for the post-Cold War world. During the 1992 presidential campaign, for example, President Clinton declared that, “in a world where freedom, not tyranny, is on the march, the cynical calculus of pure power politics simply does not compute. It is ill-suited to a new era.” Before taking office, Anthony Lake, the president’s national security adviser, criticized the Bush administration for viewing the world through a “classic balance of power prism,” whereas he and Mr. Clinton took a ‘more ‘neo-Wilsonian’ view.”

This approach to international politics rests on the belief that institutions are a key means of promoting world peace. In particular, Western policymakers claim that the institutions that “served the West well” before the Soviet Union collapsed must be reshaped to encompass Eastern Europe as well. “There is no reason,” according to Secretary of State Warren Christopher, “why our institutions or our aspirations should

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2. The other prominent theme in Western policymaking circles is the importance of spreading democracy and capitalism across the globe. Prosperous democracies, so the argument goes, do not fight each other. Thus, the aim is to increase the number of stable democracies in the international system. This line of argument is not examined here. For conciseness, international institutions are henceforth referred to simply as institutions.
3. Douglas Hurd, “A New System of Security in Europe,” Speech to the Diplomatic and Commonwealth Writers’ Association, London, June 2, 1992. Hurd, the British Foreign Secretary, said in this speech: “We have in Western Europe, in the West as a whole, a set of international institutions which have proved their worth for one set of problems—the problems for which they were set up, and now have to be adapted for another. That is the key, the necessary changes in all these institutions are the key to getting the right help, the right reassurance to the countries of central and Eastern Europe.” Even Margaret Thatcher, with all her reservations about European institutions, has adopted this theme. She argued days after Iraq invaded Kuwait that, “We must bring the new democracies of Eastern Europe into closer association with the institutions of Western Europe. . . . The European Community has reconciled antagonisms within Western Europe; it

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stop at the old frontiers of the Cold War." The institutions he has in mind include the European Community (EC), the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE), and the Western European Union (WEU). No single institution is expected to play a dominating role in Europe; instead, the aim is to create "a framework of complementary, mutually reinforcing" institutions. "We can promote more durable European security," Christopher claims, "through interlocking structures, each with complementary roles and strengths." No other region of the world has institutions as extensive and as well-developed as those in Europe. Consequently, Western policymakers trumpet the importance of creating webs of overlapping institutions outside of Europe. Special emphasis is placed on Asia, where there are only a few weak institutions, and where fear of Japan, coupled with the rise of China and the prospect of a further reduction in the American presence, has observers worried about future stability in the region.

There has also been a recent wave of academic interest in institutions. Academic institutionalists, not surprisingly, consider institutions to be a powerful force for stability. Robert Keohane, for example, declares that, "avoiding military conflict in Europe after the Cold War depends greatly on whether the next decade is characterized by a continuous pattern of institutionalized cooperation." Commenting on the aftermath of the Soviet collapse and the end of the Cold War, John Ruggie maintains that "there seems little doubt that multilateral norms and institutions have helped stabilize their international consequences. Indeed, such norms and institutions appear to be playing should now help to overcome divisions between East and West in Europe." Margaret Thatcher, "Shaping A New Global Community," Speech to the Aspen Institute, Aspen, Colorado, August 5, 1990.

4. Warren Christopher, "Toward a More Integrated World," Statement at the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) Ministerial Meeting, Paris, June 8, 1994. President Clinton and German Chancellor Helmut Kohl share the same view, as Clinton made clear when describing his private talks with Kohl in July 1994: "We know from our experience how half of Europe was integrated through NATO and other institutions that built stability after World War II. At the heart of our discussion today was what we have to do to integrate Europe’s other half, the new independent nations," Thomas L. Friedman, "Clinton Sees Germany as Main Partner of the U.S. in Europe," New York Times, July 12, 1994.


8. Stability is simply the absence of wars and major crises.

a significant role in the management of a broad array of regional and global changes in the world system today.”

This article examines the claim that institutions push states away from war and promote peace. I concentrate on assessing the major international relations theories that employ institutions as a core concept: liberal institutionalism, collective security, and critical theory. I begin, however, with a brief review of realism, because of the “institutionalist” theories is largely a response to realism, and each directly challenges realism’s underlying logic. Realists and institutionalists particularly disagree about whether institutions markedly affect the prospects for international stability. Realists say no; institutionalists say yes. Realists maintain that institutions are basically a reflection of the distribution of power in the world. They are based on the self-interested calculations of the great powers, and they have no independent effect on state behavior. Realists therefore believe that institutions are not an important cause of peace. They matter only on the margins. Institutionalists directly challenge this view of institutions, arguing instead that institutions can alter state preferences and therefore change state behavior. Institutions can discourage states from calculating self-interest on the basis of how every move affects their relative power positions. Institutions are independent variables, and they have the capability to move states away from war.

Although institutionalists are united in their opposition to realist claims about institutions, each institutionalist theory makes a different argument about how institutions work to alter state behavior. My goal is to evaluate these three theories to determine whether the claim that institutions cause peace is persuasive. That task involves answering four questions: 1) What are institutions? 2) How do they work to cause peace? Specifically, what is the causal logic that underpins each theory? 3) Are these different logics that explain how institutions work compelling? 4) Does the evidence support these theories?

My central conclusion is that institutions have minimal influence on state behavior, and thus hold little promise for promoting stability in the post–Cold War world. The three theories on which the case for institutions is based are all flawed. Each has problems in its causal logic, and all three institutionalist theories find little support in the historical record.

The remainder of this article is organized as follows. I begin with a brief definition of institutions and a discussion of realism, because each of the institutionalist theories takes its bearings from realism. In the main body of the article, I describe and evaluate

11. Prescriptions about how best to maintain peace should rest on general theories about the causes of war and peace. This point is true for both academics and policymakers. Although policymakers are seldom self-conscious in their use of theory, their views about institutions are nevertheless shaped by their implicit preferences for one theory of international relations over another.
liberal institutionalism, collective security, and critical theory. The concluding section considers why institutions are so highly regarded by policymakers and academics, when there is so little evidence that they are an important cause of peace.

What Are Institutions?

There is no widely-agreed upon definition of institutions in the international relations literature. The concept is sometimes defined so broadly as to encompass all of international relations, which gives it little analytical bite. For example, defining institutions as "recognized patterns of behavior or practice around which expectations converge" allows the concept to cover almost every regularized pattern of activity between states, from war to tariff bindings negotiated under the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT), thus rendering it largely meaningless. Still, it is possible to devise a useful definition that is consistent with how most institutionalist scholars employ the concept.

I define institutions as a set of rules that stipulate the ways in which states should cooperate and compete with each other. They prescribe acceptable forms of state behavior, and proscribe unacceptable kinds of behavior. These rules are negotiated by states, and according to many prominent theorists, they entail the mutual acceptance of higher norms, which are "standards of behavior defined in terms of rights and obligations." These rules are typically formalized in international agreements, and are

13. Regimes and institutions are treated as synonymous concepts in this article. They are also used interchangeably in the institutionalist literature. See Robert O. Keohane, "International Institutions: Two Approaches," International Studies Quarterly, Vol. 32, No. 4 (December 1988), p. 384; Robert O. Keohane, International Institutions and State Power: Essays in International Relations Theory (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1989), pp. 3-4; and Oran R. Young, International Cooperation: Building Regimes for Natural Resources and the Environment (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1989), chaps. 1 and 8. The term “multilateralism” is also virtually synonymous with institutions. To quote John Ruggie, "the term 'multilateral' is an adjective that modifies the noun 'institution.' Thus, multilateralism depicts a generic institutional form in international relations. . . . [Specifically,] multilateralism is an institutional form which coordinates relations among three or more states on the basis of 'generalized' principles of conduct." Ruggie, "Multilateralism," pp. 570-571.
17. Krasner, International Regimes, p. 186. Non-realist institutions are often based on higher norms, while few, if any, realist institutions are based on norms. The dividing line between norms and rules is not sharply defined in the institutionalist literature. See Robert O. Keohane, After Hegemony: Cooperation and Discord in the World Political Economy (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1984), pp. 57-58. For example, one might argue that rules, not just norms, are concerned with rights and obligations. The key point, however, is that for many institutionalists, norms, which are core beliefs about standards of appropriate state behavior, are the foundation on which more specific rules are constructed. This distinction between norms and rules applies in a rather straightforward
usually embodied in organizations with their own personnel and budgets.\textsuperscript{18} Although rules are usually incorporated into a formal international organization, it is not the organization \textit{per se} that compels states to obey the rules. Institutions are not a form of world government. States themselves must choose to obey the rules they created. Institutions, in short, call for the “decentralized cooperation of individual sovereign states, without any effective mechanism of command.”\textsuperscript{19}

To answer the three remaining questions about how institutions do or do not work, we must examine the different institutionalist theories separately. However, a brief discussion of realism is in order first.

\textbf{Realism}

Realism paints a rather grim picture of world politics.\textsuperscript{20} The international system is portrayed as a brutal arena where states look for opportunities to take advantage of each other, and therefore have little reason to trust each other.\textsuperscript{21} Daily life is essentially a struggle for power, where each state strives not only to be the most powerful actor in the system, but also to ensure that no other state achieves that lofty position.

International relations is not a constant state of war, but it is a state of relentless security competition, with the possibility of war always in the background. The intensity of that competition varies from case to case. Although it might seem counterintuitive, states do frequently cooperate in this competitive world. Nevertheless, cooperation among states has its limits, mainly because it is constrained by the dominating logic of security competition, which no amount of cooperation can eliminate. Genuine peace, or a world where states do not compete for power, is not likely, according to realism.

way in the subsequent discussion. Both collective security and critical theory challenge the realist belief that states behave in a self-interested way, and argue instead for developing norms that require states to act more altruistically. Liberal institutionalism, on the other hand, accepts the realist view that states act on the basis of self-interest, and concentrates on devising rules that facilitate cooperation among states.\textsuperscript{18} International organizations are public agencies established through the cooperative efforts of two or more states. These administrative structures have their own budget, personnel, and buildings. John Ruggie defines them as “palpable entities with headquarters and letterheads, voting procedures, and generous pension plans.” Ruggie, “Multilateralism,” p. 573. Once rules are incorporated into an international organization, “they may seem almost coterminous,” even though they are “distinguishable analytically.” Keohane, \textit{International Institutions and State Power}, p. 5.


\textsuperscript{20} Although realist scholars agree about many aspects of international politics, there are important intellectual disagreements among them. Consider Hans Morgenthau and Kenneth Waltz, probably the two most influential realists over the past fifty years. Morgenthau maintains that states have a will to power, while Waltz begins his theory with the assumption that states merely want to survive and are therefore driven to maximize security. See Hans J. Morgenthau, \textit{Politics Among Nations: The Struggle for Power and Peace}, 5th ed. (New York: Knopf, 1973); and Kenneth N. Waltz, \textit{Theory of International Politics} (Reading, Mass.: Addison-Wesley, 1979). The discussion in this section is based on my own thinking about realism, which is closer to Waltz than to Morgenthau.

This pessimistic view of how the world works can be derived from realism’s five assumptions about the international system. The first is that the international system is anarchic. This does not mean that it is chaotic or riven by disorder.\textsuperscript{22} It is easy to draw that conclusion, since realism depicts a world characterized by security competition and war. However, “anarchy” as employed by realists has nothing to do with conflict; rather it is an ordering principle, which says that the system comprises independent political units (states) that have no central authority above them. Sovereignty, in other words, inheres in states, because there is no higher ruling body in the international system. There is no “government over governments.”\textsuperscript{23}

The second assumption is that states inherently possess some offensive military capability, which gives them the wherewithal to hurt and possibly to destroy each other. States are potentially dangerous to each other. A state’s military power is usually identified with the particular weaponry at its disposal, although even if there were no weapons, the individuals of a state could still use their feet and hands to attack the population of another state.

The third assumption is that states can never be certain about the intentions of other states. Specifically, no state can be certain another state will not use its offensive military capability against the first. This is not to say that states necessarily have malign intentions. Another state may be reliably benign, but it is impossible to be certain of that judgment because intentions are impossible to divine with 100 percent certainty. There are many possible causes of aggression, and no state can be sure that another state is not motivated by one of them. Furthermore, intentions can change quickly, so a state’s intentions can be benign one day and malign the next. Uncertainty is unavoidable when assessing intentions, which simply means that states can never be sure that other states do not have offensive intentions to go with their offensive military capability.

The fourth assumption is that the most basic motive driving states is survival. States want to maintain their sovereignty. The fifth assumption is that states think strategically about how to survive in the international system. States are instrumentally rational. Nevertheless, they may miscalculate from time to time because they operate in a world of imperfect information, where potential adversaries have incentives to misrepresent their own strength or weakness and to conceal their true aims.

None of these assumptions alone mandates that states will behave competitively. In fact, the fundamental assumption dealing with motives says that states merely aim to survive, which is a defensive goal.\textsuperscript{24} When taken together, however, these five assump-


\textsuperscript{24} Morgenthau, as emphasized, maintains that states have an innate will to power, and are therefore inherently offensive in their outlook. The argument here is that states begin with a defensive motive, but are forced to think and sometimes act offensively because of the structure of the international system.
tions can create incentives for states to think and sometimes to behave aggressively. Specifically, three main patterns of behavior result.

First, states in the international system fear each other. They regard each other with suspicion, and they worry that war might be in the offing. They anticipate danger. There is little room for trust among states. Although the level of fear varies across time and space, it can never be reduced to a trivial level. The basis of this fear is that in a world where states have the capability to offend against each other, and might have the motive to do so, any state bent on survival must be at least suspicious of other states and reluctant to trust them. Add to this the assumption that there is no central authority that a threatened state can turn to for help, and states have even greater incentive to fear each other. Moreover, there is no mechanism—other than the possible self-interest of third parties—for punishing an aggressor. Because it is often difficult to deter potential aggressors, states have ample reason to take steps to be prepared for war.

The possible consequences of falling victim to aggression further illustrate why fear is a potent force in world politics. States do not compete with each other as if international politics were simply an economic marketplace. Political competition among states is a much more dangerous business than economic intercourse; it can lead to war, and war often means mass killing on the battlefield and even mass murder of civilians. In extreme cases, war can even lead to the total destruction of a state. The horrible consequences of war sometimes cause states to view each other not just as competitors, but as potentially deadly enemies.

Second, each state in the international system aims to guarantee its own survival. Because other states are potential threats, and because there is no higher authority to rescue them when danger arises, states cannot depend on others for their security. Each state tends to see itself as vulnerable and alone, and therefore it aims to provide for its own survival. As Kenneth Waltz puts it, states operate in a “self-help” system. This emphasis on self-help does not preclude states from forming alliances. But alliances are only temporary marriages of convenience, where today’s alliance partner might be tomorrow’s enemy, and today’s enemy might be tomorrow’s alliance partner. States operating in a self-help world should always act according to their own self-interest, because it pays to be selfish in a self-help world. This is true in the short term as well as the long term, because if a state loses in the short run, it may not be around for the long haul.

Third, states in the international system aim to maximize their relative power positions over other states. The reason is simple: the greater the military advantage one

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25. This point is illustrated by the reaction of Britain and France to German reunification at the end of the Cold War. Despite the fact that these three states had been close allies for almost forty-five years, both Britain and France immediately began thinking about the dangers of a united Germany. See David Garnham, “European Defense Cooperation: The 1990s and Beyond,” in Dale L. Smith and James Lee Ray, eds., The 1992 Project and the Future of Integration in Europe (Armonk, N.Y.: M.E. Sharpe, 1993), pp. 203–205; and Margaret Thatcher, The Downing Street Years (New York: HarperCollins, 1993), chaps. 25–26.
27. There is disagreement among realists on this point. Some realists argue that states are principally interested in maintaining the existing balance of power, not maximizing relative power. For
state has over other states, the more secure it is. Every state would like to be the most formidable military power in the system because this is the best way to guarantee survival in a world that can be very dangerous. This logic creates strong incentives for states to take advantage of one another, including going to war if the circumstances are right and victory seems likely. The aim is to acquire more military power at the expense of potential rivals. The ideal outcome would be to end up as the hegemon in the system. Survival would then be almost guaranteed.

All states are influenced by this logic, which means not only that they look for opportunities to take advantage of one another, but also that they work to insure that other states do not take advantage of them.28 States are, in other words, both offensively-oriented and defensively-oriented. They think about conquest themselves, and they balance against aggressors; this inexorably leads to a world of constant security competition, with the possibility of war always in the background. Peace, if one defines that concept as a state of tranquility or mutual concord, is not likely to break out in this world.

COOPERATION IN A REALIST WORLD

Although realism envisions a world that is fundamentally competitive, cooperation between states does occur. It is sometimes difficult to achieve, however, and always difficult to sustain. Two factors inhibit cooperation: relative-gains considerations, and concern about cheating.29

States contemplating cooperation must consider how the profits or gains will be distributed among them. They can think about the division in two different ways. They can think in terms of absolute gains, which means each side focuses on maximizing its own profit, and cares little about how much the other side gains or loses in the deal. Each side cares about the other only to the extent that the other side’s behavior affects its own prospects for achieving maximum profits. Alternately, states can think in terms of relative gains, which means each side not only considers its individual gain, but also how well it does compared to the other side.

Because states in a realist world are concerned about the balance of power, they must be motivated primarily by relative gains concerns when considering cooperation. While each state wants to maximize its absolute gains, it is more important to make sure that it does better, or at least no worse, than the other state in any agreement. However, cooperation is more difficult to achieve when states are attuned to relative-gains logic, rather than absolute-gains logic. This is because states concerned about absolute gains examples of this “defensive realism,” which contrasts with my “offensive realism,” see: Joseph M. Grieco, “Anarchy and the Limits of Cooperation: A Realist Critique of the Newest Liberal Institutionalism,” International Organization, Vol. 42, No. 3 (Summer 1988), pp. 498–500; Jack L. Snyder, Myths of Empire: Domestic Politics and International Ambition (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1991), pp. 10–13; and Waltz, Theory of International Politics, pp. 126–127. Also see Fareed Zakaria, “Realism and Domestic Politics: A Review Essay,” International Security, Vol. 17, No. 1 (Summer 1992), pp. 190–196. Morgenthau is also an offensive realist. This disagreement notwithstanding, all realists do believe that states care greatly about the relative balance of power.

29. See Grieco, “Anarchy and the Limits of Cooperation.”
need only make sure that the pie is expanding and that they are getting at least some portion of the increase, while states that worry about relative gains must care also about how the pie is divided, which complicates cooperative efforts.

Concerns about cheating also hinder cooperation. States are often reluctant to enter into cooperative agreements for fear that the other side will cheat on the agreement and gain a relative advantage. There is a “special peril of defection” in the military realm, because the nature of military weaponry allows for rapid shifts in the balance of power. Such a development could create a window of opportunity for the cheating state to inflict a decisive defeat on the victim state.30

These barriers to cooperation notwithstanding, states do cooperate in a realist world. For example, balance-of-power logic often causes states to form alliances and cooperate against common enemies. States sometimes cooperate to gang up on a third state, as the Germans and the Soviets did against Poland in 1939.31 Rivals as well as allies cooperate. After all, deals can be struck that roughly reflect the distribution of power, and satisfy concerns about cheating. The various arms control agreements signed by the superpowers during the Cold War illustrate this point.

The bottom line, however, is that cooperation takes place in a world that is competitive at its core—one where states have powerful incentives to take advantage of other states. This point is graphically highlighted by European politics in the forty years before World War I. There was much cooperation among the great powers during this period, but that did not stop them from going to war in 1914.32

INSTITUTIONS IN A REALIST WORLD
Realists also recognize that states sometimes operate through institutions. However, they believe that those rules reflect state calculations of self-interest based primarily on the international distribution of power. The most powerful states in the system create and shape institutions so that they can maintain their share of world power, or even increase it. In this view, institutions are essentially “arenas for acting out power relationships.”33 For realists, the causes of war and peace are mainly a function of the balance of power, and institutions largely mirror the distribution of power in the system. In short, the balance of power is the independent variable that explains war; institutions are merely an intervening variable in the process.

NATO provides a good example of realist thinking about institutions. NATO is an institution, and it certainly played a role in preventing World War III and helping the

32. See John Maynard Keynes, The Economic Consequences of the Peace (New York: Penguin Books, 1988), chap. 2; and J.M. Roberts, Europe, 1880-1945 (London: Longman, 1970), pp. 239-241. There was also significant cooperation between the United States and the Soviet Union during World War II, but that cooperation did not prevent the outbreak of the Cold War shortly after Germany and Japan were defeated.
West win the Cold War. Nevertheless, NATO was basically a manifestation of the bipolar distribution of power in Europe during the Cold War, and it was that balance of power, not NATO per se, that provided the key to maintaining stability on the continent. NATO was essentially an American tool for managing power in the face of the Soviet threat. Now, with the collapse of the Soviet Union, realists argue that NATO must either disappear or reconstitute itself on the basis of the new distribution of power in Europe.\textsuperscript{34} NATO cannot remain as it was during the Cold War.

\textit{Varieties of Institutionalist Theories}

There are three institutionalist theories, and each offers a different argument about how institutions push states away from war and help foster stability.\textsuperscript{35} Liberal institutionalism is the least ambitious of the three theories. It does not directly address the important question of how to prevent war, but focuses instead on explaining why economic and environmental cooperation among states is more likely than realists recognize. Increased cooperation in those realms is presumed to reduce the likelihood of war, although liberal institutionalists do not explain how. The theory is predicated on the belief that cheating is the main inhibitor of international cooperation, and that institutions provide the key to overcoming that problem. The aim is to create rules that constrain states, but not to challenge the fundamental realist claim that states are self-interested actors.

Collective security directly confronts the issue of how to prevent war. The theory starts with the assumption that force will continue to matter in world politics, and that states will have to guard against potential aggressors. However, the threat of war can be greatly reduced, according to the theory, by challenging realist thinking about state behavior, and substituting in its place three anti-realist norms. First, states should reject the idea of using force to change the status quo. Second, to deal with states that violate that norm and threaten (or start) a war, responsible states must not act on the basis of their own narrow self-interest. Rather, they must suppress the temptation to respond in whatever way would maximize their individual gains, and instead automatically join together to present the aggressor with the threat of overwhelming force. Third, states must trust each other to renounce aggression and to mean that renunciation. They must also be confident that other states will come to their rescue, should they become the target of aggression.

Critical theory is the most ambitious of the theories, as its ultimate aim is to transform the fundamental nature of international politics and to create a world where there is not just increased cooperation among states, but the possibility of genuine peace. Like collective security, but unlike liberal institutionalism, critical theory directly challenges


\textsuperscript{35} Despite these differences among institutionalist theories, proponents of each theory occasionally make favorable reference to the other theories, and thus seem to recognize that all three theories are part of an institutionalist body of literature that takes anti-realism as its main point of reference. See, for example: Charles A. Kupchan and Clifford A. Kupchan, “Concerts, Collective Security, and the Future of Europe,” \textit{International Security}, Vol. 16, No. 1 (Summer 1991), pp. 114-161; and Ruggie, “Multilateralism,” pp. 561-598.
realist thinking about the self-interested behavior of states. The theory is predicated on the assumption that ideas and discourse—how we think and talk about international politics—are the driving forces behind state behavior. It utterly rejects realism’s claim that state behavior is largely a function of the given structure of the external world. For critical theorists, ideas shape the material world in important ways, and thus the way to revolutionize international politics is to change drastically the way individuals think and talk about world politics. Intellectuals, especially the critical theorists themselves, are believed to play a key role in that process.

LIBERAL INSTITUTIONALISM

Liberal institutionalism does not directly address the question of whether institutions cause peace, but instead focuses on the less ambitious goal of explaining cooperation in cases where state interests are not fundamentally opposed. Specifically, the theory looks at cases where states are having difficulty cooperating because they have “mixed” interests; in other words, each side has incentives both to cooperate and not to cooperate. Each side can benefit from cooperation, however, which liberal institutionalists define as “goal-directed behavior that entails mutual policy adjustments so that all sides end up better off than they would otherwise be.” The theory is of little relevance in situations where states’ interests are fundamentally conflictual and neither side thinks it has much to gain from cooperation. In these circumstances, states aim to gain advantage over each other. They think in terms of winning and losing, and this invariably leads to intense security competition, and sometimes war. But liberal institutionalism does not deal directly with these situations, and thus says little about how to resolve or even ameliorate them.

Therefore, the theory largely ignores security issues and concentrates instead on economic and, to a lesser extent, environmental issues. In fact, the theory is built on the assumption that international politics can be divided into two realms—security and economic. The rest of my discussion concentrates on economic, not environmental issues, for conciseness, and also because the key theoretical works in the liberal institutionalist literature focus on economic rather than environmental matters.


39. For examples of the theory at work in the environmental realm, see Peter M. Haas, Robert O. Keohane, and Marc A. Levy, eds., Institutions for the Earth: Sources of Effective International Environmental Protection (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1993), especially chaps. 1 and 9. Some of the most important work on institutions and the environment has been done by Oran Young. See, for example, Young, International Cooperation. The rest of my discussion concentrates on economic, not environmental issues, for conciseness, and also because the key theoretical works in the liberal institutionalist literature focus on economic rather than environmental matters.
political economy—and that liberal institutionalism mainly applies to the latter, but not
the former. This theme is clearly articulated by Charles Lipson, who writes that "signi-
ficantly different institutional arrangements are associated with international eco-
nomic and security issues." Moreover, the likelihood of cooperation is markedly
different within these two realms: when economic relations are at stake, "cooperation
can be sustained among several self-interested states," whereas the prospects for coop-
eration are "more impoverished . . . in security affairs." Thus, the theory’s proponents
pay little attention to the security realm, where questions about war and peace are of
central importance.

Nevertheless, there are good reasons to examine liberal institutionalism closely.
Liberal institutionalists sometimes assert that institutions are an important cause of
international stability. Moreover, one might argue that if the theory shows a strong
causal connection between institutions and economic cooperation, it would be relatively
easy to take the next step and link cooperation with peace. Some proponents of the
theory maintain that institutions contribute to international stability; this suggests that
they believe it is easy to connect cooperation and stability. I doubt this claim, mainly
because proponents of the theory define cooperation so narrowly as to avoid military
issues. Let us assume, however, that liberal institutionalists are attempting to take a
giant step toward developing a theory that explains how institutions push states away
from war.

Causal Logic. Liberal institutionalists claim to accept realism’s root assumptions
while arguing that cooperation is nevertheless easier to achieve than realists recognize.
Robert Keohane, for example, writes in After Hegemony that he is "adopting the realist
model of rational egoism." He continues: "I propose to show, on the basis of their own
assumptions, that the characteristic pessimism of realism does not necessarily follow. I
seek to demonstrate that realist assumptions about world politics are consistent with
the formation of institutionalized arrangements . . . which promote cooperation." In
particular, liberal institutionalists emphasize that states "dwell in perpetual anarchy,"
and must therefore act as rational egoists in what is a self-help world.

42. I have suggested a possible line of argument in John J. Mearsheimer, "Back to the Future:
Instability in Europe After the Cold War," International Security, Vol. 15, No. 1 (Summer 1990),
pp. 42–44. Also, Charles Glaser makes the connection between cooperation and peace in "Realists
50–90.
43. Liberal institutionalists assume that cooperation is a positive goal, although they recognize it
has a downside as well. See Keohane, After Hegemony, pp. 10–11, 247–257; and Keohane, "Interna-
tional Institutions: Two Approaches," p. 393. The virtues and vices of cooperation are not explored
in any detail in the liberal institutionalist literature.
44. Keohane, After Hegemony, p. 67; also see p. 29. Similarly, Arthur Stein claims that, "Despite the
different conclusions that they draw about the cooperative or conflictual nature of international
According to liberal institutionalists, the principal obstacle to cooperation among states with mutual interests is the threat of cheating. The famous “prisoners’ dilemma,” which is the analytical centerpiece of most of the liberal institutionalist literature, captures the essence of the problem that states must solve to achieve cooperation. Each of two states can either cheat or cooperate with the other. Each side wants to maximize its own gain, but does not care about the size of the other side’s gain; each side cares about the other side only so far as the other side’s chosen strategy affects its own prospects for maximizing gain. The most attractive strategy for each state is to cheat and hope the other state pursues a cooperative strategy. In other words, a state’s ideal outcome is to “suck” the other side into thinking it is going to cooperate, and then cheat. But both sides understand this logic, and therefore both sides will try to cheat the other. Consequently, both sides will end up worse off than if they had cooperated, since mutual cheating leads to the worst possible outcome. Even though mutual cooperation is not as attractive as suckering the other side, it is certainly better than the outcome when both sides cheat.

The key to solving this dilemma is for each side to convince the other that they have a collective interest in making what appear to be short-term sacrifices (the gain that might result from successful cheating) for the sake of long-term benefits (the substantial payoff from mutual long-term cooperation). This means convincing states to accept the second-best outcome, which is mutual collaboration. The principal obstacle to reaching this cooperative outcome will be fear of getting suckered, should the other side cheat. This, in a nutshell, is the problem that institutions must solve.

To deal with this problem of “political market failure,” institutions must deter cheaters and protect victims. Three messages must be sent to potential cheaters: you will be caught, you will be punished immediately, and you will jeopardize future cooperative efforts. Potential victims, on the other hand, need early warning of cheating to avoid serious injury, and need the means to punish cheaters.

Liberal institutionalists do not aim to deal with cheaters and victims by changing fundamental norms of state behavior. Nor do they suggest transforming the anarchical nature of the international system. They accept the assumption that states operate in an anarchic environment and behave in a self-interested manner. In this regard, their approach is less ambitious than collective security and critical theory, which aim to alter

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46. Cheating is basically a “breach of promise.” Oye, “Explaining Cooperation Under Anarchy,” p. 1. It usually implies unobserved non-compliance, although there can be observed cheating as well. Defection is a synonym for cheating in the institutionalist literature.
47. The centrality of the prisoners’ dilemma and cheating to the liberal institutionalist literature is clearly reflected in virtually all the works cited in footnote 36. As Helen Milner notes in her review essay on this literature: “The focus is primarily on the role of regimes [institutions] in solving the defection [cheating] problem.” Milner, “International Theories of Cooperation,” p. 475.
48. The phrase is from Keohane, After Hegemony, p. 85.
49. Kenneth Oye, for example, writes in the introduction to an issue of World Politics containing a number of liberal institutionalist essays: “Our focus is on non-altruistic cooperation among states dwelling in international anarchy.” Oye, “Explaining Cooperation Under Anarchy,” p. 2. Also see Keohane, “International Institutions: Two Approaches,” pp. 380-381; and Keohane, International Institutions and State Power, p. 3.
important international norms. Liberal institutionalists instead concentrate on showing how rules can work to counter the cheating problem, even while states seek to maximize their own welfare. They argue that institutions can change a state’s calculations about how to maximize gains. Specifically, rules can get states to make the short-term sacrifices needed to resolve the prisoners’ dilemma and thus to realize long-term gains. Institutions, in short, can produce cooperation.

Rules can ideally be employed to make four major changes in “the contractual environment.” First, rules can increase the number of transactions between particular states over time. This institutionalized iteration discourages cheating in three ways. It raises the costs of cheating by creating the prospect of future gains through cooperation, thereby invoking “the shadow of the future” to deter cheating today. A state caught cheating would jeopardize its prospects of benefiting from future cooperation, since the victim would probably retaliate. In addition, iteration gives the victim the opportunity to pay back the cheater: it allows for reciprocation, the tit-for-tat strategy, which works to punish cheaters and not allow them to get away with their transgression. Finally, it rewards states that develop a reputation for faithful adherence to agreements, and punishes states that acquire a reputation for cheating.

Second, rules can tie together interactions between states in different issue areas. Issue-linkage aims to create greater interdependence between states, who will then be reluctant to cheat in one issue area for fear that the victim—and perhaps other states as well—will retaliate in another issue area. It discourages cheating in much the same way as iteration: it raises the costs of cheating and provides a way for the victim to retaliate against the cheater.

Third, a structure of rules can increase the amount of information available to participants in cooperative agreements so that close monitoring is possible. Raising the level of information discourages cheating in two ways: it increases the likelihood that cheaters will be caught, and more importantly, it provides victims with early warning of cheating, thereby enabling them to take protective measures before they are badly hurt.

Fourth, rules can reduce the transaction costs of individual agreements. When institutions perform the tasks described above, states can devote less effort to negotiating and monitoring cooperative agreements, and to hedging against possible defections. By increasing the efficiency of international cooperation, institutions make it more profitable and thus more attractive for self-interested states.

Liberal institutionalism is generally thought to be of limited utility in the security realm, because fear of cheating is considered a much greater obstacle to cooperation.

53. See Keohane, After Hegemony, pp. 89–92.
when military issues are at stake.\textsuperscript{54} There is the constant threat that betrayal will result in a devastating military defeat. This threat of "swift, decisive defection" is simply not present when dealing with international economics. Given that "the costs of betrayal" are potentially much graver in the military than the economic sphere, states will be very reluctant to accept the "one step backward, two steps forward" logic which underpins the tit-for-tat strategy of conditional cooperation. One step backward in the security realm might mean destruction, in which case there will be no next step—backward or forward.\textsuperscript{55}

FLAWS IN THE CAUSAL LOGIC. There is an important theoretical failing in the liberal institutionalist logic, even as it applies to economic issues. The theory is correct as far as it goes: cheating can be a serious barrier to cooperation. It ignores, however, the other major obstacle to cooperation: relative-gains concerns. As Joseph Grieco has shown, liberal institutionalists assume that states are not concerned about relative gains, but focus exclusively on absolute gains.\textsuperscript{56} Keohane acknowledged this problem in 1993: "Grieco has made a significant contribution by focusing attention on the issue of relative gains, a subject that has been underemphasized, especially by liberal or neoliberal commentators on the world economy."\textsuperscript{57}

This oversight is revealed by the assumed order of preference in the prisoners' dilemma game: each state cares about how its opponent's strategy will affect its own (absolute) gains, but not about how much one side gains relative to the other. In other words, each side simply wants to get the best deal for itself, and does not pay attention to how well the other side fares in the process.\textsuperscript{58} Nevertheless, liberal institutionalists

\textsuperscript{54} This point is clearly articulated in Lipson, "International Cooperation," especially pp. 12-18. The subsequent quotations in this paragraph are from ibid. Also see Axelrod and Keohane, "Achieving Cooperation Under Anarchy," pp. 232-233.


\textsuperscript{57} Robert O. Keohane, "Institutional Theory and the Realist Challenge," in Baldwin, Neorealism and Neoliberalism, p. 283. When liberal institutionalists developed their theory in the mid-1980s, they did not explicitly assume that states pursue absolute gains. There is actually little evidence that they thought much about the distinction between relative gains and absolute gains. However, the assumption that states pursue absolute but not relative gains is implicit in their writings.

\textsuperscript{58} Lipson writes: "The Prisoner’s Dilemma, in its simplest form, involves two players. Each is assumed to be a self-interested, self-reliant maximizer of his own utility, an assumption that clearly parallels the Realist conception of sovereign states in international politics." Lipson, "International
cannot ignore relative-gains considerations, because they assume that states are self-interested actors in an anarchic system, and they recognize that military power matters to states. A theory that explicitly accepts realism's core assumptions—and liberal institutionalism does that—must confront the issue of relative gains if it hopes to develop a sound explanation for why states cooperate.

One might expect liberal institutionalists to offer the counterargument that relative-gains logic applies only to the security realm, while absolute-gains logic applies to the economic realm. Given that they are mainly concerned with explaining economic and environmental cooperation, leaving relative-gains concerns out of the theory does not matter.

There are two problems with this argument. First, if cheating were the only significant obstacle to cooperation, liberal institutionalists could argue that their theory applies to the economic, but not the military realm. In fact, they do make that argument. However, once relative-gains considerations are factored into the equation, it becomes impossible to maintain the neat dividing line between economic and military issues, mainly because military might is significantly dependent on economic might. The relative size of a state's economy has profound consequences for its standing in the international balance of military power. Therefore, relative-gains concerns must be taken into account for security reasons when looking at the economic as well as military domain. The neat dividing line that liberal institutionalists employ to specify when their theory applies has little utility when one accepts that states worry about relative gains.59

Second, there are non-realist (i.e., non-security) logics that might explain why states worry about relative gains. Strategic trade theory, for example, provides a straightforward economic logic for why states should care about relative gains.60 It argues that states should help their own firms gain comparative advantage over the firms of rival states, because that is the best way to insure national economic prosperity. There is also a psychological logic, which portrays individuals as caring about how well they do (or their state does) in a cooperative agreement, not for material reasons, but because it is human nature to compare one's progress with that of others.61

Another possible liberal institutionalist counterargument is that solving the cheating problem renders the relative-gains problem irrelevant. If states cannot cheat each other, they need not fear each other, and therefore, states would not have to worry about relative power. The problem with this argument, however, is that even if the cheating problem were solved, states would still have to worry about relative gains because gaps

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59. My thinking on this matter has been markedly influenced by Sean Lynn-Jones, in his June 19, 1994, correspondence with me.
in gains can be translated into military advantage that can be used for coercion or aggression. And in the international system, states sometimes have conflicting interests that lead to aggression.

There is also empirical evidence that relative-gains considerations mattered during the Cold War even in economic relations among the advanced industrialized democracies in the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD). One would not expect realist logic about relative gains to be influential in this case: the United States was a superpower with little to fear militarily from the other OECD states, and those states were unlikely to use a relative-gains advantage to threaten the United States.\(^62\) Furthermore, the OECD states were important American allies during the Cold War, and thus the United States benefited strategically when they gained substantially in size and strength.

Nonetheless, relative gains appear to have mattered in economic relations among the advanced industrial states. Consider three prominent studies. Stephen Krasner considered efforts at cooperation in different sectors of the international communications industry. He found that states were remarkably unconcerned about cheating but deeply worried about relative gains, which led him to conclude that liberal institutionalism “is not relevant for global communications.” Grieco examined American and EC efforts to implement, under the auspices of GATT, a number of agreements relating to non-tariff barriers to trade. He found that the level of success was not a function of concerns about cheating but was influenced primarily by concern about the distribution of gains. Similarly, Michael Mastanduno found that concern about relative gains, not about cheating, was an important factor in shaping American policy towards Japan in three cases: the FSX fighter aircraft, satellites, and high-definition television.\(^63\)

I am not suggesting that relative-gains considerations make cooperation impossible; my point is simply that they can pose a serious impediment to cooperation and must therefore be taken into account when developing a theory of cooperation among states. This point is apparently now recognized by liberal institutionalists. Keohane, for example, acknowledges that he “did make a major mistake by underemphasizing distributive issues and the complexities they create for international cooperation.”\(^64\)

**Can Liberal Institutionalism Be Repaired?** Liberal institutionalists must address two questions if they are to repair their theory. First, can institutions facilitate

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cooperation when states seriously care about relative gains, or do institutions only matter when states can ignore relative-gains considerations and focus instead on absolute gains? I find no evidence that liberal institutionalists believe that institutions facilitate cooperation when states care deeply about relative gains. They apparently concede that their theory only applies when relative-gains considerations matter little or hardly at all. Thus the second question: when do states not worry about relative gains? The answer to this question would ultimately define the realm in which liberal institutionalism applies.

Liberal institutionalists have not addressed this important question in a systematic fashion, so any assessment of their efforts to repair the theory must be preliminary. What exists are a lengthy response by Keohane to Grieco’s original work on relative gains, and two studies responding to Grieco’s writings by Robert Powell and Duncan Snidal, which Keohane and other liberal institutionalists point to as exemplars of how to think about the relative-gains problem.

Powell and Snidal offer different arguments about when relative-gains considerations are slight. Nevertheless, both are essentially realist arguments. Neither study discusses how institutions might facilitate cooperation, and both explanations are built around familiar realist concepts.

At the root of Powell’s argument is the well-known offense-defense balance made famous by Robert Jervis, George Quester, Jack Snyder, and Stephen Van Evera. Powell maintains that relative-gains considerations matter little, and that states act in accordance with liberal institutionalism when the threat of aggressive war is low and “the use of force is no longer at issue.” That situation obtains when the cost of aggression is high, which is, in turn, a function of the “constraints imposed by the underlying technology of war.” In other words, when the prevailing military weaponry favors

65. For example, Keohane wrote after becoming aware of Grieco’s argument about relative gains: “Under specified conditions—where mutual interests are low and relative gains are therefore particularly important to states—neoliberal theory expects neorealism to explain elements of state behavior.” Keohane, International Institutions and State Power, pp. 15–16.


69. Powell, “Absolute and Relative Gains,” p. 1314; also see p. 1311.

70. Ibid., p. 1312. Powell does not use the term “offense-defense” balance in his article.
the offense, then the cost of war is low, and relative-gains considerations will be intense.
Institutions can do little to facilitate cooperation in such circumstances. However, when
defensive technology dominates, the cost of initiating aggression is high and the rela-
tive-gains problem is subdued, which allows institutions to cause cooperation.

Snidal maintains that relative-gains concerns might not matter much to states even
if they face a serious threat of war. The root concept in his argument is the distribution
of power in the international system. Specifically, he maintains that in a multipolar
system where more than a small number of states have roughly equal power, states will
not worry much about relative gains. Increasing the number of states in the system
decreases concern for relative gains. “The reason is that more actors enhance the
possibilities of protecting oneself through forming coalitions; and, generally, the less
well united one’s potential enemies, the safer one is.” However, he concedes that “the
relative gains hypothesis . . . has important consequences for two-actor situations and,
where there are small numbers or important asymmetries among larger numbers, it
may modify conclusions obtained from the absolute gains model.”

I draw three conclusions from this discussion of the liberal institutionalists’ efforts
to deal with the relative-gains problem. First, even if one accepts Powell and Snidal’s
arguments about when states largely ignore relative-gains concerns, those conditions
are rather uncommon in the real world. Powell would look for a world where defensive
military technologies dominate. However, it is very difficult to distinguish between
offensive and defensive weapons, and Powell provides no help on this point. Nuclear
weapons are an exception; they are defensive weapons in situations of mutual assured
destruction. Still, the presence of massive numbers of nuclear weapons in the arsenals
of the superpowers during the Cold War did not stop them from engaging in an intense
security competition where relative-gains considerations mattered greatly. Very impor-
tantly, Powell provides no historical examples to illustrate his central argument. Snidal

71. Although Snidal’s basic arguments about distribution of power fit squarely in the realist
tradition (in fact, Grieco made them in abbreviated form in “Anarchy and the Limits of Coopera-
tion,” p. 506), the formal model he develops rests on the non-realist assumption that “gains from
cooperation are proportional to the size of the involved states and are shared equally between
them.” Snidal, “Relative Gains,” p. 715. This assumption essentially eliminates the possibility of
gaps in gains and thus erases the relative-gains problem. For discussion of this matter, see Grieco’s
73. Ibid., p. 702.
74. There is general agreement that defensive weapons make conquest difficult and costly, while
offensive weapons make conquest cheap and easy. However, there is no recognized set of criteria
for assigning specific weapons either offensive or defensive status. See Marion Boggs, Attempts to
Define and Limit “Aggressive” Armament in Diplomacy and Strategy (Columbia: University of Mis-
souri, 1941); Jack Levy, “The Offensive/Defensive Balance of Military Technology: A Theoretical
and Historical Analysis,” International Studies Quarterly, Vol. 28, No. 2 (June 1984), pp. 219–238;
27; and Jonathan Shimshoni, “Technology, Military Advantage, and World War I: A Case for
75. See Shai Feldman, Israeli Nuclear Deterrence: A Strategy for the 1980s (New York: Columbia
University Press, 1982), pp. 43–49; Charles L. Glaser, Analyzing Strategic Nuclear Policy (Princeton,
Stephen Van Evera, Causes of War, Vol. II: National Misperception and the Origins of War, forthcoming,
chap. 13.
would look for a multipolar world with large numbers of roughly equal-sized great powers. However, historically we find multipolar systems with small numbers of great powers—usually five or six—and very often significant power asymmetries within them. Snidal offers no historical examples of multipolar systems in which the great powers largely ignored relative-gains considerations.76

Second, liberal institutionalism itself has little new to say about when states worry about relative gains. Proponents of the theory have instead chosen to rely on two realist explanations to answer that question: the offense-defense balance and the distribution of power in the system. Thus, liberal institutionalism can hardly be called a theoretical alternative to realism, but instead should be seen as subordinate to it.77

Third, even in circumstances where realist logic about relative gains does not apply, non-military logics like strategic trade theory might cause states to think in terms of relative gains. Liberal institutionalist theory should directly confront those logics.

PROBLEMS WITH THE EMPirical RECORD. Although there is much evidence of cooperation among states, this alone does not constitute support for liberal institutionalism. What is needed is evidence of cooperation that would not have occurred in the absence of institutions because of fear of cheating, or its actual presence. But scholars have provided little evidence of cooperation of that sort, nor of cooperation failing because of cheating. Moreover, as discussed above, there is considerable evidence that states worry much about relative gains not only in security matters, but in the economic realm as well.

This dearth of empirical support for liberal institutionalism is acknowledged by proponents of that theory.78 The empirical record is not completely blank, however, but the few historical cases that liberal institutionalists have studied provide scant support for the theory. Consider two prominent examples.

76. Keohane actually discusses the prospects for stability in post–Cold War Europe in his response to Grieco; see Keohane, “Institutional Theory and the Realist Challenge,” pp. 284–291. Surprisingly, his optimistic assessment pays no attention to either Powell or Snidal’s arguments, although earlier in that response, he relies on their arguments to “delimit the scope of both realist and institutionalist arguments.” See ibid., p. 276.

77. Liberal institutionalists have not always been clear about the relationship between their theory and realism. For example, Keohane makes the modest claim in After Hegemony (p. 14) that his theory is a “modification of Realism. Realist theories. . . . need to be supplemented, though not replaced.” He made a somewhat bolder claim a few years later, writing that, “despite [certain] affinities with neorealism, neoliberal institutionalism should be regarded as a distinct school of thought.” Keohane, International Institutions and State Power, p. 8. In that same piece, however, he makes the very bold argument that “we must understand that neoliberal institutionalism is not simply an alternative to neorealism, but, in fact, claims to subsume it.” Ibid., p. 15.

78. For example, Lisa Martin writes that “scholars working in the realist tradition maintain a well-founded skepticism about the empirical impact of institutional factors on state behavior. This skepticism is grounded in a lack of studies that show precisely how and when institutions have constrained state decision-making.” According to Oran Young, “One of the more surprising features of the emerging literature on regimes [institutions] is the relative absence of sustained discussions of the significance of . . . institutions, as determinants of collective outcomes at the international level.” Martin, “Institutions and Cooperation,” p. 144; Young, International Cooperation, p. 206.
Keohane looked at the performance of the International Energy Agency (IEA) in 1974–81, a period that included the 1979 oil crisis. This case does not appear to lend the theory much support. First, Keohane concedes that the IEA failed outright when put to the test in 1979: “regime-oriented efforts at cooperation do not always succeed, as the fiasco of IEA actions in 1979 illustrates.” He claims, however, that in 1980 the IEA had a minor success “under relatively favorable conditions” in responding to the outbreak of the Iran-Iraq War. Although he admits it is difficult to specify how much the IEA mattered in the 1980 case, he notes that “it seems clear that ‘it [the IEA] leaned in the right direction,’” a claim that hardly constitutes strong support for the theory. Second, it does not appear from Keohane's analysis that either fear of cheating or actual cheating hindered cooperation in the 1979 case, as the theory would predict. Third, Keohane chose the IEA case precisely because it involved relations among advanced Western democracies with market economies, where the prospects for cooperation were excellent. The modest impact of institutions in this case is thus all the more damping to the theory.

Lisa Martin examined the role that the European Community (EC) played during the Falklands War in helping Britain coax its reluctant allies to continue economic sanctions against Argentina after military action started. She concludes that the EC helped Britain win its allies' cooperation by lowering transaction costs and facilitating issue linkage. Specifically, Britain made concessions on the EC budget and the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP); Britain's allies agreed in return to keep sanctions on Argentina.

This case, too, is less than a ringing endorsement for liberal institutionalism. First, British efforts to maintain EC sanctions against Argentina were not impeded by fears of possible cheating, which the theory identifies as the central impediment to cooperation. So this case does not present an important test of liberal institutionalism, and thus the cooperative outcome does not tell us much about the theory's explanatory power. Second, it was relatively easy for Britain and her allies to strike a deal in this case. Neither side's core interests were threatened, and neither side had to make significant sacrifices to reach an agreement. Forging an accord to continue sanctions was not a difficult undertaking. A stronger test for liberal institutionalism would require states to cooperate when doing so entailed significant costs and risks. Third, the EC was not essential to an agreement. Issues could have been linked without the EC, and although the EC may have lowered transaction costs somewhat, there is no reason to think these

79. Keohane, After Hegemony, chap. 10.
80. Ibid., p. 16.
82. Keohane, After Hegemony, p. 7.
83. Martin, “Institutions and Cooperation.” Martin looks closely at three other cases in Coercive Cooperation to determine the effect of institutions on cooperation. I have concentrated on the Falklands War case, however, because it is, by her own admission, her strongest case. See ibid., p. 96.
costs were a serious impediment to striking a deal. It is noteworthy that Britain and America were able to cooperate during the Falklands War, even though the United States did not belong to the EC.

There is also evidence that directly challenges liberal institutionalism in issue areas where one would expect the theory to operate successfully. The studies discussed above by Grieco, Krasner, and Mastanduno test the institutionalist argument in a number of different political economy cases, and each finds the theory has little explanatory power. More empirical work is needed before a final judgment is rendered on the explanatory power of liberal institutionalism. Nevertheless, the evidence gathered so far is unpromising at best.

In summary, liberal institutionalism does not provide a sound basis for understanding international relations and promoting stability in the post–Cold War world. It makes modest claims about the impact of institutions, and steers clear of war and peace issues, focusing instead on the less ambitious task of explaining economic cooperation. Furthermore, the theory's causal logic is flawed, as proponents of the theory now admit. Having overlooked the relative-gains problem, they are now attempting to repair the theory, but their initial efforts are not promising. Finally, the available empirical evidence provides little support for the theory.

COLLECTIVE SECURITY

The theory of collective security deals directly with the issue of how to cause peace. It recognizes that military power is a central fact of life in international politics, and is likely to remain so for the foreseeable future. The key to enhancing stability in this world of armed states is the proper management of military power. As Inis Claude notes, "the problem of power is here to stay; it is, realistically, not a problem to be

84. Martin does not claim that agreement would not have been possible without the EC. Indeed, she appears to concede that even without the EC, Britain still could have fashioned "separate bilateral agreements with each EEC member in order to gain its cooperation, [although] this would have involved much higher transaction costs." Martin, "Institutions and Cooperation," pp. 174-175. However, transaction costs among the advanced industrial democracies are not very high in an era of rapid communications and permanent diplomatic establishments.

eliminated but a problem to be managed."86 For advocates of collective security, institutions are the key to managing power successfully.

Although the theory emphasizes the continuing importance of military force, it is explicitly anti-realist. Its proponents express a distaste for balance-of-power logic and traditional alliances, as well as a desire to create a world where those realist concepts have no role to play.87

In the early twentieth century, Woodrow Wilson and others developed the theory of collective security, which formed the basis for the League of Nations. Despite the well-known failings of that particular institution, the theory’s popularity remains high. In fact, there has been much interest in collective security in the aftermath of the Cold War.88 Claude notes, “Whatever their failures, the Wilsonians clearly succeeded in establishing the conviction that collective security represents a brand of international morality vastly superior to that incorporated in the balance of power system.”89

Curiously, however, it is difficult to find scholarly work that makes the case for collective security without simultaneously expressing major reservations about the theory, and without expressing grave doubts that collective security could ever be realized in practice. Consider the writings of Claude, who is sympathetic to collective security, and has produced some of the most important work on the subject. He wrote in Power and International Relations, “I would regard the epithet unrealistic as fairly applicable to the theory of collective security.” In Swords into Plowshares, he maintained that for “men involved in . . . establishing a collective security system . . . their devotion to the ideal has been more a manifestation of their yearning for peace and order as an end than as an expression of conviction that the theory of collective security provides a workable and acceptable means to that end.” Finally, Claude wrote in 1992, “I reached the conclusion some thirty years ago that . . . the implementation of collective security theory is not a possibility to be taken seriously.”90

86. Claude, Power And International Relations, p. 6.
87. Consider, for example, how Woodrow Wilson describes pre-World War I Europe: “The day we left behind us was a day of alliances. It was a day of balances of power. It was a day of ‘every nation take care of itself or make a partnership with some other nation or group of nations to hold the peace of the world steady or to dominate the weaker portions of the world.’” Quoted in Claude, Power and International Relations, p. 81.
89. Claude, Power And International Relations, p. 116. Also see Wolfers, Discord And Collaboration, p. 197.
90. Claude, Power And International Relations, pp. 203–204; Claude, Swords Into Plowshares, p. 283; and Claude, “Collective Security After the Cold War,” p. 9. The Kupchans, who are also sympa-
causal logic. Collective security starts with the assumption that states behave according to the dictates of realism.\textsuperscript{91} The aim, however, is to move beyond the self-help world of realism where states fear each other and are motivated by balance-of-power considerations, even though the theory assumes that military power will remain a fact of life in the international system. For advocates of collective security, institutions are the key to accomplishing this ambitious task. Specifically, the goal is to convince states to base their behavior on three profoundly anti-realist norms.

First, states must renounce the use of military force to alter the status quo. They must not launch wars of aggression, but instead must agree to settle all disputes peaceably. Collective security allows for changes in the status quo, but those changes must come via negotiation, not at the end of a rifle barrel. The theory, as Claude notes, “depends upon a positive commitment to the value of world peace by the great mass of states.”\textsuperscript{92}

The theory nevertheless recognizes that some states may not accept this norm: if there were universal subscription to the norm, there would be no need for a collective security system to deal with troublemakers, since there would be none.\textsuperscript{93} However, the overwhelming majority of states must renounce wars of conquest, or else the system would collapse.

It is difficult to stipulate how many aggressors a collective security system can handle at once before it comes undone. The answer depends on the particular circumstances facing the system, such as: the number of great powers, the distribution of power among them, geography, and whether the aggressors are minor or major powers. The upper limit for aggressive major powers is probably two at any one time, but even then, the system is likely to have difficulty dealing with them. Some collective security systems might even have trouble fighting two minor powers at the same time, since minor powers today are often well-armed. Fighting simultaneous wars against Iraq and North Korea, for example, would be a very demanding task, although the great powers would win them. Ideally, a collective security system would confront only one aggressor at a time, and not too often at that. Claude sums up the matter nicely: “Collective security

\textsuperscript{91} My thinking about the logic underpinning collective security has been significantly influenced by Bradley A. Thayer, “A Theory of Security Structures,” unpublished manuscript, University of Chicago, July 1994.

\textsuperscript{92} Claude, Swords Into Plowshares, p. 250.

\textsuperscript{93} Collective security is often criticized on the grounds that “it is feasible only when it is also unnecessary.” In other words, collective security requires that “all members are willing to accept the political status quo,” but if that is the case, collective security would be unnecessary since no state, by definition, would cause trouble. Charles L. Glaser, “Why NATO is Still Best: Future Security Arrangements for Europe,” International Security, Vol. 18, No. 1 (Summer 1993), p. 28. Also see Jofie, “Collective Security and the Future of Europe,” pp. 44, 46; and Kupchan and Kupchan, “Concerts and Collective Security,” p. 124. This criticism is unfair, however, because the very purpose of a collective security system is to deal with aggressors. If states could be guaranteed that no other state would ever launch an aggressive war, there would be no need for collective security. The theory recognizes that such a guarantee is not possible.
assumes the *lonely* aggressor; the violator of the world’s peace may be allowed an accomplice or two, but in principle the evil-doer is supposed to find himself virtually isolated in confrontation with the massive forces of the international *posse comitatus.*

Second, “responsible” states must not think in terms of narrow self-interest when they act against lonely aggressors, but must instead choose to equate their national interest with the broader interests of the international community. Specifically, states must believe that their national interest is inextricably bound up with the national interest of other states, so that an attack on any state is considered an attack on every state. Thus, when a troublemaker appears in the system, all of the responsible states must automatically and collectively confront the aggressor with overwhelming military power. The aim is “to create automatic obligations of a collective character.”

States in a self-help world calculate each move on the basis of how it will affect the balance of power. This narrow sense of self-interest means that states are likely to remain on the sidelines if vital interests are not threatened. This kind of behavior is unacceptable in a collective security world, where there must instead be “a legally binding and codified commitment on the part of all members to respond to aggression whenever and wherever it might occur.”

A collective security system allows states little freedom of action. The practical effect of this comprehensive system of mutual assistance is that lonely aggressors are quickly confronted with a coalition of overwhelming military strength. For both deterrence and warfighting purposes, this “preponderant power” is far superior to the “minimum winning coalitions” that a troublemaker faces in a balance-of-power world. Once it becomes clear that aggression does not pay, even states reluctant to accept the first norm (the renunciation of aggression) will be more inclined to accept it.

Third, states must trust each other. States must not only act in accordance with the first two norms, but they must trust that other states will do likewise. If states fear each other, as they do in a realist world, collective security cannot work. States, Claude

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95. Woodrow Wilson said in 1916, “We are participants, whether we would or not, in the life of the world. The interests of all nations are our own also. We are partners with the rest. What affects mankind is inevitably our affair as well as the affair of the nations of Europe and of Asia.” Quoted in August Heckscher, ed., *The Politics of Woodrow Wilson: Selections from His Speeches and Writings* (New York: Harper, 1956), p. 258.
97. A state not at risk might fail to come to the aid of a threatened state because the risks and costs of going to war are too high, or because it has an interest in letting the combatants wear each other down, thus improving its own strategic position. A state not directly at risk might even join forces with the aggressor against the threatened state, so as to gain some of the spoils of victory.
99. Traditional alliances have no place in a collective security system. Woodrow Wilson is particularly eloquent on this point: “I am proposing that all nations henceforth avoid entangling alliances which would draw them into a competition of power, catch them in a net of intrigue and selfish rivalry, and disturb their own affairs with influences intruded from without. There is no entangling alliance in a concert of power. When all unite to act in the same sense and with the same purpose, all act in the common interest and are free to live their own lives under a common protection.” Quoted in Frederick L. Schuman, *International Politics: An Introduction to the Western State System* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1933), p. 254.
emphasizes, must "be willing to entrust their destinies to collective security. Confidence is the quintessential condition of the success of the system; states must be prepared to rely upon its effectiveness and impartiality."[100]

Trust is actually the most important of the three norms because it underpins the first two. Specifically, states must be very confident that almost all the other states in the system will sincerely renounce aggression, and will not change their minds at a later date. States also have to be confident that when an aggressor targets them, none of the other responsible states will get cold feet and fail to confront the troublemaker. This element of certainty is of great importance in a collective security system because if it fails to work, at least some of those states that have ignored the balance of power and eschewed alliances are going to be vulnerable to attack.

This discussion of trust raises an additional point about the problems a collective security system faces when it confronts multiple aggressors. The previous discussion focused mainly on the logistical difficulties of dealing with more than one troublemaker. However, the presence of multiple aggressors also raises the question of whether most states in the system are deeply committed to peace, and therefore, whether it makes sense to trust collective security. The more troublemakers there are in the system, the more doubts responsible states are likely to have about their investment in collective security. This same logic applies to suggestions that collective security can get by without requiring that all states join the system. Some argue that one or more states can remain on the sidelines, provided the member states can still confront any troublemakers with overwhelming military force.[101] Although these free-riders are assumed to be non-aggressors, there is no guarantee that they will not later turn to conquest, in which case their free ride might have allowed them to improve significantly their relative power position. This free-rider problem, like the multiple-aggressor problem, is likely to undermine the responsible states' trust in collective security and thus to cause its failure.

FLAWS IN THE CAUSAL LOGIC. There are two major flaws in collective security theory, and both concern the all-important component of trust. Collective security is an incomplete theory because it does not provide a satisfactory explanation for how states overcome their fears and learn to trust one another. Realists maintain that states fear one another because they operate in an anarchic world, have offensive military capabilities, and can never be certain about other states' intentions. Collective security is largely silent about the first two realist assumptions, as the theory says little about either anarchy or offensive capability.[102] However, it has something to say about intentions,

100. Claude, Swords Into Plowshares, p. 255. Also see Claude, Power And International Relations, p. 197.
102. Advocates of collective security usually favor widespread arms reductions, but they also recognize that states must maintain a significant offensive capability so that they can challenge an aggressor. For this reason, some scholars suggest that collective security might undermine stability. See Glaser, "Why NATO is Still Best," pp. 30–33.
because the theory's first two norms call for states not to aggress, but only to defend. States, in other words, should only have benign intentions when contemplating the use of military force.

However, the theory recognizes that one or more states might reject the norms that underpin collective security and behave aggressively. The very purpose of a collective security system, after all, is to deal with states that have aggressive intentions. In effect, collective security admits that no state can ever be completely certain about another state's intentions, which brings us back to a realist world where states have little choice but to fear each other.

There is a second reason why states are not likely to place their trust in a collective security system: it has a set of demanding requirements—I count nine—that are likely to thwart efforts to confront an aggressor with preponderant power. Collective security, as Claude notes, "assumes the satisfaction of an extraordinarily complex network of requirements."103

First, for collective security to work, states must be able to distinguish clearly between aggressor and victim, and then move against the aggressor. However, it is sometimes difficult in a crisis to determine who is the troublemaker and who is the victim.104 Debates still rage about which European great power, if any, bears responsibility for starting World War I. Similar disputes have followed most other wars.

Second, the theory assumes that all aggression is wrong. But there are occasionally cases where conquest is probably warranted. For example, there are good reasons to applaud the 1979 Vietnamese invasion of Cambodia, since it drove the murderous Pol Pot from power.

Third, some states are especially friendly for historical or ideological reasons. Should a state with close friends be labeled an aggressor in a collective security system, its friends are probably going to be reluctant to join the coalition against it. For example, it is difficult to imagine the United States using military force against Britain or Israel, even if they were branded aggressors by the international community.

Fourth, historical enmity between states can also complicate collective security efforts. Consider that a European collective security system would have to depend heavily on Germany and Russia, the two most powerful states on the continent, to maintain order. However, the idea of Germany, which wrought murder and destruction across Europe in 1939-45, and Russia, which was the core of the Soviet empire, maintaining order in Europe is sure to meet significant resistance from other European states.

Fifth, even if states agree to act automatically and collectively to meet aggression, there would surely be difficulty determining how to distribute the burden. States will have strong incentives to pass the buck and get other states to pay the heavy price of confronting an aggressor.105 During World War I, for example, Britain, France, and

Russia each tried to get its allies to pay the blood price of defeating Germany on the battlefield.\textsuperscript{106} Rampant buck-passing might undermine efforts to produce the preponderant military power necessary to make collective security work.

Sixth, it is difficult to guarantee a rapid response to aggression in a collective security system. Planning beforehand is problematic because “it is impossible to know what the alignment of states will be if there is an armed conflict.”\textsuperscript{107} There are also significant coordination problems associated with assembling a large coalition of states to fight a war. Rapid response becomes even more problematic if the responsible states must deal with more than one aggressor. It took more than six months for the United States to put together a coalition to liberate Kuwait from Saddam Hussein. As impressive as the American effort was, threatened states are not likely to have much faith in a security system that tells them help is likely to come, but will only arrive months after they have been conquered.

Seventh, states are likely to be reluctant to join a collective security effort because the system effectively transforms every local conflict into an international conflict. States that see conflict around the globe will surely be tempted to cordon off the troubled area and prevent further escalation, as the West has done in the former Yugoslavia.\textsuperscript{108} Collective security, however, calls for escalation, even though it is intended for peaceful purposes.

Eighth, the notion that states must automatically respond to aggression impinges in fundamental ways on state sovereignty, and will therefore be difficult to sell. States, especially democracies, are likely to guard jealously their freedom to debate whether or not to fight an aggressor. War is a deadly business, especially if great powers are involved, and few countries want to commit themselves in advance to paying a huge blood price when their own self-interests are not directly involved.

Ninth, there is some contradiction concerning attitudes towards force that raises doubts about whether responsible states would actually come to the rescue of a threatened state. Collective security theory is predicated on the belief that war is a truly horrible enterprise, and therefore states should renounce aggression. At the same time, the theory mandates that states must be ready and willing to use force to thwart troublemakers. However, responsible states find war so repellent that they would renounce it; this raises doubts about their willingness to go to war to stop aggression. Indeed, most advocates of collective security prefer “creative diplomacy and economic sanctions” to military force when dealing with an aggressor state.\textsuperscript{109}

In sum, states have abundant reasons to doubt that collective security will work as advertised when the chips are down and aggression seems likely. Should it fail, potential

victims are likely to be in deep trouble if they have ignored balance-of-power considerations and placed their faith in collective security. Recognizing this, states are not likely to place their fate in the hands of other states, but will prefer instead the realist logic of self-help.

**PROBLEMS WITH THE EMPIRICAL RECORD.** The historical record provides little support for collective security, a point acknowledged by the theory's proponents. The great powers have seriously considered implementing collective security three times in this century: after both World Wars, and after the Cold War. The League of Nations, which was established after World War I, was a serious attempt to make collective security work.\(^{110}\) It had some minor successes during the 1920s. For example, League mediation resolved the Aaland Islands dispute between Finland and Sweden in 1920, and pressure from the League forced Greek, Italian, and Yugoslav troops out of Albania one year later. The League was much less successful in handling several other conflicts during the 1920s, however: it did not prevent or stop the Greco-Turkish War of 1920–22, or the Russo-Polish War of 1920, and France refused to allow the League to consider its occupation of the Ruhr in January 1923, going so far as to threaten withdrawal from the League if it intervened in the crisis. The League had a mixed record during the 1920s, even though that decade was relatively pacific, and no great power was then bent on aggression.

The international system became increasingly unstable during the 1930s, and the League was seriously tested on six occasions: 1) the Japanese invasion of Manchuria in 1931; 2) the Chaco War of 1932–35; 3) Japan's 1937 invasion of China; 4) Italy's aggression against Ethiopia in 1935; 5) the German occupation of the Rhineland in March 1936; and 6) the Soviet invasion of Finland in 1939. The League failed each test, and was effectively useless by the late 1930s, when the great powers were making the critical decisions that led to World War II.

The United Nations was established in the waning days of World War II to provide collective security around the globe. However, the Soviet-American competition followed on the heels of that war, and the United Nations was therefore never seriously tested as a collective security apparatus during the Cold War.\(^{111}\)

Since the Cold War ended, there has been much talk in the West about building a collective security system.\(^ {112}\) The success of the American-led coalition that pushed Iraq out of Kuwait led some experts to conclude that the UN might finally be ready to operate as a collective security institution. In Europe, experts have discussed the possibility of turning NATO, or possibly the CSCE, into a collective security system for the continent. It is too early for conclusive judgments as to whether any of these ideas about collective security will be realized. However, almost all the evidence to date

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\(^ {112}\) See the sources cited in footnote 88.
points to failure. Iraq was an unusual case, and no effort is underway to reform the UN so that it can perform true collective security missions. Moreover, the failure of the United States and its European allies either to prevent or to stop the wars in the former Yugoslavia, coupled with NATO's January 1994 decision not to expand its membership eastward, does not bode well for establishing a collective security system in post–Cold War Europe.

**Fallback Positions.** Given the limits of collective security, some of its proponents argue that two less ambitious forms of the theory might be realizable: peacekeeping and concerts. Although they are portrayed as the “budget” version of collective security, some experts think that peacekeeping and concerts might still be a powerful force for international stability.

Peacekeeping, as William Durch notes, “evolved as an alternative to the collective security that the UN was designed to provide but could not.” However, peacekeeping is not a watered-down version of collective security. It is, instead, a much less ambitious alternative strategy for promoting stability. Peacekeeping entails third party intervention in minor-power civil wars or disputes between minor powers, for the purpose of either preventing war from breaking out or stopping it once it has begun. This intervention can only be accomplished with the consent of the disputants, and third parties cannot use force to affect the behavior of the parties in dispute. Peacekeeping operations must be “expressly non-threatening and impartial.” In essence, peacekeeping is mainly useful for helping implement cease-fires in wars involving minor powers. However, the UN’s record in performing even that quite limited task is at best mixed. Peacekeeping has no role to play in disputes between great powers. Moreover, it forbids the use of coercion, which is essential to a collective security system. Its mission is a far cry from the ambitious goals of collective security. Peacekeeping by the UN or

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114. There is still discussion about extending NATO eastward to include Poland, Hungary, and the two Czechoslovakian remnant states. Russia is deeply opposed to such a move, however, and therefore NATO is not likely to expand eastward in any meaningful way. Regardless, even if those four states joined NATO, the remnant states of the former Soviet Union would still be excluded, and their inclusion would be necessary to transform NATO into an effective collective security system for Europe. For an argument that NATO should not be transformed into a collective security system, see Glaser, “Why NATO is Still Best,” pp. 26–33.


by regional organizations like the Organization of African Unity (OAU) can enhance the prospects for world peace only on the margins.\textsuperscript{118}

Concerts are sometimes described as an “attenuated form of collective security,” or a “reasonable hybrid version of collective security.”\textsuperscript{119} Charles and Clifford Kupchan maintain that “collective security organizations can take many different institutional forms along a continuum ranging from ideal collective security to concerts.”\textsuperscript{120} However, the claim that concerts are a less ambitious version of collective security is incorrect.\textsuperscript{121} Concerts essentially reflect the balance of power, and are thus largely consistent with realism, whereas collective security, as explained above, is a fundamentally anti-realist theory. Concerts and collective security systems, therefore, reflect different and ultimately incompatible logics. As Quincy Wright reminds us, “The fundamental assumptions of the two systems are different. A government cannot at the same time behave according to the Machiavellian assumptions of the balance of power and the Wilsonian assumptions of international organization.”\textsuperscript{122}

A concert is an arrangement in which great powers that have no incentive to challenge each other militarily agree on a set of rules to coordinate their actions with each other, as well as with the minor powers in the system, often in the establishment of spheres of influence. A concert is a great power condominium that reflects the underlying balance of power among its members. The coordinated balancing that takes place inside a concert does not violate great power self-interest. In fact, when those great powers have a dispute, self-interest determines each side’s policy and the concert may collapse as a result.

Concerts are most likely to emerge in the wake of great power wars in which a potential hegemon has been defeated, and power is distributed roughly equally among the victors.\textsuperscript{123} Four factors account for this phenomenon. First, the great powers would not have much to gain militarily by attacking each other, given the rough balance of

\begin{thebibliography}{99}
\bibitem{119} Kupchan and Kupchan, “Concerts and Collective Security,” p. 120; Betts, “Systems for Peace or Causes of War?” p. 27. Also see Downs, Collective Security beyond the Cold War.
\bibitem{120} Kupchan and Kupchan, “Concerts and Collective Security,” p. 119.
\bibitem{121} I cannot find evidence that Woodrow Wilson, Inis Claude, or Arnold Wolfers considered concerts to be a limited form of collective security. It appears that the first serious efforts to link collective security with concerts were made in post-Cold War writings on collective security, especially Kupchan and Kupchan, “Concerts and Collective Security.”
\bibitem{122} Quincy Wright, A Study Of War, Vol. 2 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1942), p. 781. Charles Lipson provides an example of how institutionalists try to combine these two incompatible theories. He writes: “Thus, the [post-1815] Concert is a kind of beacon to advocates of collective security . . . not only because it succeeded but because it did so . . . without transforming the self-interested behavior of states.” Lipson, “Future of Collective Security,” p. 119. However, a system based on the self-interested behavior of states is antithetical to collective security, and therefore, it is difficult to understand how such a system could be considered a “kind of beacon to advocates of collective security.” For another example of this problem, see Kupchan and Kupchan, “Concerts and Collective Security,” p. 116.
\end{thebibliography}
power among them. Second, the victorious powers are likely to have a significant interest in maintaining the status quo, mainly because they are in control and the potential hegemon has been subdued. Third, hegemonic wars are very costly, so the great powers are likely to be war-weary, and deeply interested in avoiding another costly war. Fourth, the victorious great powers worked together to win the war, so the notion of collective action is likely to appeal to them, and carry over into the early postwar years.

Concerts usually last only a few years. The balance of power changes. Defeated powers rise from the ashes. Victorious powers squabble among themselves, especially about how to deal with minor powers. States become less sensitive to the costs of war as time passes.

The Concert of Europe, which was established after Napoleonic France had finally been subdued, is the only case of a successful concert.¹²⁴ Not surprisingly, it is sometimes held up as a model for the post–Cold War world. The Concert worked fairly well from 1815 to 1823, although the great powers did occasionally clash over their dealings with minor powers. After 1823, however, the Concert was unable to function effectively as a coordinating device for the great powers. “The concert existed in an abortive form” until its final collapse as the Crimean War began in 1854.¹²⁵ During its heyday, the Concert of Europe reflected the balance of power; states were not compelled to behave in ways that weakened their relative power position. “Maintaining a balance of power,” as Richard Betts notes, “remained an important object of the nineteenth-century Concert regime.”¹²⁶

In sum, the theory of collective security directly addresses the issue of how to push states away from war and promote peace, and it recognizes that military power plays a central role in international politics. But the theory has several important flaws. It is built on the foundational norm that states should trust each other, but it does not satisfactorily explain how this is possible in an anarchic world where states have military power and uncertain intentions. Furthermore, the historical record provides little support for the theory. The single case of an operative collective security system was the League of Nations, and it was a spectacular failure. Although peacekeeping and concerts are sometimes described as limited but promising versions of collective security, they are of marginal value in promoting peace. Moreover, both peacekeeping

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¹²⁵. The phrase is from Gulick, Europe’s Classical Balance of Power, p. 22.

and concerts work according to different logics than collective security. In fact, concerts, like alliances, basically reflect the balance of power, and are thus consistent with a realist view of institutions.

CRITICAL THEORY

Critical theorists directly address the question of how to bring about peace, and they make bold claims about the prospects for changing state behavior. Specifically, they aim to transform the international system into a “world society,” where states are guided by “norms of trust and sharing.” Their goal is to relegate security competition and war to the scrap heap of history, and create instead a genuine “peace system.”

Critical theorists take ideas very seriously. In fact, they believe that discourse, or how we think and talk about the world, largely shapes practice. Roughly put, ideas are the

127. Critical theory is an approach to studying the human condition that is not tied to a particular discipline. In fact, critical theory was well-developed and employed widely in other disciplines before it began to penetrate the international relations field in the early 1980s. This article does not focus on critical theory per se, but examines the scholarly literature where critical theory is applied to international relations. I treat those works as a coherent whole, although there are differences, especially of emphasis, among them. For a general discussion of critical theory, see David Held, Introduction to Critical Theory: Horkheimer to Habermas (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980); and Pauline M. Rosenau, Post-Modernism And The Social Sciences: Insights, Inroads, and Intrusions (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1992). Also see Pauline Rosenau, “Once Again Into the Fray: International Relations Confronts the Humanities,” Millennium: Journal of International Studies, Vol. 19, No. 1 (Spring 1990), pp. 83–110.


129. The quotations in this paragraph are from Ashley, “Poverty of Neorealism,” p. 285; and Wendt, “Anarchy Is What States Make Of It,” p. 431.
driving force of history. Furthermore, they recognize that realism has long been the dominant theory of international politics, and therefore, according to their account of reality, has had substantial influence on state behavior. But critical theorists intend to change that situation by challenging realism and undermining it. Richard Ashley graphically describes their intentions: “Let us then play havoc with neorealist concepts and claims. Let us neither admire nor ignore the orrery of errors, but let us instead fracture the orbs, crack them open, crack them and see what possibilities they have enclosed. And then, when we are done, let us not cast away the residue. Let us instead sweep it into a jar, shine up the glass, and place it high on the bookshelf with other specimens of past mistakes.”130 With realism shattered, the way would presumably be open to a more peaceful world.

Critical theory is well-suited for challenging realism because critical theory is, by its very nature, concerned with criticizing “hegemonic” ideas like realism, not laying out alternative futures. The central aim is “to seek out the contradictions within the existing order, since it is from these contradictions that change could emerge.”131 It is called “critical” theory for good reason. Very significantly, however, critical theory per se has little to say about the future shape of international politics. In fact, critical theory emphasizes that, “It is impossible to predict the future.”132 Robert Cox explains this point: “Critical awareness of potentiality for change must be distinguished from utopian planning, i.e., the laying out of the design of a future society that is to be the end goal of change. Critical understanding focuses on the process of change rather than on its ends; it concentrates on the possibilities of launching a social movement rather than on what that movement might achieve.”133

Nevertheless, international relations scholars who use critical theory to challenge and subvert realism certainly expect to create a more harmonious and peaceful international system. But the theory itself says little about either the desirability or feasibility of achieving that particular end.

CAUSAL LOGIC. Institutions are at the core of critical theory, as its central aim is to alter the constitutive and regulative norms of the international system so that states stop thinking and acting according to realism. Specifically, critical theorists hope to create “pluralistic security communities,” where states behave according to the same norms or institutions that underpin collective security.134 States would renounce the use...
of military force, and there would instead be “a generally shared expectation of peaceful change.” Furthermore, states would “identify positively with one another so that the security of each is perceived as the responsibility of all.” States would not think in terms of self-help or self-interest, but would instead define their interests in terms of the international community. In this new world, “national interests are international interests.”

Critical theorists have a more ambitious agenda than proponents of collective security. Critical theorists aim to create a world in which all states consider war an unacceptable practice, and are not likely to change their minds about the matter. There do not appear to be any troublemaker states in a pluralistic security community, as there might be in a collective security system. In fact, military power seems to be largely irrelevant in the critical theorists’ post-realist world, which has the earmarks of a true “peace system.”

For critical theorists, the key to achieving a “postmodern international system” is to alter state identity radically, or more specifically, to transform how states think about themselves and their relationship with other states. In the jargon of the theory, “intersubjective understandings and expectations” matter greatly. In practice, this means that states must stop thinking of themselves as solitary egoists, and instead develop a powerful communitarian ethos. Critical theorists aim to create an international system characterized not by anarchy, but by community. States must stop thinking of themselves as separate and exclusive—i.e., sovereign—actors, and instead see themselves as mutually conditioned parts of a larger whole. States, or more precisely, their inhabitants and leaders, should be made to care about concepts like “rectitude,” “rights,” and “obligations.” In short, they should have a powerful sense of responsibility to the broader international community.


137. Ibid.

138. This outcome is fully consistent with Deutsch’s definition of a pluralistic security community: “there is real assurance that the members of that community will not fight each other physically, but will settle their disputes in some other way. If the entire world were integrated as a security community, wars would be automatically eliminated.” Deutsch, Political Community, p. 5.


142. In a recent article, Alexander Wendt discusses the “emergence of ‘international states,’ which would constitute a structural transformation of the Westphalian states system.” Wendt, “Collective Identity Formation,” p. 385.
A realist might argue that this goal is desirable in principle, but not realizable in practice, because the structure of the international system forces states to behave as egoists. Anarchy, offensive capabilities, and uncertain intentions combine to leave states with little choice but to compete aggressively with each other. For realists, trying to infuse states with communitarian norms is a hopeless cause.

Critical theory, however, directly challenges the realist claim that structural factors are the main determinants of state behavior. In contrast to realism, critical theory assumes that ideas and discourse are the driving forces that shape the world, although it recognizes that structural factors have some, albeit minor, influence. How individuals think about and talk about the world matters greatly for determining how states act in the international system. Ideas matter so much, according to critical theorists, because the world is socially constructed by individual human beings whose behavior is mediated by their thoughts; these thoughts, in turn, are shared by the members of a larger culture. Individuals bear responsibility for shaping the world they inhabit. The world around them is not a given that forces itself upon them. On the contrary, critical theorists argue that ideational forces or “institutions often can change environments.”

Markus Fischer sums up this crucial point: “In essence, critical theory holds that social reality is constituted by intersubjective consciousness based on language and that human beings are free to change their world by a collective act of will.”

Robert Cox’s description of the state illustrates how this process of thinking about the world determines how it is structured. “The state,” he writes, “has no physical existence, like a building or a lamp-post; but it is nevertheless a real entity. It is a real entity because everyone acts as though it were.” Alexander Wendt’s discussion of anarchy provides another good example: “Structure,” he writes, “has no existence or causal powers apart from process.” States, in fact, can think about anarchy in a number of different ways. “Anarchy is what states make of it.” Moreover, “self-help and power politics are institutions . . . not essential features of anarchy.”

This discussion of how critical theorists think about the state and anarchy points up the fact that realism and critical theory have fundamentally different epistemologies.

143. It is important to emphasize that critical theorists do not make a case for pure idealism, where realist structure has little bearing on state behavior. Their argument is much more sophisticated, as they maintain that structure and discourse are inextricably linked together and constantly interact in a dialectical fashion. Structure, they emphasize, both enables and constrains individual behavior. Nevertheless, the key point for critical theorists is that structure is ultimately shaped and reshaped by discourse. In other words, structure may shape our thinking about the world, but structure is ultimately shaped by our discourse. Structure is not an independent material force that shapes how we think and talk about the world. Social reality, in the end, is ultimately a construction of our minds.


and ontologies, which are the most basic levels at which theories can be compared.\footnote{See Cox, “Post-Hegemonic Conceptualization,” pp. 132–139; Kratochwil and Ruggie, “International Organization,” pp. 763–775; Yosef Lapid, “The Third Debate: On the Prospects of International Theory in a Post-Positivist Era,” \textit{International Studies Quarterly}, Vol. 33, No. 3 (September 1989), pp. 235–254; Wendt, “The Agent-Structure Problem,” pp. 335–370.} Realists maintain that there is an objective and knowable world, which is separate from the observing individual. Critical theorists, on the other hand, “see subject and object in the historical world as a reciprocally interrelated whole,” and they deny the possibility of objective knowledge.\footnote{Cox, “Post-Hegemonic Conceptualization,” p. 135.} Where realists see a fixed and knowable world, critical theorists see the possibility of endless interpretations of the world before them. For critical theorists, “there are no constants, no fixed meanings, no secure grounds, no profound secrets, no final structures or limits of history . . . there is only interpretation. . . . History itself is grasped as a series of interpretations imposed upon interpretation—none primary, all arbitrary.”\footnote{Ashley, “Geopolitics of Geopolitical Space,” pp. 408–409.}

Nevertheless, critical theorists readily acknowledge that realism has been the dominant interpretation of international politics for almost seven hundred years. “Realism is a name for a discourse of power and rule in modern global life.”\footnote{Ibid., p. 422.} Still, critical theory allows for change, and there is no reason, according to the theory anyway, why a communitarian discourse of peace and harmony cannot supplant the realist discourse of security competition and war. In fact, change is always possible with critical theory because it allows for an unlimited number of discourses, and it makes no judgment about the merit or staying power of any particular one. Also, critical theory makes no judgment about whether human beings are “hard-wired” to be good or bad, but instead treats people as infinitely changeable. The key to how they think and behave is the particular “software program” that individuals carry around in their heads, and those can be changed. In essence, critical theorists hope to replace the widely used realist software package with new software that emphasizes communitarian norms. Once that switch has been made, states will cooperate with each other and world politics will be more peaceful.

Most critical theorists do not see ideas and discourses forming at the grass roots and then percolating up to the elites of society. Rather, theirs is a top-down theory, whereby elites play the key role in transforming language and discourse about international relations. Experts, especially scholars, determine the flow of ideas about world politics. It is especially useful, however, if this intellectual vanguard consists of individuals from different states. These transnational elites, which are sometimes referred to as “epistemic communities,” are well-suited for formulating and spreading the communitarian ideals that critical theorists hope will replace realism.\footnote{See Adler, “Arms Control”; and Peter M. Haas, ed., \textit{Knowledge, Power, and International Policy Coordination}, special issue of \textit{International Organization}, Vol. 46, No. 1 (Winter 1992).}

Finally, it is worth noting that critical theorists are likely to be quite intolerant of other discourses about international politics, especially realism.\footnote{For example, see Ashley, “Poverty of Neorealism,” \textit{passim}.} Four factors combine.
to account for this situation. The theory is based on the belief that ideas matter greatly for shaping international politics. Also, it recognizes that particular theories triumph in the marketplace of ideas, and the result is hegemonic discourse. Moreover, although the theory itself does not distinguish between good and bad ideas, critical theorists themselves certainly make that distinction. Furthermore, critical theorists have no historical guarantee that hegemonic discourse will move toward ideas about world politics that they consider sound. Realism, for example, has been the dominant discourse in the international arena for many centuries. Therefore, it makes sense for critical theorists to try to eliminate ideas they do not like, thus maximizing the prospects that their favorite discourse will triumph. Realist thinking, in this view, is not only dangerous, but is the main obstacle critical theorists face in their effort to establish a new and more peaceful hegemonic discourse.154

**FLAWS IN THE CAUSAL LOGIC.** The main goal of critical theorists is to change state behavior in fundamental ways, to move beyond a world of security competition and war and establish a pluralistic security community. However, their explanation of how change occurs is at best incomplete, and at worst, internally contradictory.155

Critical theory maintains that state behavior changes when discourse changes. But that argument leaves open the obvious and crucially important question: what determines why some discourses become dominant and others lose out in the marketplace of ideas? What is the mechanism that governs the rise and fall of discourses? This general question, in turn, leads to three more specific questions: 1) Why has realism been the hegemonic discourse in world politics for so long? 2) Why is the time ripe for its unseating? 3) Why is realism likely to be replaced by a more peaceful communitarian discourse?

Critical theory provides few insights on why discourses rise and fall. Thomas Risse-Kappen writes, “Research on . . . ‘epistemic communities’ of knowledge-based transnational networks has failed so far to specify the conditions under which specific ideas are selected and influence policies while others fall by the wayside.”156 Not surprisingly, critical theorists say little about why realism has been the dominant discourse, and why its foundations are now so shaky. They certainly do not offer a well-defined argument that deals with this important issue. Therefore, it is difficult to judge the fate of realism through the lens of critical theory.

Nevertheless, critical theorists occasionally point to particular factors that might lead to changes in international relations discourse. In such cases, however, they usually end up arguing that changes in the material world drive changes in discourse. For example, when Ashley makes surmises about the future of realism, he claims that “a crucial issue is whether or not changing historical conditions have disabled longstanding realist

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154. Lebow, for example, writes that “Contemporary realists . . . theories and some of the policy recommendations based on them may now stand in the way of the better world we all seek.” Lebow, “The Long Peace,” p. 277.

155. My thinking on this matter has been markedly influenced by Hein Goemans.

rituals of power." Specifically, he asks whether "developments in late capitalist society," like the "fiscal crisis of the state," and the "internationalization of capital," coupled with "the presence of vastly destructive and highly automated nuclear arsenals [has] de-
prived statesmen of the latitude for competent performance of realist rituals of
power?" 157 Similarly, Cox argues that fundamental change occurs when there is a "disjuncture" between "the stock of ideas people have about the nature of the world and the practical problems that challenge them." He then writes, "Some of us think the erstwhile dominant mental construct of neorealism is inadequate to confront the chal-
lenge of global politics today." 158

It would be understandable if realists made such arguments, since they believe there is an objective reality that largely determines which discourse will be dominant. Critical theorists, however, emphasize that the world is socially constructed, and not shaped in fundamental ways by objective factors. Anarchy, after all, is what we make of it. Yet when critical theorists attempt to explain why realism may be losing its hegemonic position, they too point to objective factors as the ultimate cause of change. Discourse, so it appears, turns out not to be determinative, but mainly a reflection of developments in the objective world. In short, it seems that when critical theorists who study inter-
national politics offer glimpses of their thinking about the causes of change in the real world, they make arguments that directly contradict their own theory, but which appear to be compatible with the theory they are challenging. 159

There is another problem with the application of critical theory to international relations. Although critical theorists hope to replace realism with a discourse that emphasizes harmony and peace, critical theory per se emphasizes that it is impossible to know the future. Critical theory, according to its own logic, can be used to undermine realism and produce change, but it cannot serve as the basis for predicting which discourse will replace realism, because the theory says little about the direction change takes. In fact, Cox argues that although "utopian expectations may be an element in stimulating people to act . . . such expectations are almost never realized in practice." 160

159. Cox is apparently aware of this problem. After spending eleven pages outlining various objective factors that might shape a new world order, he notes, "It would, of course, be logically inadmissible, as well as imprudent, to base predictions of future world order upon the foregoing considerations." Cox, "Social Forces," p. 149, emphasis added. Nevertheless, he then emphasizes in the next few sentences how important those objective considerations are for understanding future world order prospects. He writes: "Their utility is rather in drawing attention to factors which could incline an emerging world order in one direction or another. The social forces generated by changing production processes are the starting point for thinking about possible futures. These forces may combine in different configurations, and as an exercise one could consider the hypothetical configurations most likely to lead to three different outcomes as to the future of the state system. The focus on these three outcomes is not, of course, to imply that no other outcomes or configurations of social forces are possible." In other words, Cox does rely heavily on objective factors to explain possible future world orders.
160. Cox, Production, Power, And World Order, p. 393.
Thus, in a sense, the communitarian discourse championed by critical theorists is wishful thinking, not an outcome linked to the theory itself. Indeed, critical theory cannot guarantee that the new discourse will not be more malignant than the discourse it replaces. Nothing in the theory guarantees, for example, that a fascist discourse far more violent than realism will not emerge as the new hegemonic discourse.

PROBLEMS WITH THE EMPIRICAL RECORD. Critical theorists have offered little empirical support for their theory.\(^1\) It is still possible to sketch the broad outlines of their account of the past. They appear to concede that realism was the dominant discourse from about the start of the late medieval period in 1300 to at least 1989, and that states and other political entities behaved according to realist dictates during these seven centuries. However, some critical theorists suggest that both the discourse and practice of international politics during the preceding five centuries of the feudal era or central medieval period (800–1300) was not dominated by realism and, therefore, cannot be explained by it.\(^2\) They believe that European political units of the feudal era did not think and therefore did not act in the exclusive and selfish manner assumed by realism, but instead adopted a more communitarian discourse, which guided their actions. Power politics, so the argument goes, had little relevance in these five hundred years.

Furthermore, most critical theorists see the end of the Cold War as an important watershed in world politics. A few go so far as to argue that “the revolutions of 1989 transformed the international system by changing the rules governing superpower conflict and, thereby, the norms underpinning the international system.”\(^3\) Realism, they claim, is no longer the hegemonic discourse. “The end of the Cold War . . . undermined neorealist theory.”\(^4\) Other critical theorists are more tentative in their judgment about whether the end of the Cold War has led to a fundamental transformation of international politics.\(^5\) For these more cautious critical theorists, the revolutions of 1989 have created opportunities for change, but that change has not yet been realized.

Three points are in order regarding the critical theorists’ interpretation of history. First, one cannot help but be struck by the sheer continuity of realist behavior in the critical theorists’ own account of the past. Seven centuries of security competition and war represents an impressive span of time, especially when you consider the tremen-

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161. Wendt, for example, acknowledges that, “Relatively little empirical research has been explicitly informed by structuration [critical] theory, which might illustrate its implications for the explanation of state action.” Wendt, “The Agent-Structure Problem,” p. 362.


dous political and economic changes that have taken place across the world during that lengthy period. Realism is obviously a human software package with deep-seated appeal, although critical theorists do not explain its attraction.

Second, a close look at the international politics of the feudal era reveals scant support for the claims of critical theorists. Markus Fischer has done a detailed study of that period, and he finds “that feudal discourse was indeed distinct, prescribing unity, functional cooperation, sharing, and lawfulness.”166 More importantly, however, he also finds “that while feudal actors observed these norms for the most part on the level of form, they in essence behaved like modern states.” Specifically, they “strive for exclusive territorial control, protected themselves by military means, subjugated each other, balanced against power, formed alliances and spheres of influence, and resolved their conflicts by the use and threat of force.”167 Realism, not critical theory, appears best to explain international politics in the five centuries of the feudal era.

Third, there are good reasons to doubt that the demise of the Cold War means that the millennium is here. It is true that the great powers have been rather tame in their behavior towards each other over the past five years. But that is usually the case after great-power wars. Moreover, although the Cold War ended in 1989, the Cold War order that it spawned is taking much longer to collapse, which makes it difficult to determine what kind of order or disorder will replace it. For example, Russian troops remained in Germany until mid-1994, seriously impinging on German sovereignty, and the United States still maintains a substantial military presence in Germany. Five years is much too short a period to determine whether international relations has been fundamentally transformed by the end of the Cold War, especially given that the “old” order of realist discourse has been in place for at least twelve centuries.

A close look at the sources of this purported revolutionary change in world politics provides further cause for skepticism. For critical theorists, “the Cold War was fundamentally a discursive, not a material, structure.”168 Thus, if the United States and the Soviet Union had decided earlier in the Cold War that they were no longer enemies, it would have been over sooner.169 Mikhail Gorbachev, critical theorists argue, played the central role in ending the Cold War. He challenged traditional Soviet thinking about national security, and championed ideas about international security that sounded like they had been scripted by critical theorists.170 In fact, critical theorists argue that Gorbachev’s “new thinking” was shaped by a “transnational liberal internationalist community [epistemic community] comprising the U.S. arms control community, Western European scholars and center-left policy makers, as well as Soviet instituchiks.”171 These new ideas led Gorbachev to end the Soviet Union’s “imperial relationship with

169. This sentence is a paraphrase of Wendt, “Anarchy Is What States Make of It,” p. 397.
Eastern Europe," which led to a fundamental change in "the norms of bloc politics and thereby the rules governing superpower relations." In essence, "the changed practices of one of the major actors . . . [had] system-wide repercussions." Both superpowers "repudiated the notion of international relations as a self-help system and . . . trans-
scended the consequences of anarchy as depicted by realism.

Gorbachev surely played the key role in ending the Cold War, but there are good reasons to doubt that his actions fundamentally transformed international politics. His decision to shut down the Soviet empire in Eastern Europe can very well be explained by realism. By the mid-1980s, the Soviet Union was suffering an economic and political crisis at home that made the costs of empire prohibitive, especially since nuclear weapons provided the Soviets with a cheap and effective means of defense. Many empires collapsed and many states broke apart before 1989, and many of them sought to give to dire necessity the appearance of virtue. But the basic nature of international politics remained unchanged. It is not clear why the collapse of the Soviet Union is a special case.

Furthermore, now that Gorbachev is out of office and has little political influence in Russia, the Russians have abandoned his "new thinking." In fact, they now have an offensively-oriented military doctrine that emphasizes first use of nuclear weapons. More importantly, since the end of 1992, the Russians have been acting like a traditional great power toward their neighbors. The former Soviet Union seems to be an arena for power politics, and Boris Yeltsin's Russia appears to be fully engaged in that enterprise.

Regarding the more modest claim that the end of the Cold War presents an opportunity to move to a world where states are guided by norms of trust and sharing, perhaps this is true. But since critical theorists acknowledge that their theory cannot predict the future, why should we believe their claim, especially when it means choosing against realism, a theory that has at least 1200 years of staying power?

Critical theorists have ambitious aims. However, critical theory also has important flaws, and therefore it will likely remain in realism's shadow. Specifically, critical theory is concerned with affecting fundamental change in state behavior, but it says little about

173. Ibid., p. 227.
how it comes about. Critical theorists do occasionally point to particular causes of change, but when they do, they make arguments that are inconsistent with the theory itself. Finally, there is little empirical evidence to support the claims of critical theorists, and much to contradict them.

Conclusion

Many policymakers as well as academics believe that institutions hold great promise for promoting international peace. This optimistic assessment of institutions is not warranted, however, mainly because the three institutionalist theories which underpin it are flawed. There are serious problems with the causal logic of each theory, and little empirical evidence for any of them. What is most impressive about institutions, in fact, is how little independent effect they seem to have had on state behavior.

We have an important paradox here: although the world does not work the way institutionalist theories say it does or should, those theories remain highly influential in both the academic and policy worlds. Given the limited impact of institutions on state behavior, one would expect considerable skepticism, even cynicism, when institutions are described as a major force for peace. Instead, they are still routinely described in promising terms by scholars and governing elites.

It is beyond the scope of this paper to attempt a detailed explanation of this paradox. Nevertheless, I would like to close with some speculative comments about this puzzle, focusing on the American context.

The attraction of institutionalist theories for both policymakers and scholars is explained, I believe, not by their intrinsic value, but by their relationship to realism, and especially to core elements of American political ideology. Realism has long been and continues to be an influential theory in the United States. Leading realist thinkers such as George Kennan and Henry Kissinger, for example, occupied key policymaking positions during the Cold War. The impact of realism in the academic world is amply demonstrated in the institutionalist literature, where discussions of realism are pervasive. Yet despite its influence, Americans who think seriously about foreign policy issues tend to dislike realism intensely, mainly because it clashes with their basic values. The theory stands opposed to how most Americans prefer to think about themselves and the wider world.


178. Summing up the autobiographical essays of 34 international relations scholars, Joseph Kruzel notes that “Hans Morgenthau is more frequently cited than any other name in these memoirs.” Joseph Kruzel, “Reflections on the Journeys,” in Joseph Kruzel and James N. Rosenau, eds., Journeys through World Politics: Autobiographical Reflections of Thirty-four Academic Travelers (Lexington, Mass.: Lexington Books, 1989), p. 505. Although “Morgenthau is often cited, many of the references in these pages are negative in tone. He seems to have inspired his critics even more than his supporters.” Ibid.

There are four principal reasons why American elites, as well as the American public, tend to regard realism with hostility. First, realism is a pessimistic theory. It depicts a world of stark and harsh competition, and it holds out little promise of making that world more benign. Realists, as Hans Morgenthau wrote, are resigned to the fact that "there is no escape from the evil of power, regardless of what one does." Such pessimism, of course, runs up against the deep-seated American belief that with time and effort, reasonable individuals can solve important social problems. Americans regard progress as both desirable and possible in politics, and they are therefore uncomfortable with realism's claim that security competition and war will persist despite our best efforts to eliminate them.

Second, realism treats war as an inevitable, and indeed sometimes necessary, form of state activity. For realists, war is an extension of politics by other means. Realists are very cautious in their prescriptions about the use of force: wars should not be fought for idealistic purposes, but instead for balance-of-power reasons. Most Americans, however, tend to think of war as a hideous enterprise that should ultimately be abolished. For the time being, however, it can only justifiably be used for lofty moral goals, like "making the world safe for democracy"; it is morally incorrect to fight wars to change or preserve the balance of power. This makes the realist conception of warfare anathema to many Americans.

Third, as an analytical matter, realism does not distinguish between "good" states and "bad" states, but essentially treats them like billiard balls of varying size. In realist theory, all states are forced to seek the same goal: maximum relative power. A purely realist interpretation of the Cold War, for example, allows for no meaningful difference in the motives behind American and Soviet behavior during that conflict. According to the theory, both sides must have been driven by concerns about the balance of power, and must have done what was necessary to try to achieve a favorable balance. Most

180. Hans J. Morgenthau, Scientific Man vs. Power Politics (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1974), p. 201. Nevertheless, Keith Shimko convincingly argues that the shift within realism, away from Morgenthau's belief that states are motivated by an unalterable will to power, and toward Waltz's view that states are motivated by the desire for security, provides "a residual, though subdued optimism, or at least a possible basis for optimism [about international politics]. The extent to which this optimism is stressed or suppressed varies, but it is there if one wants it to be." Shimko, "Realism, Neorealism, and American Liberalism," p. 297. Realists like Stephen Van Evera, for example, point out that although states operate in a dangerous world, they can take steps to dampen security competition and minimize the danger of war. See Van Evera, Causes of War.


182. It should be emphasized that many realists have strong moral preferences and are driven by deep moral convictions. Realism is not a normative theory, however, and it provides no criteria for moral judgment. Instead, realism merely seeks to explain how the world works. Virtually all realists would prefer a world without security competition and war, but they believe that goal is unrealistic given the structure of the international system. See, for example, Robert G. Gilpin, "The Richness of the Tradition of Political Realism," in Keohane, Neorealism and Its Critics, p. 321.
Americans would recoil at such a description of the Cold War, because they believe the United States was motivated by good intentions while the Soviet Union was not.183

Fourth, America has a rich history of thumbing its nose at realism. For its first 140 years of existence, geography and the British navy allowed the United States to avoid serious involvement in the power politics of Europe. America had an isolationist foreign policy for most of this period, and its rhetoric explicitly emphasized the evils of entangling alliances and balancing behavior. Even as the United States finally entered its first European war in 1917, Woodrow Wilson railed against realist thinking. America has a long tradition of anti-realist rhetoric, which continues to influence us today.

Given that realism is largely alien to American culture, there is a powerful demand in the United States for alternative ways of looking at the world, and especially for theories that square with basic American values. Institutionalist theories nicely meet these requirements, and that is the main source of their appeal to policymakers and scholars. Whatever else one might say about these theories, they have one undeniable advantage in the eyes of their supporters: they are not realism. Not only do institutionalist theories offer an alternative to realism, but they explicitly seek to undermine it. Moreover, institutionalists offer arguments that reflect basic American values. For example, they are optimistic about the possibility of greatly reducing, if not eliminating, security competition among states and creating a more peaceful world. They certainly do not accept the realist stricture that war is politics by other means. Institutionalists, in short, purvey a message that Americans long to hear.

There is, however, a downside for policymakers who rely on institutionalist theories: these theories do not accurately describe the world, hence policies based on them are bound to fail. The international system strongly shapes the behavior of states, limiting the amount of damage that false faith in institutional theories can cause. The constraints of the system notwithstanding, however, states still have considerable freedom of action, and their policy choices can succeed or fail in protecting American national interests and the interests of vulnerable people around the globe. The failure of the League of Nations to address German and Japanese aggression in the 1930s is a case in point. The failure of institutions to prevent or stop the war in Bosnia offers a more recent example. These cases illustrate that institutions have mattered rather little in the past; they also suggest that the false belief that institutions matter has mattered more, and has had pernicious effects. Unfortunately, misplaced reliance on institutional solutions is likely to lead to more failures in the future.

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183. Realism’s treatment of states as billiard balls of different sizes tends to raise the hackles of comparative politics scholars, who believe that domestic political and economic factors matter greatly for explaining foreign policy behavior.
The False Premise of Realism

John J. Mearsheimer’s latest missive in defense of the neorealist homeland targets tous les azimuts in the camp of institutionalism.¹ The other contributors to this symposium take up Mearsheimer’s treatment of the institutionalist literature. I am concerned here with the policy dimensions of his anti-institutionalist posture.

The brevity of this note permits me only to sketch out three counterpoints to Mearsheimer’s analysis. First, U.S. policymakers after World War II went out of their way to ignore the anti-institutionalism that Mearsheimer would have us adopt today. Second, had postwar U.S. policymakers accepted Mearsheimer’s views about the irrelevance of international institutions, the international security environment today would not only be different but would pose far greater challenges than it does. Third, the unfavorable view of realism which some U.S. policymakers historically have held is not a product of mushy thinking, as Mearsheimer suggests, but of their grasp of a distinctive feature of America’s geopolitical situation which continues to prevail today. These facts register poorly, if at all, on Mearsheimer’s neorealist radar screen. As a result, the analytical basis of his force de frappe against institutionalism entails serious and potentially dangerous limits as a guide for U.S. foreign policy in the post–Cold War world.

Realism and Institutions after World War II

Postwar America pursued its interests and sought to manage the changing international balance of power; that no one questions. But in doing so, U.S. policymakers also had certain institutional objectives in mind, as evidenced by their stance toward the United Nations, the creation of NATO, and European unification. And at every turn, they faced opposition for this stance from realist anti-institutionalists. I enumerate some of the highlights.

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Franklin Roosevelt’s initial concept for the organization of the postwar security order was regional: his “four policemen” scheme. But he realized that “the only appeal which would be likely to carry weight with the United States public . . . would be one based upon a world-wide conception.”² Hence, Roosevelt adopted a hybrid design for the United Nations: a collective security organization based in a concert of power, to be used by, but not against, the permanent members of the Security Council.³ To be credible, this concert-based system required an enforcement capability. “We are not thinking of a superstate with its own police force and other paraphernalia of coercive power,” Roosevelt noted not long before the Dumbarton Oaks conference, at which the major powers agreed upon the enforcement provisions of the UN charter. Instead, he said, they planned to devise a mechanism for “joint action” by national forces.⁴ George Kennan, soon to become celebrated as a realist practitioner and then serving in the Moscow embassy, urged “burying” the Dumbarton Oaks proposals. “We are badly enmeshed in our own unsound slogans,” he admonished Washington in an unsolicited cable.⁵ His advice was ignored. Once Congress approved the charter in December 1945, the major powers proceeded to negotiate hefty UN standby forces.⁶ Gradually, these talks fell victim to the emerging cold war.

The Eisenhower administration in 1956 facilitated the invention of the more modest UN collective security mechanism known as peacekeeping. The Suez crisis provided the occasion. When Israel, Britain, and France launched their coordinated attacks against Egypt, Eisenhower was furious. “All right,” he instructed his Secretary of State, John Foster Dulles, “Foster, you tell ‘em, goddamn it, we’re going to apply sanctions, we’re going to the United Nations, we’re going to do everything that there is so we can stop this thing.”⁷ Eisenhower did all of that, beginning with U.S.-sponsored UN resolutions calling for an immediate cease-fire and the withdrawal of foreign forces. Under intense U.S. pressure, Britain, France, and Israel claimed that theirs had been a police

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3. Ibid., pp. 103–105.
5. Ibid., p. 250.
6. The final U.S. proposal in mid-1947—by then probably designed to be rejected by the Soviet Union—advocated a total of 20 ground divisions; 1,250 bombers; 2,250 fighters; 3 battleships; 6 carriers; 15 cruisers; 84 destroyers; and 90 submarines. See D.W. Bowett, United Nations Forces: A Legal Study (New York: Praeger, 1964), pp. 12–18.
action, designed to safeguard the Suez Canal, and that they would be willing to turn over their policing functions to a UN force if one were constituted. The UN obliged. With U.S. prodding, Canadian Foreign Minister Lester Pearson proposed a United Nations Emergency Force (UNEF), comprising troops from ten middle-sized and smaller countries. A cease-fire and withdrawal of the invading forces was arranged. Egypt (but not Israel) agreed to accept UNEF on its territory. UNEF, which reached a strength of 6,000, supervised the cease-fire and foreign troop withdrawals, arranged to clear the Suez Canal of war-related blockage, and monitored the Israeli-Egyptian border.

Leading realists of the day objected vigorously to Eisenhower’s actions. George Kennan, by then a private citizen, charged that the administration, by opposing its allies at the UN, had allowed “the very foundations of American policy [to be] swept away, the victim of an empty legalism,” by which he meant the concept of collective security Eisenhower invoked on occasion. Hans Morgenthau, the paterfamilias of American postwar academic realists, was appalled. “Regardless of the intrinsic merits of [the allies’] military operation,” he opined, “once it was started we had a vital interest in its quick and complete success.” Arnold Wolfers supported these views. By rejecting realist precepts, however, Eisenhower enabled the UN to devise a limited but nontrivial mode of conflict containment.

International nuclear nonproliferation arrangements, also initiated by the Eisenhower administration, tell a similar story. From the outset, realists have belittled these arrangements, with some going so far as to claim that they induce a false sense of security, thereby making the world worse off. Yet, Secretary Dulles—not known as a liberal internationalist—had it right when

12. He felt that all had ended well, however, because “the three ‘aggressors’ did the exceptional thing of restoring the status quo ante despite the absence of collective military sanctions.” Arnold Wolfers, Discord and Collaboration (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1962), p. 187. Wolfers’ logic is tortuous, and it also ignores the extensive economic sanctions the United States imposed on Britain. See Diane B. Kunz, The Economic Diplomacy of the Suez Crisis (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1991).
he appealed for Senate approval of the International Atomic Energy Agency statute: "We realize that atomic energy materials and know-how will spread, Agency or no Agency. . . . But a rapid and unsupervised development of nuclear power around the world raises the specter of nuclear weapons ultimately becoming quite general, the byproduct of nuclear power plants." The actual and potential members of the nuclear club today total less than half the number that experts and government officials predicted in the late 1950s and early 1960s. Indeed, in recent years more countries have left the list of problem cases—including Argentina, Brazil, and South Africa—than have joined it. "Virtually every nonproliferation initiative has turned out to be much more effective than expected when it was proposed or designed, and nonproliferation success has been cheaper than expected."

In creating NATO, of all the means available to President Truman for defending Europe from the Soviet threat—unilateral U.S. security guarantees to one, several, or an organization of European states; one or more U.S. bilateral alliances with European states; or a "dumbbell" model linking North American and European alliances—Truman chose the institutional form that most closely approximated collective security commitments. "The signing of the NATO Alliance," Michael Howard has written, "provided a sense that now at last all were for one and one was for all," which is what the concept of collective security has traditionally meant. NATO promised its members equal and unqualified protection under a common security umbrella. At the same time, all members pledged to undertake those measures, including the use of armed force, that they deemed necessary to maintain or restore the security of the collectivity. After the Korean War, an integrated command structure was established within NATO to help execute these pledges.

Leading realists opposed outright this very feature of NATO, which arguably accounts for its continued efficacy and attraction today. Kennan, as Director of Policy Planning in the State Department, initially felt that no U.S. military commitments to Europe were necessary. But if they had to be made, Kennan preferred what he called a “particularized” rather than a “legalistic-moralistic” form: such commitments should be specific in nature, limited in time, and contingent on discrete exigencies.\textsuperscript{18} For Kennan, Article 5 of the North Atlantic Treaty exhibited anything but those attributes. Even though Kennan eventually acquiesced in the creation of NATO, he viewed its “legalistic-moralistic” commitments as barely better than the UN in this regard. In the political arena, Republican Senator Robert A. Taft of Ohio, considered to be “the most powerful single legislator of his day,”\textsuperscript{19} lobbied and voted against the North Atlantic Treaty despite being an ardent anticommunist because, as Taft explained: “I do not like the obligation written into the pact which binds us for twenty years to come to the defense of any country, no matter by whom it is attacked and even though the aggressor may be another member of the pact.”\textsuperscript{20}

Finally, in its posture toward European unification the United States deviated sharply from the core realist maxim that, because today’s ally could be tomorrow’s adversary, one’s ally should not benefit from an alliance relationship so much that it could become a serious competitor another day. In stark contrast, the United States strongly supported European unification. “It was the first time a major power fostered unity rather than discord among nations in a part of the world where it had significant interests.”\textsuperscript{21} Clearly, as with NATO, this “first” would not have occurred in the absence of the Soviet threat. But equally clear, to all but realists it seems, is that the United States promoted European unification through institutional means that promised to transform the traditional conduct of European international politics, not merely in economic, but also in security affairs.


\textsuperscript{19} Kennan later recalled favoring a “dumbbell” arrangement, with the European countries cooperating on one side, the United States and Canada on the other, but in which they would have been linked, \textit{not} by treaty and a permanent U.S. troop presence in Europe, but merely by a U.S.-Canadian guarantee of assistance in case of Soviet attack. George F. Kennan, \textit{Memoirs: 1925–1950} (Boston: Little, Brown, 1967), pp. 406–407.


\textsuperscript{21} Robert A. Taft, \textit{A Foreign Policy for Americans} (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1951), pp. 88–89.

General Eisenhower was an early and ardent advocate of a European Defense Community (EDC), and he helped persuade President Truman of its desirability. As president, Eisenhower pushed actively for its establishment: “Only in collective security,” he wrote to his friend General Alfred Gruenther during discussions of the EDC, is there “any future for the free world.”

The Joint Chiefs of Staff came to accept EDC, as did Congress, which proposed to make military aid to EDC countries conditional on the adoption of the treaty. Secretary Dulles told the North Atlantic Council in 1953 that if Europe failed to ratify EDC, “grave doubts” would arise in the United States concerning the future of European security, and America would be obliged to undertake an “agonizing reappraisal” of its role in Europe. The respected realist analyst Robert Osgood was still disturbed by this affair a decade later: “Both sides of the argument displayed almost total indifference to the strategic military considerations,” he noted sternly. “Indeed, in the eyes of its principal architects, EDC became as important as an instrument of Franco-German reconciliation as of military security.”

But that, of course, was the point of U.S. support for EDC, as Franco-German reconciliation was the key to European unification.

After the EDC’s failure, the Eisenhower administration turned its attention to nuclear energy as a vehicle for European security integration. It facilitated the creation of EURATOM. It planned ways of sharing nuclear weapons with its NATO allies. And it even explored endowing them with an independent nuclear deterrent. Realists undoubtedly can devise rationalizations of these moves after the fact, but I know of no realist argument that anticipated or recommended them prior to their occurrence.

Roads Not Taken

The preceding discussion suggests that the world today would be significantly different had postwar U.S. policymakers adopted the realists’ anti-institutionalist views. NATO almost certainly would not have embodied indivisible

security guarantees, but would instead have taken the form of specific and contingent alliance commitments.\textsuperscript{27} As such, it might not have lasted as long as the Cold War did and, if it had, in all likelihood it then would have gone the way of the Warsaw Treaty Organization.\textsuperscript{28} Attempts to achieve European unification might well have succumbed to the collective action problems realists and rationalists repeatedly stress, leaving us today with far more competitive European policies in places like ex-Yugoslavia and the former Soviet Union, quite probably considerable instability in the heart of Europe itself, and no 35,000-strong Eurocorps becoming operational in the autumn of 1995. Finally, however weak the UN may be today, even marginal contributions in peacekeeping and nonproliferation usually are better, and in the long run often less costly, than none.

\textit{Realism and U.S. Policymakers}

Mearsheimer states that “American elites, as well as the American public, tend to regard realism with hostility” (p. 48). The reason, he believes, has to do with values or idealism. This assessment misses the mark. It may accurately characterize Woodrow Wilson, who claimed to find power politics abhorrent, though he exhibited no problem practicing it.\textsuperscript{29} But it does not capture the views of Roosevelt, Truman, Eisenhower, or Dulles. Their attitudes toward the institutional dimensions of security policy had less to do with mushy thinking than with geopolitical realities. Curiously, realism’s blinders on this issue have caused it to overlook its own explanatory terrain.

America is not now and has never been a relative equal on a continent densely populated by potential adversaries, the European context for which balance-of-power theory and \textit{raison d’état} were first invented. The traditional

\textsuperscript{27} Steve Weber tries carefully to generate “predictions” from today’s realist and rationalist theories about NATO’s form, based on how these theories calculate states’ interests and strategies, and taking into account the facts as they were known to policymakers in 1949. He finds it difficult if not impossible to conjure up NATO’s indivisible security guarantees within either theoretical model. See Weber, “Shaping the Postwar Balance of Power,” pp. 235–238.

\textsuperscript{28} For numerous reasons, ranging from differential changes in external threat perception to shifts in domestic politics or simple transaction costs, country-by-country alliance commitments among a large number of states are intrinsically harder to sustain over time than is one single set of generalized commitments; see John Gerard Ruggie, “Multilateralism: The Anatomy of an Institution,” in Ruggie, \textit{Multilateralism Matters}, esp. pp. 31–35. In addition to having been imposed by Moscow, the Warsaw Pact was, of course, based on dyadic ties to Moscow.

\textsuperscript{29} No American president before or since used force more often than Wilson. See Frederick C. Calhoun, \textit{Power and Principle: Armed Intervention in Wilsonian Foreign Policy} (Kent, Ohio: Kent State University Press, 1986), p. 2.
American aversion to "entangling alliances" is easily understood as a by-product of that geopolitical situation. But it has complicated the task of achieving sustained U.S. involvement for the sake of a stable international security order. Narrowly defined interest calculations would, more often than not, indicate that a crisis in some faraway place was not a vital U.S. concern, until it was too late to avoid the worst of outcomes, including two world wars. And yet the United States could hardly involve itself everywhere all the time.

This foreign policy dilemma has existed for as long as America has been a world power. Teddy Roosevelt employed a mixture of piety, patriotism, and jingoism on behalf of a campaign by "civilized and orderly powers to insist on the proper policing of the world." Wilson hoped to build on America's aversion to entangling alliances a U.S. commitment to what he described as "a universal alliance." Franklin Roosevelt sought to "make Wilsonianism practical" by establishing a universal institutional tripwire but embedding it in a major power concert. Thereafter, the problem was attenuated by the Soviet military threat and communist ideological challenge. But even then, and true to form, Truman and Eisenhower agreed to involve the United States militarily in the defense of Europe only within institutional frameworks that promised to transform the organization of European security relations in the direction of a security community, in which the likelihood of future wars (and the necessity for U.S. involvement) would be reduced. Ideas, reflecting a fundamental geopolitical fact, not idealism, were at play in these endeavors.

Ironically, Henry Kissinger, the canonical figure in the American pantheon of practical realists, has now discovered this dilemma. Without the driving force of the Cold War, Kissinger asks, what will ensure the American involvement that is necessary to create and sustain a stable international security order? A la carte interest calculations, he concedes, are unlikely to suffice. "In traveling along the road to world order for the third time in the modern era," Kissinger concludes, U.S. power will need to be coupled with an affirmative vision that rises above mere necessity: "a vision of a future that cannot be

demonstrated when it is put forward and judgments about the relationship between hope and possibility that are, in their essence, conjectural.\textsuperscript{35}

\textit{Realism and the Future}

Realism got a great many things right about the postwar world, but it has failed to grasp the subtle yet integral role of institutionalist objectives in U.S. foreign policy, including security policy. As a result, realism—especially the hyperrealist variant represented by Mearsheimer—is not only wanting but potentially dangerous as a guide to the post–Cold War world. That realism missed the mark on core elements of institutionalism in the structurally far simpler postwar era is \textit{prima facie} grounds for doubting that it will do better—and strong reason to believe that it will do worse—in the more complex and ambiguous international security environment ahead.

Moreover, as the other contributors to this symposium demonstrate, neorealism also misconstrues key theoretical aspects of institutionalism. And yet, in the policy arena its flawed rationale is invoked routinely to legitimate such serious anti-institutionalist assaults as the national security provisions of the new Republican majority’s “Contract With America” (H.R. 7 and the Senate’s “Peace Powers Act”), which would virtually foreclose timely and effective U.S. participation in UN peacekeeping operations, and constrain the constitutional prerogatives of the president as commander-in-chief if these were to be exercised through UN means. The echoes of 1919, when unilateralists riding on realist rhetoric joined with a rump of ever-present irreconcilables to defeat Wilson’s quest to take the United States into the League of Nations, and thus ushered in an era of costly isolationism, are ominous.

\textsuperscript{35} Ibid., pp. 833–834.
The Struggle for Autonomy: A Realist Structural Theory of International Relations

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Structural theories have advanced our understanding of International Relations (IR). This article contends that the two leading structural realist frameworks, however, rely too heavily on an ascribed unit motivation and core dynamic that are not derived from structure. This ultimately weakens both theories’ explanatory potential. This article offers a refinement called structural autonomy that explains IR through a focus on a self-reliant pursuit of autonomy and the particular distribution of capabilities found across the system.

This article offers a new variant to the two leading structural realist frameworks associated most prominently with the thinking of Kenneth Waltz (1979) and John Mearsheimer (2001). This refinement of structural realism is based on the assessment that both defensive and offensive realism, while advancing structural reasoning, rely too heavily on an ascribed unit level motivation that is not derived from structure. Both Waltz and Mearsheimer were correct to orient the study of International Relations (IR) toward the importance of structural analysis, but neither has delivered fully on the explanatory promise that structuralism offers.1 Thus, unlike most critical interpretations that seek full rejection of defensive and offensive realism, this article seeks to build upon their strengths and refine their weaknesses within a new framework of structural autonomy—a structural theory that finds its conceptual roots in realist IR thought. A theory of structural autonomy promises a richer explanatory frame that can better address the distinct dynamics that flow from different power structures.

1This article suggests that both offensive and defensive realisms, because of internal inconsistency, ultimately produce partial explanations. In offering an emphasis on structure as the locus of explanation, this article heads in the opposite direction of recent structurally oriented theorizing in IR, which is inclined toward more hybridization of already existing hybrid frameworks. Neo-classical realists with their multi-causal and multi-level frameworks are increasing the number of factors across the realist paradigm. This is a degenerative process from a structuralist perspective. For some examples, see Walt (1987), Schweller (1994), Van Evera (1999). For the most recent attempt to synthesize already synthetic theories of offensive and defensive realism, see Fiammenghi (2011).

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The article proceeds in four main parts: First, briefly, the core hybrid nature of offensive and defensive realism is explored to reveal where they fall short in structural reasoning. Second, discussion of structure and units leads to the introduction of the two new core concepts of autonomy and self-reliance. Third, the fundamental logic of structural autonomy is outlined, so that in the final section the implications of structural autonomy and how it reorients thinking about international politics can be considered.

On Defensive and Offensive Motivations

Structuralism, in principle, provides the opportunity of understanding human identity, motivation, and behavior by tracing their roots to the environment in which they are all located. It is based on a belief in the shaping power of conditions over agency. Instead of the essentialist focus on “who we are” or the intentionalist emphasis on “what we want,” structuralism is about “what we have.” It is our possessions in an environment that is constituted by the distribution of our possessions that influence “who we are,” “what we want,” and “what we do.”

In the two most prominent realist-based attempts to explain IR from a structural level, Kenneth Waltz and John Mearsheimer focused attention correctly on two key elements of structure in the international system—its anarchic nature and the distribution of capabilities. From a structural perspective, how capabilities are distributed across an environment lacking centralized authority should reveal why IR flows as it does. Such a focus should provide us an expectation about the key actors within the system and their behaviors. As Hans Morgenthau (1993:7) himself suggested, it is what is possible and not what is desirable that drives behavior.

However, the explanatory locus of both Waltz and Mearsheimer falls short of this structural principle in that both defensive and offensive realism ascribe to states a base desire to either maximize security or maximize power that is removed from the conditioning effect of the specific distribution of power within which states must react. The unit level desire to survive pursued through consistent maximizing behavior overwhelms, from an explanatory logic, the particular conditions in which states seeking survival exist. If the distribution of power is structurally conditioning the behavior of states, should not the behavior of states vary based on the relative capabilities they possess? What is possible for the United States differs from what is possible for Kuwait, which shifts over time as well. The relative position of the United States in the world of 1796 when George Washington advised against entangling alliances differed substantively from the world in 1949 when the United States signed the North Atlantic Treaty.

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2We classify these two theoretical frameworks as hybrid rather than structural because of three reasons on two different levels: First, they assume that states wish to survive. This is an independent assumption on the unit level about state desire rather than being a structurally determined orientation. Second, when they attempt to justify that assumption through the logic of the structure, they misinterpret the international environment as a self-help system, which implies an unnecessary threat dimension that would require a fundamental survival motivation. Third, they define the ways of survival in two different forms as offensive and defensive behaviors, which are not structurally determined. Mainly because of the existence of independent assumptions on the unit level, these theories include multiple levels and multiple causes of state behavior.

3Constructivist theorizing is one recent example of essentialism in IR (see Ruggie 1998; Wendt 1999). Democratic Peace Theory represents a recent turn to essentialism in the liberal school (see Doyle 1983; Russett 1993, 1995; Owen 1994).

4Neo-classical realism is an example of recent intentionalist theorizing (see, for instance, Walt 1987; Wohlforth 1987, 1999; Snyder 1991; Schweller 1994). For an example in liberal theorizing, see Moravcsik (1997).

5Structuralism is criticized for its lack of detailed descriptive accuracy. However, unit-level focus on identities and interests that come at the expense of a focus on environmental conditioning tend to a descriptive richness that lacks a comprehensive explanation of the causes of social behavior.

500 Structural Autonomy
And yet for Waltz, we assume that both the United States and Kuwait are consistently maximizing their security, and thus, their behaviors are explained via this consistent motivation. For Mearsheimer, behavior is explained as a result of power maximization. According to both, the base motivation of all states is to survive. And herein lies the core flaw in defensive and offensive realism. The survival motivation is said to extend from the anarchical nature of international politics. Because there is no central authority, states live in a system of self-help. But help from what? Both Waltz and Mearsheimer devise a rendering of anarchy that presumes a threat from which states need assistance to the extent that ultimately questions their survival. This logic de-links the two structural variables of anarchy and the distribution of power. There are particular distributions of power that are not threatening at the level of survival to particular states depending on their relative position in the international system. If the distribution of power matters explanatorily, it must be allowed to structurally condition state behavior. Structural theory must allow for the prospect that if conditions do not threaten survival, behavior should not be based primarily on a survival instinct. States cannot decide a priori whether maximizing security or power is their best strategy. Despite what they might wish to achieve, states must take the distribution of power and their relative systemic position into consideration. Therefore, a structural theory of international politics should pay sufficient attention to both anarchy and the distribution of power, rather than attributing an unsustainable threat dimension to the concept of anarchy or making fixed unit-level assumptions about what states want divorced from the conditions in which they find themselves.

On Realist Structure and Realist Units

So, how can a realist’s viewpoint better leverage structuralism? On what foundation can analysis of international politics rest if we do not a priori ascribe to states a motivation to seek maximum power or security? The answer lies in granting the explanatory weight to a structure in which anarchy and the distribution of power interact iteratively in establishing the conditions under which the primary agents of international politics act. It also requires use of the most primitive assumption that can be derived from that dynamic structure as a fundamental motivation applied systemically to all units.

The Overwhelming Structure

A theory of structural autonomy rests on four base assumptions about the notion of structure: First, structure is the overruling element of international politics. Second, it is composed of two elements: anarchy and the distribution of power. Structural autonomy adopts the materialist base assumptions found in past realist theories concerning the composition of structure. As such, the term “distribution of power” is understood to reflect the systemic (global or regional) relative measure of unit capabilities to act. Unit capacity includes a unit’s population, political organization, military potential for offensive and defensive operations, economic infrastructure (both of which leverage geographic location, technology advancement, natural resource control, and reliable access to capital and other assets necessary to support military and economic developments). Structural explanation rests on how the relative spread of those unit capabilities shapes unit behavior, not the unit capabilities themselves.
Third, structure is so overwhelming that as the most fundamental factor it shapes not only behaviors but also identity and orientations of the units. Fourth, structure is a conditional environment (continuously active) that creates an imperative of responsiveness among its units.

First, structure is the overwhelming factor of international politics. This assumption is quite straightforward. It is based on a specific worldview that claims that human behavior is shaped by structural factors. It is the starting point of any structural analysis. Without a belief in the capacity of structure to shape and transform agency behavior, there would be no need to develop structural theories. So any structural theory has to start by recognizing the overruling force of structure. Since structure is composed of both an anarchical ordering principle and a shifting distribution of capabilities, it both shapes agent behavior and is iteratively modified by that behavior as the distribution of capabilities changes. What vary are the particular strategies units will pursue in relation to the specific distribution of power they find themselves in.

As suggested above, the second assumption is that the structure of international politics is composed of two elements: anarchy and the distribution of power. Although this assumption is, too, quite straightforward in structural theories of IR in principle, theorists, in practice, emphasize one structural element over the other. In the case of balance of power theories, for instance, outcomes of anarchy are emphasized over the outcomes of the distribution of power, while hegemonic stability theorists tend to neglect the outcomes of anarchy on state behavior by depicting an international environment as defined by a hegemonic distribution of power (Gilpin 1981; Wohlfarth 1987, 1999, 2002). In balance of power theories, the distribution of power and the relative positions of actors in this distribution play only a minor role in shaping state behavior—states are expected to balance regardless of their relative capacity to do so. For example, states are expected to balance emergent hegemons as a survival strategy even though they do not have the capability to do so as in the case of unipolarity. The inability of predicting and explaining unipolarity is directly related to the overemphasis of the survival motivation at the expense of the distribution of power variable (Waltz 2000; Krauthammer 1990/91; Huntington 1999; Layne 1993). On the other side, for hegemonic stability theorists, the distribution of power explains all state behavior without resorting to the influence of anarchy. States jump on bandwagon even in an anarchic system without considering the risks of bandwagoning for their autonomy in an anarchic environment (Wohlfarth 2002). Alternatively, structural autonomy theory rests on an understanding of the interplay between the distribution of power and anarchy. Units act in accordance with both anarchy and the distribution of power. They do not a priori favor one over the other.

Third, structure shapes not only behaviors but also identities and orientations of agents. In offensive and defensive realist theories, state identities and motivations are defined and assumed independently from the shaping power of structural factors. States are taken to have a specific motivation whatever the constraints and opportunities of structural conditions. Structure does not affect the survival motivation in neorealist theories of IR, which assume that even if there is no direct threat to state survival, it is a survival instinct that is driving action. In contrast, in the structural autonomy theory developed here, units rearrange not only their behaviors, but also their identities and motivations in response to the distribution of power. A structural autonomy theory holds the assumption that structure is the most fundamental source of actors’ identities and motivations. Units do not decide who they are and what they want without their knowledge of the international structure, which is composed of anarchy and the distribution of power.

Structure is not an “event” to which units react, but the defined stage upon which they must play out their existence and upon which they interact with each other.
power. Great Power status, for instance, is a form of identity that flows not solely from where a unit’s capabilities land across the distribution of power, but through a relative successful self-reliant struggle for autonomy in response to the anarchical condition of international politics. The identity of Great Power status carries with it behavioral expectations that are not found in units whose capabilities are much lower and whose struggle for autonomy is highly constrained. The inaction of the United States in the Rwandan genocide of the 1990s mattered not only on the ground in Rwanda, but in how international and regional organizations and other states responded to the emerging killing. The inaction of Fiji did not have consequence. More importantly, the fact that the United States was a Great Power that did not act in 1994 created a precedent that impacted international calculations as the military forces of Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi neared the rebellious city of Benghazi in 2011. Its self-identity as a Great Power in a specific structural distribution set against its past inaction helped shape the United States’ promotion of a multilateral NATO-led intervention even though on the face of it, a massacre in Benghazi would not have affected US survival. Assessed in the context of a desire to sustain the autonomy of a Great Power, such leadership is more understandable. Of course, the strategies the Libyan government adopted after the intervention reflected its reaction to its relative place in the distribution of power at the time, which did bring into play the threat to its autonomy at the extreme base level of survival.

The final assumption about structure that underlies the logic of structural autonomy is that structure is an ever-present and continuously active environment. This assumption is strongly related to the previous one, which holds that structure shapes not only behaviors but also identities and motivations. Structure has an influence on all these sources of decision making. It is not a factor that shapes once and does nothing in other stages. Structure, as the overarching conditional environment, creates the identities and orientations of the agents in it and reshapes those orientations actively.

**The Realistic Reasoning and Responsive Agent**

What can we draw from previous realist writings in terms of assumptions to be ascribed to these units that conform to the expectations of a structural theory? Two base-interrelated assumptions are made—that these actors are reasoning and responsive. Without making an assumption about the nature of agents within a system, the application of structural theory is impossible. For any social theory, we need to identify at least with what kind of actors we are dealing. However, that assumption should be held in a minimized form. It should not exceed the boundaries of structural factors, for the locus of explanatory power rests with the structural dynamics that shape the agent’s behavior and identity, not the qualities of the agents themselves. For instance, in a sociological study, the very existence of human agency and its minimal properties need to be recognized. The important thing is keeping that assumption in a comprehensive and primitive form, which will not conflict with the shaping power of structure. Otherwise, without an agent that responds to the structural conditioning, the theory cannot be applied. Therefore, a structural theory should try to and actually has to hold a minimized assumption about the agents.

From this perspective, assuming the reasoning and responsive nature of actors within an international structure is justifiable, because it is an assumption that is both comprehensive and primitive. Essentialist theories hold a belief that

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9Both offensive and defensive realists assume states to be units wishing to survive. Survival, as a state motivation, is a consequentialist assumption that specifies a direction for state behavior and interests, but it does not in reality cover all units in the system at all times. So, it is both specific and biased.
human beings or human organizations act because of their essential characteristics. So an answer given about the identity of any agent is believed to explain its behaviors. Intentionalist theories hold a belief that we can assign specific intentions for human agencies, and these assumptions of human intention help us in building theories to explain human behavior. In contrast to essentialism and intentionalism, a theory of structural autonomy sets aside unit-level identities and interests for the sake of a broader explanatory power. The theory, for example, is not deriving explanation from some assumption about human nature as classic realists, such as Hans Morgenthau prescribed.

It does not hold a biased belief about the desires of the units’ orientation toward a future action. It is not fixed to a specific form of motivation for some specific actors derived independently from structural formation. It tries to encompass the most fundamental properties shared by all actors in the system. Lastly, it is not a consequentialist assumption as in the case of intentionalist theories, but is a conditionalist one in accordance with structural requirements. It is based not on outcomes, but on conditions. Within the theoretical framework of structural autonomy, reasoning and responsive actors form their identities, motivations, and actions, not from a desire that is independent from the structure but because of structural conditioning. They respond to the structural conditions with their available capabilities. We assume units are not blind calculators, but reasoning processors.

Thus, the reasoning and the responsive characteristics of units should not be interpreted as a classical rational choice assumption. Even though reasoning and responsiveness can be considered as a loose rationality assumption, it is not a classical rational choice assumption because of its responsive and inconsequentialist characteristics. Units are assumed as focusing and responding to the conditions not only on the behavioral level, but also on the motivational level. Reason is not an instrument of already-given and unchanging motivations but can rearrange the motivations according to the circumstances. International actors do not follow their goals blindly at the expense of anything else. This is not a consequentialist assumption, which focuses on the determinism of agency; on the contrary, it is an assumption based on the sources of motivation and behavior. In this form, for example, states are assumed to be aware of the conditions of the international structure and as defining and redefining their interests not according to their individual desires but according to the requirements of the international environment.

A structural theory should consider the reflectiveness and responsiveness of agency in structural conditions in which agents act because of their conditioned reasoning. We assume that reasoning actors rearrange their motivations and interests according to their reflections about the international environment. They hold complicated evaluations of the world in which they act and rearrange their immediate interests according to where their capabilities place them on the distribution of power, globally. They reason and respond to the structural conditions. They might have specific desires to attain but in cases where those desires do not fit into the power context in which they find themselves, we can assume they have the capacity to re-evaluate and re-describe their interests.

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10 This study is based on a classification of social theories as intentionalist, essentialist, and structural theories. While the former two classifications adopt a consequentialist logic that assumes agents act to attain a specific goal, the latter approach adopts a conditionalist perspective in which agency ends are shaped by means.

11 This conceptualization of reasoning and responsive actor is highly related to John Searle’s philosophy of action, but it differs from Searle’s formulation in some respects (see Searle 2001). For a similar loosened reasoning and responsive actor model, see Giddens (1979).

12 For an explanation between the practical and theoretical reasoning and their relation to desire and belief, respectively, see Harman (1976).

13 This assumption might provoke criticism from a domestic-level perspective. Even if states might form their own preferences because of domestic reasons, they should be ignored in a structural analysis because structuralism is based on the belief of the removal of domestic concerns due to the overruling character of structural factors. For an example of domestic preference formation, see Moravcsik (1997).
This reasoning and responsiveness assumption is also consistent with the assumption of an ever-present and continuously active structure. In such a structure, actors cannot rely on fixed attitudes. In order to respond to an ever-active structure, units have to repeatedly adjust their motivations and behaviors. A consequentialist assumption of rationality would lead to fixed motivations, which would not be rearranged according to the structural conditions, and thus, this assumption marks an important refinement from traditional renderings of realist tenets that tend to emphasize the notion of rationality as a unit-level ascribed characteristic.

In sum, structural autonomy theory suggests that international politics is characterized by units with organized power (the capacity for sustained action), who are reasoning and responsive to the international structure, which shapes not only behaviors, but also motivations of units in an iterative and active realm of shifting distributions of power.

These particular assumptions about units allow structural autonomy to correct misunderstandings about realist theory as a theory concerning state behavior. Hans Morgenthau directed us to the recognition that international politics is conducted in a realm of power and that realms of power create distinctive dynamics. The units to which we should focus our analytical attention are those that have the material capacity for sustained consequential action internationally. At the time of Morgenthau’s writing, a parsimonious reading of international reality led him to focus explanatory attention on states as the best organized units of power (Morgenthau 1993). Over 60 years later, what should drive our analytical focus is a realistic assessment of what units today possess the most effective material capacity for sustained consequential action internationally—where does organized power lie? While current analysis can suggest that the territorial state remains privileged in its capacity to act globally and in current application should be the locus of explanation, structural autonomy theory is not a theory of state action, but rather of unit action globally. A theory of IR drawing from realist traditions need not be confined to a focus on the state if through technological advancement or the emergence of new forms of territorial arrangement and action (governance or lack of governance) other units emerge that have organized material capacity that rivals or challenges the level that now is held by the territorial state. What drives this unit determination is actually one of the core structural variables—the distribution of power. In the context of distribution, what is revealed is where the capacity to act rests across the system under study. Currently, global politics is conducted by many actors, and one can conclude that the most prominent generalizable pockets of sustainable capacity to act globally remain states. The logic of structural autonomy, however, need not a priori assume that states will be the primary consequential actors that drive international politics. It is not something inherent to states that make them the focus of study, but where they land as prominent units in the global distribution of power. Thus, since 2001, significant patterns of state behavior have been driven in reaction to a nonstate actor, Al Qaeda. The logic of structural autonomy does not preclude analysis about the interaction between the United States and an organization like Al Qaeda.14

The Core Concepts: Autonomy and Self-Reliance

What is the central dynamic that logically follows from the interaction of anarchy, the distribution of power, and reasoning and responsive units? In contrast

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14The information technology revolution’s empowerment of individuals and small groups that can affect international dynamics is in its infancy, but its potential is growing. Nonstate actors empowered with information technology may in the near future have sustainable capacity—autonomy—and thus should be captured in theories that seek to explain international politics.
to defensive and offensive realism, structural autonomy argues that states are not inherently preoccupied with power maximization or security, but rather more fundamentally with seeking autonomy. All that can be derived from a structural imperative about unit motivation is that it is not about accumulating a capacity, but rather having the wherewithal to act on that capacity in a sustained and significant manner. The wherewithal to act (autonomy) or the lack of it derives from the combined lack of a central authority and the variance of capabilities arrayed across several units (anarchy and the distribution of power). Thus, structurally derived, it can be assumed that units seek autonomy, which is defined as possession of the wherewithal for the organized capacity to act in a sustained fashion globally. Seeking autonomy should be understood not as a unit-based and generated motivation, but rather as a structurally generated necessity. Understanding autonomy as the basic motivation shifts our understanding of Waltz’s and Mearsheimer’s focus on security or power maximization. Those pursuits are, in reality, different strategies (among many others) for achieving the base structural necessity of being autonomous. As discussed earlier, the combination of anarchy and a distribution of power cannot a priori tell us whether states are under threat, concerned about survival and fixed on how they will go about dealing with their condition. All anarchic structure and distributed capacity can reveal is that we are dealing with a system of relatively autonomous actors. If the system persists, we can derive the assumption that at least some of the actors are successfully seeking autonomy relative to each other.

Thus, structural autonomy offers a substantive modification to Morgenthau’s traditional supposition. Rather than a struggle over power, international politics is best understood, more purely, as a struggle for autonomy.\footnote{This is a reference to Morgenthau’s famous frame about international politics as a struggle for power and its dominant role in the field. Also see Mearsheimer (2001).}

The concept of autonomy differs from the concepts of power and security as motivations and does not have a link to any defensive or offensive presuppositions. It liberates our analytical capability to assess international politics more broadly. It does not tell us that states act defensively because of their defensive intentions or offensively because of their offensive intentions. Those intentions and the actions that ultimately follow from them are responses to the particular structural conditions units face.\footnote{Rather than assuming independently, we derive the dynamic of struggle for autonomy from the structure which is composed of anarchy as a self-reliance system and distribution of power. This is the only unit-level motivation that can be derived structurally and covers all units with its primitive and comprehensive nature.}

To understand why the pursuit of autonomy has greater explanatory value than the conceptualizations of power or security maximization, the base concept of anarchy must be examined more closely and a refinement offered there as well.

In a structural analysis of international politics, there can be no overarching unit motivation of survival or search for wealth and power independent of the distribution of power. Units who assess that the international environment presents opportunities will not feel threatened, while units who conclude that their position in the distribution of power is under threat may be compelled to take defensive measures.\footnote{For a similar but underdeveloped argument about the existence of both opportunities and constraints, see Mastanduno (1997).} Opportunistic or threat-responsive behavior flows from the structure of international politics and cannot be pre-assigned as a dominant motivation. At its root, we must assume that units simply want to possess the capacity to act in a sustained manner that preserves and enhances their capacity to act into the future—they merely want to remain autonomous. Whether that autonomy is threatened to the point at which survival is at stake is dependent upon a number of factors, but principally where their power rests across the distribution of power. Not all units will find themselves assessing their policy choices set
against a backdrop of surviving, which implies a threat to their existence. A default to a survival-first response follows only from a particularly threatening distribution of power, and not all distributions of power will threaten every state’s existence to the point that it can be assumed that survival is a base motivation. If we are to offer an explanatory framework truly anchored on structure, then the distribution of power combined with anarchy must actually matter in an explanatory way; that is, we must assume that it will shape unit behavior, and units must define themselves against those particular and distinctive distributions, otherwise the distribution of power is either static (which it is not) or meaningless (which, in a structural realist theory, it cannot be). While for some, the distribution of power will create a condition of extreme threat (survival), for others it will be less severe and not immediately threatening, and perhaps for others, it will create conditions for opportunity. A structural theory must be alive to all of these structurally driven conditions and the behaviors that will flow from them.

What we can observe and deduce is that there exists both a reinforcement of the imperative of autonomy due to anarchy and a restriction on pure freedom of action imposed by the conditional opportunities and threats embedded in the distribution of power. Idealized, autonomous actors would prefer pure freedom of action and thus direct control over their individual destinies, but the ever-present and shifting distribution of power to which they must react is a fundamental feature. The supposition that the dynamic of international politics is best understood as a struggle is a recognition that structural autonomy theory is not deterministic in its explanation of state behavior. The struggle is infinite and exhausting (here John Mearsheimer’s notion of tragedy is instructive), but it is a struggle that has twists and turns, poor decisions that turn out okay, and optimized decisions that fail to achieve optimal ends. This follows from the responsiveness to structure—an interplay—rather than a scripted play.

The search for autonomy is the most fundamental motivation about agent behavior under the conditions of anarchy that structure can derive. Units react to the conditions that have the capacity to increase or decrease their autonomy. In the search of this deep-level motivation, units rearrange their surface-level and specific goals and behaviors in accordance with their capabilities. So their standing in the international distribution of power plays a significant role in defining the strategies of autonomy they will adopt.

In order to understand and identify the fundamental motivation of units in the system, it is necessary to characterize how the structure of the international system operates to shape it. In general, most theorists of IR have argued that anarchic orders are self-help systems in which all actors feel threatened, so they seek to survive beyond all other motivations. According to this common interpretation, any state behavior is a means of achieving the eventual goal of survival. By seeking power or security or wealth, states want to attain survival. If the anarchic order is a self-help system, then this reasoning would be powerful, but if it is not a self-help system at its core, then the fundamental state motivation to be derived is not survival.

The argument in this study is that the anarchic order is a self-reliance, not a self-help system. Units do not try to secure their survival by adjusting their power in accordance with some a priori supposed means and ends. They try to promote their autonomy in a self-reliance system by relying on their capabilities to act by adjusting their desires and behaviors in accordance with their capabilities. No specific orientation rules unit power, but rather the distribution of unit power rules unit orientation.

Waltzian linear model of theorizing, that anarchic orders are self-help systems and in self-help systems states wish to survive, is a helpful tool in establishing the present argument and making comparisons. Although realists and nonrealists
repeatedly note that anarchy does not necessarily mean chaos, the common frame of self-help implies help is needed to grapple with an ever-present threat dimension that, in realist formulations, is commonly interpreted as if involving a complete threat to state existence within the system. While that possibility exists, it exists only under certain power structure conditions. States are not infants incapable of survival without the help of others (or themselves). They are units within a power system because they have the capacity, at some base level, to act. Their existence as actors within an anarchical system tells us not that they are in need of help, but simply that they must rely on themselves first and foremost. The absence of centralized authority suggests not a system of self-help, but rather, more accurately, a system of self-reliance. The translation of anarchy as a self-help system in previous realist theorizing has added an unnecessary threat dimension to the logic that has been attributed to anarchic dynamics. Systems with no central authority force the units to rely on their own capabilities to take control of their own affairs, which might include both threats and opportunities. There might be different distributions of power imposing different specific ranges of responses on units. By relying on their power, units may act offensively or defensively depending on the specific conditions they face as they struggle to sustain autonomy. In a self-reliance system, it is the specific distribution of power in which units find themselves relative to what they have to rely on that drives the unit’s action.

A self-reliance system follows from, but also reinforces, the anarchical nature of the system. This reinforcing dynamic of structure (which is not static) is critical to recognize. If anarchy is the organizing principle of international politics, then the most primitive state motivation should properly follow its explicit description. In the literature, there is a traditional common ground in the definition of this central concept. It is commonly defined and adopted by realists and non-realists too, as “the lack of a central authority” (Milner 1991). Considering it as the opposite of a hierarchical system metaphorically helps us to understand its prime conditions. If hierarchical systems are characterized by organized rules, which are defined and executed by one agency or group of agencies, then anarchic systems should be characterized by the lack of those specified rules and a dominating agency who can legislate, execute, and judge rules. If a hierarchic system is constructed by labor specification among unit branches, as, for instance, in the case of domestic politics, then an anarchic system should be defined as a mechanistic society in which units perform the same set of tasks. Because of the absence of a central authority to manage the relations among the similar units, all units in the system have the same set of problems so they must hold the same fundamental motivation. States in the anarchic system of international politics do not delegate any part of their authority to legislate, execute, and judge to any higher or equal authority because they hold some share of the distribution of power. This is the structural connection between anarchy and the distribution.

If there is no central authority, then it means all units assume autonomy and try to sustain it. They reject delegating their existential unity and integrity to a higher authority. A system becomes anarchic only as the two requirements are met: the presence of units holding the wherewithal to organize the capacity to act (autonomy) and the denial of the delegation of autonomy. In this equation, a system is called anarchic when it is composed of units that deny the delegation of their autonomies to a higher authority and self-reliantly have the

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18 Against most of the critics, Waltz was certainly right in claiming that states are functionally similar units. This is the most distinctive and only characteristic of the concept of anarchy. If state functions are differentiated, then there would be no conceptual meaning of the term “anarchy.” For the most prominent examples of these critics, see Ruggie (1986); Buzan, Jones, and Little (1995).
wherewithal to remain autonomous. If the system is recognized as anarchic, then it follows that there are some units who are capable of sustaining their denial of a central authority. That means there is a specific distribution of capabilities in the system that prevents the formation of a hierarchic system. But the distribution of capabilities would not be able to sustain the anarchic system if those units who rely on their own capabilities did not wish to sustain it. Therefore, it can be derived from the equation that the system would not be anarchic if the units holding these capabilities were wishing to delegate their autonomies. Defining the international system as anarchic and characterized by the distribution of power by definition requires recognizing the existence of units who are motivated by the structure to promote their autonomy rather than delegating all or some parts of it to some other authority. This is the minimum condition for a system to be anarchic. This is also the maximum limit for deriving a unit motivation from the equation provided by the definition of an international system as a combination of anarchy and a distribution of power.

Any other unit motivation like seeking survival or maximizing power requires some additional properties beyond either the concept of anarchy or the units populating it. For instance, if anarchy was defined as an environment full of opportunities, then one could assume states as opportunity-seeking agents, or if it was defined as an environment with no opportunity but full of threats, then one could assume a survival motivation. But if it is defined merely as the lack of a central authority, then logically, the only available inference for unit motivation is the denial of central authority or, more precisely, the denial of a delegation of the autonomy that sustains the anarchic structure. If we assume an anarchic organizing principle, then we must assume that the units capable of relying on their own capabilities are sustaining that anarchic order so because they want it and are capable of sustaining it via their individual self-reliance (and thus even if a unit pursued transformation to hierarchy, the self-reliance of others would constrain the attempt). Therefore, logically, the only available inference that can be made from the definition of international structure as anarchic is the existence of units structurally driven to promote their autonomy by the presence of a distribution of power in which self-reliance is possible. There is a reason for the reinforcement and maintenance of anarchy, and it is the unit fundamental motivation to remain autonomous. If any unit in the system was powerful enough to turn it into hierarchy or all units were helplessly in need of survival, there would be no anarchic system.

The traditional realist-ascribed motive of survival implies a logic in which helpless states would eventually require the delegation of state autonomy to a higher authority in a fearful environment populated by units wishing for survival. A conceptual focus on survival does not inherently and logically reinforce anarchy; however, in our framework, seeking autonomy does. The maintenance of autonomy, not its delegation, is the structurally derived rule of international politics. The traditional interpretation of the concept of a state of nature tends to emphasize the struggle for survival motivation and, therefore, the need for a Leviathan. If states were really motivated to survive, then we would expect the emergence of a world government. However, because of the struggle of self-relying units for autonomy and because of their capabilities to act, a world government does not emerge and anarchy is sustained. In the real world of international affairs, there is no Rawls (1971) “veil of ignorance.” States are aware of the limitations of their power. They roughly know their position in the distribution of power. In making their decisions, they take their relative power positions into consideration. They are individually unable to bring about a structural change, but in theory if every member of the system delegated their autonomy the system would change—this is the regional system lesson of the US former colonies moving from the articles of confederation to a “united” states of America. But as long as one unit remained self-relying and possessive of their autonomy, by definition the system overall would lack a central authority. This change regionally did not affect the structure of the international system. The other theoretical path to hierarchy is the successful coercion of the most powerful state in overwhelming all others’ capacity to remain self-relying.

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is just one cause of anarchy and that is the presence of a distribution of power in which self-reliance is possible.21

The combination of the struggle for autonomy and the absence of enough concentration of power make the search for autonomy in its purest sense an unattainable, but structurally necessary goal.22 While absolute autonomy is an elusive goal, relative autonomy is the defining characteristic of international politics (see Table 1).

### On the Core Dynamic

Assuming a self-reliant imperative driving the pursuit of autonomy, structural autonomy theory thus orients its explanatory focus around two archetypes of power structures that allow for shifts and, in combination with the fundamental motivation of seeking autonomy, produces different incentives, behaviors, and systemic outcomes. The framework identifies two base-level forms of systemic power: a diffuse power structure and a concentrated power structure. While the base motivation is to seek autonomy, how units go about doing that will depend on whether they find themselves within one of these two power structures and where individually they find themselves in the relative distribution spread across either power structure.

### The Diffuse Power Structure

In a diffuse power structure, the relative power between several units is marginal, but important. For a diffuse power structure to exist, a small gap in power must subsist between a minimum of two units and can encompass many more. What have traditionally been called bipolar and multipolar systems have more in common than offensive and defensive realists have considered and are better explained under the single category of a diffuse power structure. Within such a diffuse power structure, there is a stronger incentive to seek change in relative power positions and in the overall structure itself. Since gaps are small, advances in material capac-

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21A similar conceptualization of hierarchy in anarchic orders might be found in David Lake’s writings. But Lake uses a legalist concept of hierarchy, which de-emphasizes the significance of state autonomy at the expense of a higher authority (see Lake 2007).

22The concept of autonomy which depends on capabilities should not be confused with sovereignty, which is a legal concept. Despite the legal claim for the sovereignty of all states since Westphalia, there can be no absolutely autonomous agent in the system. Autonomy requires the full freedom of an agent, which dominates the entire structure with its capabilities. If this was the case, then the international structure would not be an anarchic order, but it would be defined as a hierarchic one. Autonomy is essentially an elusive goal. The struggle for it reproduces the anarchic order rather than demolishing it in favor of a specific unit.
ity will affect autonomy more directly (and potentially more immediately). Opportunities and potential threats will be scrutinized to see if positive change can be made or negative change can be avoided. One characteristic of such diffuse power structures is that this behavioral orientation toward change will tend to lean the overall system toward major war—the propensity for major war is higher in diffuse power systems. This outcome tendency holds even if states within the diffuse power system frame their behavior and intentions as being primarily defensive.

Firstly, because of a more equal distribution of power, more and more actors become able to act in accordance with their individual goals and strategies. Importantly, the increased capability of each actor does not mean that they become more autonomous, if in a diffuse power system others are increasing their power as well. The increased number of actors capable to act in terms of their interests (self-reliant) decreases all actors’ level of autonomy. Under such a system, units become more and more concerned with structural constraints. It becomes an undesirable environment because of the decreased level of autonomy for all. Additionally, since small changes in gaps in power may impact the position of a unit in the diffuse system, units will not favor the status quo in such a system, and if the possibility arises, their default orientation is to transform it somehow—to shift where they sit along a tight or tightening distribution of power. Hence, because of the lack of enough relative capabilities to transform the system to its advantage, given its diffuse nature, each unit has to contend with this constraining structure and actively manage their position in the system. Thus, the main strategic orientation here is to seek autonomy by changing the distribution of power in a favorable manner, but the diffuse power structure itself frustrates these efforts. The frustrated desire for change in the overall power distribution translates into unit behavior that is constantly putting to question the relative position of other units, even if those behaviors are framed as defensive in intent. The combination of a macro-level orientation to get out from under a diffuse power structure and gain more autonomy and actual change-oriented policy decision making will structurally orient the system toward the potential for major conflict. In this dynamic, even defensive balancing creates a spiral of reaction that makes the system more prone to war. While the offensive behavior of Napoleon and Hitler can propel a diffuse system toward war, so too can the defensive balancing of city-states in 421 BC or European great powers in 1914. To use the terms of offensive and defensive realists, structural autonomy explains why in both tightening multipolar and bipolar systems, offensive and defensive actions can lead to major conflagrations. The actual outbreak of war correlates with the diffuse power structure’s influence on motivating states to seek their autonomy via a change in the power structure itself manifested in behavior that is sensitive to their relative tight (or tightening) position in that diffuse power structure. It is not the polarity of the system as a structural construct, nor the defensive or offensive unit proclivity (a unit level assumption) that offers us the best explanatory basis. Rather, it is the recognition that power is diffused between two or more units and that the distribution of power creates both opportunities and constraints to autonomy. The structural potential for major war exists in diffuse power structures, and we can hypothesize that the more immediate cause of when such major conflict occurs relates to the tightening of the shares of power held by units across that distributed system, whether the distribution is between 2, 3, 4, or a dozen units.23

23Here, structural autonomy departs from Waltz’s *Man, the State and War* (1959) in that explanation remains at the structural level, rather than shifting to the unit or state level to explain the immediate causes of war. Additionally, structure matters so much that it affects the type of war that is likely to be fought. In concentrated structures, war will be limited in objective and application.
In this regard, structural autonomy suggests that there is more in common causally between the Peloponnesian War of 421 BC and the Great War of 1914, than the traditional differentiating of them as bipolar and multipolar systems suggests. In both cases, the main states found themselves in a diffuse power structure, which they found undesirable, challenging, and full of both threat and opportunities to advance their own autonomies in a self-reliant manner. In line with the expectations of the security dilemma that exists in diffuse power structures whether framed as defensive or perceived as offensive, as focus became more intense on relative positioning, behaviors became even more change-oriented, and thus, the overall default to changing the system was played out through the interactions of change-oriented policy behaviors. The dynamic of such accumulating interactions of structurally induced change-oriented behavior culminated in direct conflict that inherently was systemic (major) in intensity and affect.

**Concentrated Power Structures**

The alternative power structure is present when there are large gaps in power between units creating a concentrated power structure around a single unit. Globally, this would exist when one unit achieved a power differential with all other units in the system. Historically, this power structure has emerged regionally, rather than globally, although much attention has been directed to the notion of unipolarity in the post-Cold War.

In concentrated power structures, units in search of an increased level of autonomy tend to prioritize retention of the power structure (and their place in it) over change. This holds for both sorts of actors that exist in concentrated power structures. Intuitively, the most powerful actor who has concentrated most of the material capabilities across the system would favor retaining such a power structure and thus their place in that structure as the leading unit. However, this orientation toward retaining the system holds for secondary units as well. Such actors, because of their inability to challenge directly the status quo, have to content themselves with maintaining their autonomy within what is possible, rather than desiring an unmanageable pursuit of systemic transformation, which could actually risk their autonomy due to the concentrated nature of the power structure. Here, it is the gap in power that prioritizes retaining the status quo over seeking change. It is also the gap in power that structurally orients the system to minor or marginal conflict when such conflicts do arise systemically.

Importantly, this tendency toward minor conflict holds even if states engage in behaviors that are framed as offensive. The leading state’s uses of force in a concentrated power system will, by structural definition, tend to be limited in scope and directed to specific instances in which such use is necessary (or perceived to be necessary) to retain the status quo overall. The leading state will have a limited preventive orientation or limited power-adjusting objective behind their use of force that will not tend to push the overall system toward global war.

Secondary states may also act offensively or opportunistically to increase their level of autonomy. They do not defensively balance the would-be hegemon because of the possible risks of doing so, but they also do not jump on its band-

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24Concentrated power structure in this study refers to a high level of power concentration in the system. It can be viewed as hegemonic position gained by one unit over others in terms of power. But that concept of hegemony should not be confused with hierarchy.

25Depending on specific power structures, states hold second-level motivations (orientation) for change or retention. Therefore, a state is defined as motivated for change if it wants to break down the distributed international power structure. In contrast, a state is defined as motivated for retention, if it views the status quo as a favorable international structure and pursues actions that do not challenge the overall concentrated nature of the system.
wagon because that would harm their level of autonomy. Instead, a base-level structural autonomy expectation is that such units will employ clever and nuanced policies of increasing their level of autonomy without directly challenging the overall concentrated nature of the power structure.

The similar behavior of those states emerging from the collapse of the Soviet empire in the early 1990s is a good case in point. The similar choices of the former Warsaw Pact nations to all seek admission into NATO and subsequently the European Union is best understood as policy choices that are structurally induced pursuits of increased autonomy. Whether these states could emerge as functioning autonomous agents was not a given in 1990. The possibility of political and economic collapse was real. Each of these states, be they the Baltic nations, Poland, or Hungary, certainly had significant domestic differences in emerging leaderships, economic challenges, and political stability. Emerging from a period of external control, one would suspect that such units would be highly sensitive to their independence and freedom of action. And yet, all pursued coordination strategies in a concentrated power structure to align their political, economic, foreign, and domestic policy with the military alliance of NATO and the economic structure of the European Union at some pain and risk. What was going on here? According to the expectations of structural autonomy, all of these states found their autonomy advanced (some might say secured and stabilized) through the opportunity to coordinate their security and economic development strategies with the institutional constructs that reflected the global and regional concentrated power structures in which they emerged in the 1990s. Counterintuitively, these states have been able to develop an improved wherewithal of organized capacity to act in a sustained fashion globally (for example, more autonomy) via the opportunity afforded in NATO membership and European Union admission. The behavior of these states was not balancing against either power or threat, nor is it best understood as defensively induced or opportunistically inspired bandwagoning. It was a clear strategy to enhance their autonomy through alignment—an opportunity afforded by the concentrated power structure that never existed when the global and regional power structure was diffuse.

Two points are salient here for structural autonomy: First, all of these states acted similarly and against the intuitive expectation. This is best explained as being structurally induced behavior to advance autonomy. Second, the type of behavior reinforced the concentrated power structure, while advancing the autonomy of the secondary state. The former Warsaw Pact countries find themselves actually more autonomous in 2011 than in 1981 or, more importantly than in 1991, via actions that did not challenge, but enhanced the concentrated nature of the power structure of this period in history; that is, they reinforced a regional and emerging global distribution concentrated around American power.

That concentrated power structure was not directly challenged even when the policies of the leading state did not accord with the interests or policies of many secondary states. The second Iraq crisis is a potential case in point. When the United States acted offensively to reinforce its autonomy, actors both regional and global, including most European Union members, could not balance the United States actively, but also rejected bandwagoning as well. They re-directed the issue toward the United Nations to define some parameters for American behavior that would maintain autonomy moving forward as the crisis unfolded. There was no major balancing or bandwagoning alignment among the secondary states. Thus, autonomy was preserved (except for Iraq itself) and the concentrated power structure reinforced.

To better highlight the explanatory re-orientation structural autonomy offers, the following section briefly outlines some hypotheses that, if they hold, will lead us to different and or more precise explanations than those we have found through offensive or defensive realisms.
Considering Some Hypotheses

Diffuse Power Structures

H1: As the number of actors with relatively equal capabilities increases, the level of autonomy for all units in the system decreases.

H2: As the distribution becomes more and more equal, the search for change increases.

H3: As the volume of the search for change increases, the possibility and the number of major wars also increases even if units are acting defensively.

In a diffuse power structure, the core explanatory variable driving international dynamics is the tight or tightening gap in power across units. Diffuse power structures are by definition structures in which there are multiple actors with relatively equal capabilities. However, because of the increased number of actors with equal capabilities, units are not relatively more autonomous. In contrast, all the units in the system have their autonomies constrained by other actors with equal capabilities. So any equal distribution of power produces less relatively autonomous actors. The very existence of other actors with equal capabilities decreases the level of autonomy of all. However, this does not mean deterministically that units are less secure and must focus intensely on survival. In contrast, we can derive structurally that when power is relatively equal, units will find that their survival is more secure, since no single actor can easily become an existential threat. Nevertheless, their autonomy will be lessened because of the difficulty in converging with multiple actors on most issue areas. In diffuse power structures, states can be secure because of their power but less autonomous because of others' power. In any issue area, there will be more actors taking part with their equal capabilities complicating the ability to act autonomously. This is a less desirable power structure in which to operate and, thus, change will be the prioritized strategy.

This argument offers a nuance to the polarity-balance of power-stability arguments found in offensive and defensive realisms. In what in Waltzian terms would be considered a balanced system, states will feel less threatened (or more secure), but this does not translate into behavior promoting stability. Since the primary motivation is not security (or survival) but autonomy, “balanced” systems will not necessarily be stable, but rather have strong structurally induced incentives to change the power structure (and the relative distributions within it) to gain autonomy. The Cold War behavior of the two superpowers became more change-oriented during periods in which their power was more “balanced” with each seeking a breakout capacity via military technology, additional allies, exploitation of minor states (the competition over the Third World), or expanded realms of competition (the Space Race). The structure, itself, induced intense change-oriented policy, not stability-seeking on the part of the superpowers. This was the case in the bipolar system of Athens and Sparta as well: as they became more equal, they became more oriented toward behaviors that challenged the diffuse power structure, even though they had a treaty requiring them to do otherwise. The change-oriented behavior of these two equal distributed systems amounted to similar competitive dynamics. The power structure induced similar state behavior. As the system moves toward a tightening of gaps in distribution, we do not get the stability of balance, as argued in previous realist frameworks, but the ripening of conditions for major war. The outcome difference between these two historical cases—why we ended in war in 421 BC and not in 1990—amounts to understanding the intervening variable of the distinct military

26 In our structural autonomy terms, balanced systems are diffuse power structures in which the gaps in the distribution are tight between two or more states.
strategic environment, namely nuclear versus conventional (this military strategic differential is discussed below).

As a consequence of a distribution of power with marginal gaps, states with decreased levels of autonomy will find this structure less attractive. They will be limited by the capabilities of others in every situation. If they were able to transform it into a more favorable one, they would certainly choose that way. So in the constant search for autonomy, states in this system would want to change it. However, there is a broad difference between what units want and what they do because of the relatively equal power distribution and increased number of actors with similar capabilities. The search for systemic change and an increased level of autonomy creates a trap that actually reproduces the diffuse system and the decreased level of autonomy for all units.

The main structural mechanism behind this gap between the behavior and international outcome is the well-known logic associated with the security dilemma (or in strict structural autonomy terms, the “autonomy” dilemma) (Jervis 1978; Glaser 1997). As predicted by the dilemma, increased autonomy of one side comes at the expense of others. So any change-oriented behavior triggers other change-oriented behaviors until it reaches a certain limit that becomes untenable. Even if framed as defensive, these change-oriented behaviors will spiral toward major war.

Concentrated Power Structures

**H1:** As the number of actors with equal capabilities decreases, the level of autonomy for some units in the system increases.

**H2:** As the distribution becomes less and less equal, the search for change decreases.

**H3:** As the volume of retention-oriented motivations increases, the propensity of major wars decreases, even if the leading unit acts offensively.

Concentrated power structures by definition are the ones in which there is a significant gap between the capabilities of one side and others. So they are populated by one powerful actor and the rest. In such a structure, there is only one actor with enough capabilities to act relatively autonomous. All others in the system lack enough capabilities to challenge that strong party or the system itself. Under these conditions, actors do not intend to change the structure because of two reasons. The first one is related to the strong party’s choices in its search for autonomy as an actor “liberated from the ropes” of conflicting autonomies (Joffe 2003), while the second one is related to weaker parties’ obligations and their lack of enough capabilities to challenge the status quo. One sees change as unnecessary, the other as unattainable.

This is a more desirable position compared to any other system for the leading state. “A hegemonic power establishes the rules and norms of international order, and acts to provide security and stability in the international system” (Layne 2004:113). This position depends on two requirements: The powerful unit is not powerful enough to turn the structure into a hierarchic one; in other words, the structure is still anarchic, and yet it is still too powerful compared to others. It cannot completely dominate the system but it has a certain level of autonomy to act relatively freer than others. If there was any hope of turning the structure into a hierarchic one, there would be no reason like the stopping power of water (Mearsheimer 2001; Levy 2004; Levy and Thompson 2005), benevolent hegemony (Kupchan 1998; Ikenberry 2001), etc., to stop it. The only reasons for voluntary/intentional support of the status quo are increased autonomy in anarchy and falling short of missing capabilities to make it hierarchic. In an anarchic environment, where power is concentrated in the hands of one actor, its relative autonomy allows the powerful actor to act preventively to
sustain its position. This does not presuppose a defensive pursuit of sufficient power, or an offensive pursuit of power maximization, but rather a mix of strategies that will sustain its relative autonomy achieved via its place in the distribution of power. Under certain conditions, “when a hegemon finds its primacy threatened, the best strategy is to eliminate the source of the problem” (Gilpin 1981:191). However, reacting to a favorable set of conditions in a particular issue area, a leading unit may grant opportunities to other units in the system to encourage buy-in toward system maintenance. The goal is not sufficient or maximum power, but maximized autonomy achieved through a mix of strategies, assuming anarchy as the system’s organizing element.

Secondary units in the system tend to behave in ways that support the system, because change-oriented policies risk autonomy. Thus, in concentrated power structures, the current structure is more favorable than the effort to change that structure. While secondary status is not favorable in itself, it is more favorable than the risky environment of unattainable challenge. Since they lack enough capabilities to turn the structure into a more favorable one, they are afraid of an untimely and unmanageable transformation. “The weaker actor is, therefore, in a conundrum: Unwilling to accept inequitable “take-it-or-leave-it” policy solutions, yet unable to balance against the other actor militarily” (Kelley 2005:153). Systemic retention is the better option.

The states that have to be content with the current order also want to find ways of gaining a more autonomous position. They may pursue offensive strategies to open new opportunities of increasing their level of autonomy. Against the expectations of hegemonic stability theorists (Wohlforth 1999), secondary states do not necessarily jump on the bandwagon. Such an expectation neglects the systemwide search for autonomy that is the imperative of anarchic order. A bandwagoning strategy in both offensive and defensive terms means the delegation of some part of autonomy to another actor. Despite their lack of capabilities, secondary states try to find some clever ways of increasing their level of autonomy instead of an automatic bandwagoning strategy. “Bandwagoning makes a country’s future security dependent on the continued goodwill of the dominant state” (Garnham 1991:65). Structural autonomy views bandwagoning as an autonomy strategy, but one that is highly conditional on the range of options available to secondary states. Ultimately, secondary states in the system try to produce nuanced policies that may include building relations with other secondary states as a form of coordinated behavior that does not directly challenge the powerful actor (Lieber and Gerard 2005:129) but creates opportunities of increased autonomy. These nuanced or “soft” policies are aimed at filling the niches of power placement, not confronting the autonomies of others.

Considering the Structural Autonomy Frame

In order to highlight heuristically the alternative perspective gained via structural autonomy, this section applies the framework to a familiar case study—the Cold War. From a structural autonomy view, this was not a 45-year period of bipolar stability, but rather a timeframe of shifting power structures in which both concentrated and diffuse structural dynamics shaped behavior. A structural autonomy framework suggests a view of the Cold War divided roughly into three periods: concentrated eras (1945–1957 and 1979–1991) and an intervening dif-

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27This conceptualization of soft policies is substantially different from the concept of “soft balancing.” Supporters of the soft-balancing argument claim that any soft policies followed by secondary states target the power of the would-be hegemon. However, the concept of soft policies does not refer to the balancing behavior targeting the powerful actor. Soft policies without clearly challenging the powerful actor requires building aggressive but soft strategies to open new spaces of opportunities of increasing the level of autonomy by diversified issue areas and increased volume of activity. For prominent examples of soft-balancing argument, see Pape (2005), Paul (2005).
fuse power structure (1957–1979). The first and third periods were characterized by status quo–oriented motivations and minor conflicts. The second era was characterized by change-oriented motivations, major superpower confrontations, and the potential for major war was at its highest. Soviet behavior is particularly instructive in that it was similar in avoiding direct challenge during the immediate aftermath of the Second World War in which US power was significantly advanced and from 1979 onward in which the Soviets viewed the gap between the United States and itself as expanding. More direct confrontation occurred when the gap between the two states was tightening and tightened into a diffuse power structure. Considering the entire Cold War period as statically bipolar overlooks the actual shifting nature of power and the structural explanation for why the real potential for major crisis varied over time. A significant difference from previous offensive and defensive realist explanations arises from structural autonomy’s perspective that, to use traditional concepts, stability lessened as the system became more balanced.

During the first era of the Cold War (1945–1957), whatever the motivations of both sides were, whatever the strategies followed were, because of the concentrated power structure, all conflicts were taking place on the margins, in covert forms, and, on the Soviet side, cautiously, since “at no point was he [Stalin] willing to challenge the Americans” (Gaddis 1997:31). Most of the crises of this era were started with an aim to protect the status quo and even if foreign policy behaviors were quite offensive like in the case of the Korean War (Jervis 1980; Zhihau 2000; Stueck 2002), crises over Turkey, Greece, and Iran (Kuniholm 1980; Raine 2005), they did not transform into a major systemic confrontation. Because of the concentrated power structure in favor of the United States (Leffler 1992), when faced with US power, Stalin decided to step back and avoid a major confrontation.

During the second era of the Cold War (1957–1979), because of the intersection of autonomies and the lack of a power gap in favor of one side, both superpowers aimed at transforming the uncomfortable conundrum. Despite the ongoing minor crises all around the world (Westad 2005), which were mostly an outcome of the first era, this period of Cold War was an era of bilateral, direct, and serious confrontation. The most serious two events of the Cold War (perhaps of human history) surfaced in this era (Walker 1995:158). In the Berlin and Cuban crises, the world came to the edges of a nuclear abyss. Both crises were the outcomes of change-oriented actions. Khrushchev, who wanted a change in the system (Fursenko 2006:7), viewed both Berlin and Cuba as tools for shaking the roots of the status quo (Dobrynin 1995:64–65). While Stalin viewed Berlin as a threat that could worsen the power gap, Khrushchev saw it as an opportunity (Khrushchev 1974:501) as he did Cuba as well (Allyn, Blight, and Welch 1989–1990) to bring change and challenge via ostensibly defensive actions (protecting the flight of East German elites with the wall and protecting Cuba from invasion) (Freedman 2002). The dynamics of the second Berlin Crisis and the Cuban Missile Crisis were systemic major confrontations that fell short of hot war only because of the unique structural intervening variable of the mutual assured destruction distribution of nuclear weapons. Nuclear weapons “helped to prevent the world wars that plagued the planet in the first half of the twentieth century” (Art 2009:129).

The final stage of the Cold War was also characterized by a concentrated power structure. Starting during the late Carter and accelerating during the Reagan administrations, US leaders found themselves in a comfortable position of increasing the tension, which would put more burdens on the deteriorating Soviet economy and power. “The new administration was thus optimistic on at least two counts: that the American economy could carry the increased burden that would result from a more assertive U.S. strategy; and that Soviet power was
in such poor shape that it would be unable to withstand a renewed American offensive” (Cox 1990:160). Overall, the new power structure of the late 1970s and early 1980s created new orientations and actions that would bring the renewal of tension. However, it is clear that this renewed tension was on minor issue areas once again and did not produce systemic confrontation as in the cases of the Second Berlin Crisis or Cuban Missile Crisis. Instead, the competition was limited to areas like Afghanistan and covert operations such as the US support for Afghan mujahids and East European liberals.

Full application of structural autonomy will require examinations of the Cold War along the lines suggested above and comparative case study analysis with key examinations of periods of concentrated and diffuse power structures that include not just the outbreak of war, but major instances of cooperation (for example, creation of institutions, treaty law). The desire to find powerful explanation via structural variables will also require a carving out of the logic behind the distinctive military strategic environment of nuclear assured destruction (which held during the Cold War and can sustain in other relations, such as China–Russia, China–India, and India–Pakistan, for example). From a structural autonomy perspective, it is not the unit-level possession of nuclear weapons that is important, but the distribution of that possession. The historical fact remains that when these weapons were possessed by a single state, they were used, but when possessed at a sufficient level to assure mutually the destruction of each opponent, despite the high potential for conflict, direct war did not occur. The proposition to be further established is that the distribution of nuclear possession at a mutual assured destruction level is an intervening strategic military environmental variable that reins in the extremes of change-oriented diffuse power structures and structurally funnels change behavior toward policies that remain short of systemic war. A dangerous environment, but one that is dangerous due to the characteristics of diffuse power structures, rather than due to the possession of nuclear weapons in a mutual assured destruction potential.

A further nuance in application of structural autonomy theory relates to the complex interface between regional and global structural framing. A case in point is Iraq in the 1990s. Iraq existed in the diffuse regional power structure of the Persian Gulf in 1990 and the globally concentrated power structure that had begun to form around the United States. One could view Saddam Hussein’s understanding of his infamous interaction with US Ambassador April Gallespie in July 1990 as signaling that the United States saw the crisis as regional in scope, and thus, the dynamics followed the expectations of change-oriented diffuse power structures and structurally funnels change behavior toward policies that remain short of systemic war. A dangerous environment, but one that is dangerous due to the characteristics of diffuse power structures, rather than due to the possession of nuclear weapons in a mutual assured destruction potential.

By 2003, the United States again used preventive war to sustain its concentrated power structure, which was perceived to have been called into question via the risky behavior of Al Qaeda and continued defiance of Saddam Hussein’s Iraq. The expectations of theory are met depending on how the power structure is framed (regional or concentrated). Further study may examine what drives one frame to dominate the other when they co-exist, but the Iraq case implies it

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28For a thematic review of the increased tensions on the margins and diplomacy on the center, see the comprehensive edited volume, Guderzo and Bruna (2010).
depends on whether the leading state in a concentrated system views regional dynamics as related to the overall global distribution of power or not. In this context, we hypothesize that the global power structure will trump any regional power structure in shaping international political dynamics, except in isolated cases, where the interests of global powers are not engaged regionally. Iraq appears as one of those exceptional regional cases in that Saddam Hussein essentially checks with the global power and confirms US interests are not engaged and, thus, proceeds to act with only the regional power structure in mind. Since that is a diffuse power structure with marginal gaps in power fluctuating, the expectations of structural autonomy theory are met—a major war is initiated (the invasion and occupation of Kuwait). And yet, from a global perspective, the concentrated power structure dictates behavior that offensively at times will retain and redress the status quo. The United States acts in accord with structural autonomy theory to retain the global status quo. The fact that the Soviets align with the United States against a Soviet-armed ally is suggestive of how significant the concentrated power structure had become by 1990 before even the formal collapse of the Soviet Union.

**Conclusion**

There is a place for structural theory in the attempt to explain the complexities of international politics. IR theory has been evolving for decades and has strengthened as structural variables were given more prominence. To date, however, the field has fallen short in leveraging the strength of structuralist thinking. The evolution of realism, in particular, has provided a solid conceptual basis for the subfield’s development (whether one has worked within or in contrast to realism), but it also complicates this endeavor since the literature has assumed we have achieved a structural realist explanation, when in fact we have not. This article seeks to plant the flag more firmly in the groundings of a structuralism that is realistic.

In the end, international politics is a struggle for autonomy. We hope that simple, but not simplistic refinement will, in itself, cause those of us seeking to explain IR to engage in a renewed intellectual struggle to leverage parsimony in the cause of better understanding.

**References**


29A challenging area of future research is to explain how systems shift between diffuse and concentrated power structures. This article has attempted more simply to first establish the utility of these two concepts for explanation under those distinct conditional power structures.
RIchard J. Harknett and Hasan B. Yalcın

In his usual direct way, John J. Mearsheimer has sharpened the theoretical issues dividing realist from institutionalist theory, and for this service we are grateful. We are also pleased that he has read the institutionalist literature so thoroughly. He correctly asserts that liberal institutionalists treat states as rational egoists operating in a world in which agreements cannot be hierarchically enforced, and that institutionalists only expect interstate cooperation to occur if states have significant common interests. Hence institutionalist theory does not espouse the Wilsonian concept of collective security—which Charles and Clifford Kupchan refer to as “ideal collective security”—critiqued so well by I.L. Claude thirty years ago. Nor does institutionalism embrace the aspirations to transform international relations put forward by some critical theorists. Like realism, institutionalist theory is utilitarian and rationalistic.

However, Professor Mearsheimer’s version of realism has some rather serious flaws. Among them are its penchant for assertions that turn out to be incorrect; its propensity to privilege its own viewpoint, so that in the absence of decisive evidence either way it invariably seems to prevail; its failure to explicate the conditions for the operation of its generalizations; and its logical contradictions, escaped only through verbal sleight-of-hand. We will begin by pointing out such errors from his own recent articles in this journal, then...
examine his major claims about institutionalism. We consider the illusory
divide between security and economic issues, the muddled question of "relative
gains," and empirical work (admittedly in its early stages) that provides
evidence of the significance of international institutions. We conclude that
institutions sometimes matter, and that it is a worthy task of social science to
discover how, and under what conditions, this is the case.

The Fallacious Logic of Realism

Five years ago Professor Mearsheimer forecast the imminent decline of NATO:
"It is the Soviet threat that holds NATO together. Take away that offensive
threat and the United States is likely to abandon the Continent, whereupon the
defensive alliance it headed for forty years may disintegrate." At the same
time, he predicted that "the EC is likely [due to the end of the Cold War] to
grow weaker, not stronger with time." Yet now that both NATO and the
European Community, now the European Union (EU), are expanding their
memberships, and hardly in decline, he abandons specificity for the equally
false but more difficult to falsify generalization that "institutions have minimal
influence on state behavior and thus hold little prospect for promoting stability
in a post–Cold War world."

Professor Mearsheimer demands proof that international institutions matter.
Yet he begins his article by reminding us that major governments recently have
been emphasizing the value of international institutions; he could have added
that they invest significant material and reputational resources in NATO, the
EU, and also in organizations such as the General Agreement on Tariffs and
Trade (GATT, recently strengthened to create the World Trade Organization)
and the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA). Not all international
institutions command such resources from governments, but some do. How
are we to account for the willingness of major states to invest resources in
expanding international institutions, if such institutions are lacking in sig-
ificance? Mearsheimer suggests that the answer lies in an ideological blind-
ness of American policymakers, whose hostility toward realism drives them to
the more congenial institutionalist framework (pp. 47–49). It is difficult to

15, No. 2 (Fall 1990), p. 199.
19, No. 3 (Winter 1994/95), p. 7. Subsequent references to this article are in parentheses in the text.
square this assertion of a collective delusion with the dominant role of realist theory in policy discussions, or with realism’s own precepts about the forces that drive state behavior. In light of states’ investments in international institutions, it is fair to turn Mearsheimer’s question around: could we not legitimately demand evidence either that leaders of governments are deluded or that NATO and the EU are designed to deceive unsophisticated observers? Mearsheimer assumes that his view is privileged, in the sense that we must accept realism unless overwhelmingly convincing evidence is presented for an alternative view; but the fact that states invest in international institutions make this stance quite problematic.

Institutionalism and realism differ in a number of other respects, one of the most significant of which concerns how they approach social science. A central fault of Mearsheimer’s realism as a scientific theory—rather than as rhetoric—is that the conditions for the operation of its “grim picture of world politics” (p. 9) typically are not well-specified. Realism is replete with global generalizations, lacking qualifications about the conditions under which they may be valid. Let us consider two examples from Mearsheimer’s own article. First, Mearsheimer writes that “states in a realist world . . . must be motivated primarily by relative gains concerns when considering cooperation” (p. 12, emphasis added). But he later admits that this proposition may be false when the threat of aggressive war is low—for instance, when defensive technologies (such as secure second-strike nuclear forces) are prevalent (pp. 23–25). Second, in Mearsheimer’s realist world, “every state would like to be the most formidable military power in the system” (p. 12). But since no one thinks that Switzerland, Argentina, or contemporary Britain actually seeks to become “the most formidable military power,” what Mearsheimer presumably means to argue is that states with sufficient capabilities always pursue this goal. Even this statement is often false: for example, the United States during the interwar period could reasonably have expected to become the most powerful state in the world, but did not seek such a position. Confronted with such contradictions and anomalies, realism typically retreats from universal rhetoric to post hoc and ad hoc qualifications, taking into account geography, history, perceptions, and domestic politics.

Institutionalism, in contrast, seeks to state in advance the conditions under which its propositions apply. Our theory may therefore have less appeal to those who require simple “truths,” but purportedly scientific theories should specify the conditions under which the theory is expected to hold a priori. As Mearsheimer indicates, when state elites do not foresee self-interested benefits from cooperation, we do not expect cooperation to occur, nor the institutions
that facilitate cooperation to develop. When states can jointly benefit from cooperation, on the other hand, we expect governments to attempt to construct such institutions. Institutions can provide information, reduce transaction costs, make commitments more credible, establish focal points for coordination, and in general facilitate the operation of reciprocity. By seeking to specify the conditions under which institutions can have an impact and cooperation can occur, institutionalist theory shows under what conditions realist propositions are valid. It is in this sense that institutionalism claims to subsume realism.

Realism’s proclivity for bold, unqualified generalizations not only generates anomalies but gets its proponents into logical difficulties. Mearsheimer holds that “institutions have no independent effect on state behavior” (p. 7); that NATO is an institution (p. 13); and that NATO played a role in preventing World War III and helping the West win the Cold War (pp. 13–14). These propositions sound like a classically fallacious syllogism, until one recognizes that there is an escape clause: “NATO was basically a manifestation of the bipolar distribution of power in Europe during the Cold War, and it was that balance of power, not NATO per se, that provided the key to maintaining stability on the continent” (p. 14). But liberal institutionalists, who see institutions as rooted in the realities of power and interest, do not argue that NATO could have maintained stability under any imaginable conditions. What we argue is that institutions make a significant difference in conjunction with power realities. Institutions are important “independently” only in the ordinary sense used in social science: controlling for the effects of power and interests, it matters whether they exist. They also have an interactive effect, meaning that their impact on outcomes varies, depending on the nature of power and interests. Mearsheimer is forced to admit the truth of institutional effects with regard to NATO, although for rhetorical purposes he shifts his ground to attack a view that we do not hold: that institutions can prevent war regardless of the structure in which they operate.

Hence Mearsheimer’s version of realism is replete with analytical problems. However, it is not our duty here to correct realism’s copy-book. In the rest of this brief response, therefore, we focus on the promise of institutionalist theory, and the research directions that we hope will help to realize that promise.

**Political Economy vs. Security and the Issue of Relative Gains**

Although Mearsheimer has provided an admirable summary of several aspects of institutionalist theory, his version of our argument requires correction on
two major points. First, Mearsheimer asserts that institutionalist theory is based on “the assumption that international politics can be divided into two realms—security and political economy—and that liberal institutionalism mainly applies to the latter” (pp. 15–16). Although some institutionalists have made this assertion, it is not the predominant view of the institutionalist literature, and we certainly do not accept it. Secondly, in contrast to Mearsheimer’s assertion, our focus is not exclusively on “cheating.” Situations of coordination, in which cheating is not a problem but distributional issues are serious, are equally important, although they were underemphasized (but not absent) in the early institutionalist literature.

THE PURPORTED SECURITY VS. POLITICAL ECONOMY DIVIDE
Mearsheimer’s assertion that institutionalism employs a “neat dividing line” to separate political economy from security issues is surprising, in view of the attention that he devotes to the volume edited by Kenneth Oye, Cooperation Under Anarchy. A major argument of Cooperation Under Anarchy is that institutionalist theory can be applied to both security and political economy issues. As Robert Axelrod and Robert O. Keohane wrote:

It has often been noted that military-security issues display more of the characteristics associated with anarchy than do political-economic ones. Charles Lipson, for instance, has recently observed that political-economic relationships are typically more institutionalized than military-security ones. This does not mean, however, that analysis of these two sets of issues requires two separate analytical frameworks. Indeed, one of the major purposes of the present collection is to show that a single framework can throw light on both [emphasis added].

We share Mearsheimer’s view that there is no clean analytical line between economic and security issues, although we do not base our view on the overarching role of relative gains. Institutionalist theory should be highly applicable to security issues because its argument revolves around the role of institutions in providing information. This argument is pertinent to realist security arguments, which often rely on worst-case analysis. Realists contend that in an uncertain, anarchic world, states must assume the worst, particularly about others’ intentions, when making policy choices. Worst-case analysis

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implies following policies that do not maximize expected utility for the sake of avoiding terrible outcomes. But if one can secure more information, it may be possible to follow policies that more nearly maximize utility. Realist writers from Kautilya on have stressed the significance of information (intelligence); if institutions can provide useful information, realists should see them as significant. The logic of institutionalist theory is directly applicable to security problems as realists define them.

Hence, if Mearsheimer meant to offer us a “loophole” through which to escape his criticism—that institutionalist theory is only applicable to non-security issues—we emphatically refuse to avail ourselves of his generosity. On the contrary, we hope that, to use Axelrod’s phrase, institutionalist theory will gradually “invade” the study of security issues, helping to explain variation in institutional form without denying the validity of many realist insights into power and interests.

RELATIVE GAINS AND INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION
The conclusions we draw from the “relative gains” debate are different from those of Professor Mearsheimer. It is true that when only two states exist and they have perfectly conflicting interests, institutions will not be significant, but this point is obvious. Two issues are more significant: 1) the conditions under which relative gains are important; and 2) the role of institutions when distributional issues are significant—that is, when relative gains are at stake.

It is important to understand the great variation in the extent to which relative gains matter. The major lesson of the recent debate on relative gains is that their importance is conditional on factors such as the number of major actors in the system and whether military advantage favors offense or defense. Duncan Snidal has shown that relative gains are unlikely to have much impact on cooperation if the potential absolute gains from cooperation are substantial, or in any context involving more than two states. A valuable aspect of the relative gains debate is that it has made distributional and bargaining issues

more salient than they were in early neoliberal thinking, but if the debate becomes one of "whether" relative gains matter, that value will be dissipated. We need instead to ask under what conditions such distributional conflicts are severe.

What is the role of institutions when distributional issues are important? Contrary to the assertion that institutionalist theory is irrelevant to distributional issues, we argue that distributional conflict may render institutions more important. To understand this point, it is essential to distinguish between two problems that states face when they attempt to cooperate. They often worry about the potential for others to cheat, as in a Prisoners' Dilemma. But they also face the problem of coordinating their actions on a particular stable cooperative outcome (solving the problem of multiple equilibria, in game-theoretic terminology). Usually more than one cooperative outcome exists. The states involved may not agree on which of these outcomes is preferred, as each has different distributional implications. Disagreement about the specific form of cooperation is the principal barrier to cooperation in such coordination games. Unless some coordinating mechanism exists, states may fail to capture the potential gains from cooperation. Institutions do not provide the only possible coordinating mechanism. However, in complex situations involving many states, international institutions can step in to provide "constructed focal points" that make particular cooperative outcomes prominent.

Realists interpret the relative-gains logic as showing that states will not cooperate with one another if each suspects that its potential partners are gaining more from cooperation than it is. However, just as institutions can mitigate fears of cheating and so allow cooperation to emerge, so can they alleviate fears of unequal gains from cooperation. Liberal theory argues that institutions provide valuable information, and information about the distribution of gains from cooperation may be especially valuable if the relative-gains logic is correct. Institutions can facilitate cooperation by helping to settle distributional conflicts and by assuring states that gains are evenly divided over


11. For example, Stephen Krasner has argued that coordination problems can be solved by the unilateral exercise of power by the strongest state. Stephen D. Krasner, "Global Communications and National Power: Life on the Pareto Frontier," World Politics, Vol. 43, No. 3 (April 1991), pp. 336-366.
time, for example by disclosing information about the military expenditures and capacities of alliance members.

In our view the successful functioning of institutions depends heavily on the operation of reciprocity, both specific and diffuse.\textsuperscript{12} States using strategies of reciprocity are engaged in exchange with one another and so require information about the value of their exchanges. Institutionalized reciprocity and distributational concerns are simply two sides of the same coin, reflecting the difficulties of cooperating in a system lacking centralized enforcement and pointing to the need for reliable sources of information if states are to achieve gains from cooperation. Far from leading to the conclusion that institutions are not significant in world politics, the relative-gains debate has led us to understand yet another pathway through which they substantially influence the course of international relations. A crucial step in the institutionalist research program will be to understand the conditions under which institutions can provide the information necessary to serve as reliable solutions to distributional problems.

**Empirical Work on the Impact of Institutions**

We agree with John Mearsheimer that “more empirical work is needed before a final judgment is rendered on the explanatory power of liberal institutionalism” (p. 26). The point of a new theory is to generate testable hypotheses: liberal institutionalism, like any other theory, only has value insofar as it generates propositions that can be tested against real evidence.

Institutionalist theory conceptualizes institutions both as independent and dependent variables: “institutions change as a result of human action, and the changes in expectations and process that result can exert profound effects on state behavior.”\textsuperscript{13} Institutional theory has a coherent account of both the creation of institutions and their effects: institutions are created by states because of their anticipated effects on patterns of behavior. Early research by institutionalists focused on institutions as dependent variables, examining the conditions under which they are created. Recent research has sought more systematically


to demonstrate that institutions are sometimes significant for political outcomes, and to determine the conditions under which this is the case.14

In view of this research program, it should be clear that evidence that institutions change in response to underlying conditions is hardly a blow against institutionalist theory. That theory, after all, posits that international institutions are created in response to state interests, and that their character is structured by the prevailing distribution of capabilities. The real empirical issue is how to distinguish the effects of underlying conditions from those of the institutions themselves. One result of the interdependence between institutions and underlying forces is that research designed to isolate the impact of institutions is difficult to design and execute. Rarely, if ever, will institutions vary while the "rest of the world" is held constant. Thus finding the ideal quasi-experimental situation to test the impact of institutions is not possible.

However, these difficulties do not make it impossible to test the argument that institutions matter, since changes in underlying conditions and in institutions are not perfectly correlated. Hence it may be worthwhile to search for instances in which underlying conditions have changed rapidly while institutions have remained relatively constant, or where similar structural changes confront regions that have different institutional endowments. Another tactic may be to consider the level of institutional variation itself. The institutionalist perspective leads us to expect patterned variation in the types of institutions states construct, since they anticipate that institutions so constructed will constrain them. Analysis of institutional form, such as variations in the institutionalization of alliances or in the legalization of the international trading system, should therefore provide valuable evidence for evaluating institutionalist theory.

Realism's insistence that institutions have only marginal effects renders its account of institutional creation incomplete and logically unsound, and leaves it without a plausible account of the investments that states have made in such international institutions as the EU, NATO, GATT, and regional trading organizations. According to the precepts of realist theory, states act rationally when they construct institutions, although they know that these institutions will have

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14. Since institutionalists do not claim that institutions always have a major impact on outcomes, finding weak institutions hardly constitutes a refutation of institutionalist theory. Hence the weakness of the International Energy Agency during the 1979 oil crisis, described by Keohane in *After Hegemony: Cooperation and Discord in the World Political Economy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), is hardly the damning evidence that Mearsheimer claims.
no impact on patterns of cooperation. But what could be the rationale behind devoting resources to structures that will make no difference? Rather than asserting that institutions have no impact, realists must mean that institutions have some effect other than that assumed by liberal institutionalists. Perhaps institutions satisfy the ideological demands of statesmen, or help to pacify inattentive publics. Whatever the rationale, we challenge realists to construct an account of institutional variation and effects that can be tested against the institutionalist alternative. The difference between realism and liberal institutionalism does not lie in whether institutions are independent or dependent variables; it lies in contrasting understandings of why institutions are created and how they exert their effects.

A number of recent studies establish institutional effects through careful empirical research, guided by institutionalist theory and recognizing potential problems of endogeneity and omitted-variable bias. Ronald B. Mitchell shows that on three different issues involving oil pollution at sea, whether states complied with institutional regulations depended on the nature of the rules. “Clear causal links unambiguously demonstrate that treaty rules independently influenced behavior, with other plausible factors controlled for or absent.” New rules on the kinds of tanks that ships are allowed to use, for example, have had a dramatic impact on intentional discharge of oil into the oceans.

The European Court of Justice (ECJ) has also proven a fruitful ground for the study of institutional influence. Anne-Marie Slaughter Burley and Walter Mattli show how the ECJ has had an unexpectedly large impact on the politics of European integration, transforming political into legal issues with the aid of transnational networks of lawyers and judges. The ECJ has gone far to convert the Treaties of Rome into a constitution for the EU, with the result that EU law now reaches deeply into the domestic law of member states. Geoffrey Garrett and Barry Weingast, in another study of the ECJ, show how it resolved problems of multiple equilibria for EU member states by providing constructed

The Promise of Institutionalist Theory

focal points in coordination problems. These studies show that institutions have the wide range of effects attributed to them by liberal institutionalists. They change the incentives for states to cheat; they also reduce transaction costs, link issues, and provide focal points for cooperation.

The institutionalist perspective has also been applied with success to the analysis of security regimes. John Duffield has considered NATO as a regional security regime. He finds that NATO made an independent contribution to the “Long Peace” in Europe by drawing boundaries, demonstrating U.S. commitments and making them credible, and facilitating the augmentation of NATO allies’ military capabilities. He also finds that the stable norms and rules of NATO led to stability in levels of conventional forces within the regime that cannot be explained by structural theories.

In Coercive Cooperation, Lisa Martin showed that the involvement of international organizations in economic sanctions is strongly correlated with high levels of cooperation. Since such a correlation does not establish causality, she also did qualitative work on several cases involving sanctions, including EC sanctions against Argentina during the Falklands War. Mearsheimer considers the Falklands case in isolation from the rest of this research, and dismisses it as “less than a ringing endorsement for liberal institutionalism” on the grounds that concerns about cheating were not involved (p. 25). In fact, Martin does find evidence that states used the EC framework to reduce fears of cheating, in the form of taking advantage of the situation to profit from trade with Argentina. However, the major effect of institutions came through institutionalized linkages that would otherwise have been nonexistent: a linkage between EC budget contributions and the sanctions issue. Prevention of cheating is not the only mechanism by which institutions facilitate cooperation. By creating issue linkages, they allow for more effective retaliation against cheaters and also create scope for mutually-beneficial exchanges. Further evidence for the

22. Ibid., p. 143.
EC's role in coordinating sanctions comes from the fact that outside the EC, the only other significant support Britain received came from Commonwealth nations and the United States. In the U.S. case, support was delayed until after the outbreak of war, in distinct contrast to the behavior of EC members.\footnote{Japan initially refused British pleas to impose sanctions, and took only minor steps following U.S. imposition of sanctions, much later than EC members.}

Mearsheimer’s dismissal of international institutions implies that linkages are easy to forge when a state desires cooperation, and that cooperation is easy to coordinate even without institutions, yet Britain did not find either to be the case. Even in isolation from the robust statistical results and other case studies reported in Coercive Cooperation, the Falklands case illustrates the central role of formal international institutions in enabling states to cooperate to impose multilateral economic sanctions.\footnote{The Falklands case cannot be dismissed on grounds that, as Mearsheimer claims, striking a deal was “not difficult.” The historical record shows intense conflict, including public protests in some countries and challenges to the sitting government in others. The Thatcher government believed that its survival was at stake in the Falklands War. While perhaps not a “core interest” by realist standards, government survival is surely a fundamental concern of policymakers that could impede cooperation.}

Institutions sometimes matter for state policy, but we do not adequately understand in what domains they matter most, under what conditions, and how their effects are exerted. More research on this subject, by students of world politics critical of institutionalist theory as well as by those working from it, is essential, and will be most welcome.

\textit{Conclusion}

Far from demonstrating the irrelevance of international institutions, Mearsheimer’s characterization of conflict in world politics makes institutions appear essential if states are to have any hope of sustained cooperation, and of reaping its benefits. This necessity for institutions does not mean that they are always valuable, much less that they operate without respect to power and interests, constitute a panacea for violent conflict, or always reduce the likelihood of war. Claiming too much for international institutions would indeed be a “false promise.” But in a world politics constrained by state power and divergent interests, and unlikely to experience effective hierarchical governance, international institutions operating on the basis of reciprocity will be components of any lasting peace.
The institutionalist research program in international relations is a promising one. The logic of institutionalist theory, with its focus on the informational role of institutions, appears solid. Institutionalists should respond to Mearsheimer's criticisms by better integrating distributional considerations into their models, further specifying the causal mechanisms by which institutions exercise influence, and building on existing empirical work to provide more convincing evidence of institutional effects. Both the questions raised and the provisional answers given by institutionalists, during the relatively short life of this research program, indicate that these tasks may be rewarding. In comparison with the extant alternatives, the promise of institutionalist theory seems bright.
Realism, Neoliberalism, and Cooperation

Robert Jervis

Understanding the Debate

The study of conflict and cooperation has been an enduring task of scholars, with the most recent arguments being between realists and neoliberal institutionalists. Most students of the subject believe that realists argue that international politics is characterized by great conflict and that institutions play only a small role. They also believe that neoliberals claim that cooperation is more extensive, in large part because institutions are potent.

I do not think that this formulation of the debate is correct. In the first section of this article, I argue that the realist-neoliberal disagreement over conflict is not about its extent but about whether it is unnecessary, given states' goals. In this context we cannot treat realism as monolithic, but must distinguish between the offensive and defensive variants. In the second section, I explain


I am grateful for comments by David Baldwin, Page Fortna, Robert Keohane, Jeffrey Legro, Helen Milner, Andrew Moravcsik, and Kenneth Waltz.


the disagreement in terms of what each school of thought\(^3\) believes would have to change to produce greater cooperation. This raises the question of institutions. In the third section, I argue that realists claim not that institutions lack utility, but that they are not autonomous in the sense of being more than a tool of statecraft. Even if it is true that cooperation and the presence of institutions are correlated, it does not follow that cooperation can be increased by establishing institutions where they do not exist, which I think is why most people find the realist-neoliberal debate over cooperation of more than academic interest.

I do not want to exaggerate the gap separating realism and neoliberalism. Robert Keohane and Lisa Martin have noted that “for better or worse, institutional theory is a half-sibling of neorealism.”\(^4\) Both realism and neoliberalism start from the assumption that the absence of a sovereign authority that can make and enforce binding agreements creates opportunities for states to advance their interests unilaterally and makes it important and difficult for states to cooperate with one another.\(^5\) States must worry that others will seek to take

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\(^3\) I use this term because I do not think realism and neoliberal institutionalism can be sharply defined. Indeed, they are better labeled schools of thought or approaches than theories. Although this vagueness contributes to confusion as scholars talk past one another, a precise definition would be necessary only if either of these approaches really were a tight theory. In that case, falsification of propositions derived from the theory would cast doubt on the entire enterprise. But, for better and for worse, neither of these approaches has the sort of integrity that would permit the use of that logic. For an attempt to formulate a rigorous, but I think excessively narrow, definition of realism, see Jeffrey W. Legro and Andrew Moravcsik, “Is Anybody Still a Realist?” International Security, Vol. 24, No. 2 (Fall 1999). See also Kenneth N. Waltz, “Realist Thought and Neorealist Theory,” in Robert L. Rothstein, ed., The Evolution of Theory in International Relations (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1991), pp. 21–38; and the exchange between Colin Elman and Waltz in Security Studies, Vol. 6, No. 1 (Autumn 1996), pp. 7–61.


\(^5\) The realization that commitment is difficult within states as well has led to enormous progress in understanding domestic politics and arrangements among private actors, thus making recent analyses in American and comparative politics appear quite familiar to students of international politics. See Helen V. Milner, “Rationalizing Politics: The Emerging Synthesis among International
advantage of them; agreements must be crafted to minimize the danger of double crosses; the incentives that operate when agreements are signed may be quite different when the time comes for them to be carried out; and both promises and threats need to be made credible. Thus it will take some disentangling to isolate the areas in which there are important disputes between realism and neoliberalism.6

Possibilities for Cooperation

Is it true that realism denies the possibility of international cooperation or, less extremely, that realists see less cooperation in world politics than do neoliberal institutionalists? I think the former statement is flatly wrong. The latter is also incorrect, but when properly reformulated, it points in a productive direction.

FALSE OR EXaggerated ISSUES

The affinity between realism and neoliberal institutionalism is not the only reason to doubt the claim that realism has no place for cooperation. This view would imply that conflict of interest is total and that whatever one state gains, others must lose.7 This vision of a zero-sum world is implausible. The sense of international politics as characterized by constant bargaining, which is central to realism (but not to realism alone, of course), implies a mixture of common and conflicting interests. One can have fighting in a zero-sum world, but not politics.

More worthy of exploration is the less extreme view that realism sees world politics as much more conflictual than does neoliberal institutionalism.8 For


6. The differences may be sharper in some central issues I am putting aside here: the efficacy and fungibility of various forms of power, especially military power; the differences in state behavior when force, coercion, or unilateral solutions are available; and the frequency of such situations.

7. This view is hard even to conceptualize in a multipolar world. Any gain of territory or power by state A would have to come at the expense of some other state, but if it diminishes state B or state C, this might aid state D, at least in the short run, if D is the rival of B or C. Here the situation is zero-sum (or, more technically, constant sum) overall, but not all actors are hurt, and some may be advantaged, by another’s gain.

8. How to measure and even conceptualize conflict and conflict of interest is not easy. See Robert Axelrod, *Conflict of Interest: A Theory of Divergent Goals with Applications to Politics* (Chicago: Markham, 1970).
realists, world politics is a continuing if not an unrelenting struggle for survival, advantage, and often dominance. Neoliberals do not deny the existence of cases of extreme conflict, but they do not see them as the entire or even a representative picture of world politics. In many cases and in many areas, states are able to work together to mitigate the effects of anarchy, produce mutual gains, and avoid shared harm.

Although not entirely misguided, this characterization of the difference between realism and neoliberalism is still wrong. To start with, some of this difference reflects the issues that the schools of thought analyze. Neoliberal institutionalists concentrate on issues of international political economy (IPE) and the environment; realists are more prone to study international security and the causes, conduct, and consequences of wars. Thus, although it would be correct to say that one sees more conflict in the world analyzed by realist scholars than in the world analyzed by neoliberals, this is at least in part because they study different worlds.9

Similarly, while neoliberal institutionalism is more concerned with efficiency and realism focuses more on issues of distribution, which are closely linked to power as both an instrument and a stake,10 it is not clear that this represents different views about the world or a difference in the choice of subject matter. Neoliberalism’s argument (usually implicit) that distributional conflicts are usually less important than the potential common gains stems at least in part from its substantive concern with issues in which large mutual benefits are

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9. The differences between the issue areas are not inherent, but it is generally believed that the factors that are conducive to cooperation, such as vulnerability, offensive advantage, and lack of transparency, are more prevalent in IPE than in the security arena. See Robert Jervis, “Security Regimes,” International Organization, Vol. 36, No. 2 (Spring 1982), pp. 358–360; and Charles H. Lipson, “International Cooperation in Economic and Security Affairs,” World Politics, Vol. 37, No. 1 (October 1984), pp. 1–23.

believed to be possible, such as protecting the environment, rather than with disputes over values such as territory, status, and influence (if not dominance).

The related difference between realists and neoliberals on the issue of relative and absolute gains also should not be exaggerated, as recent formulations have explained.11 To start with, it is not clear whether neoliberals are arguing that realists are incorrect to assert that states often are concerned with relative gains or that it is the states that err when they are thus concerned, perhaps because they have been socialized by realist prescriptions. Substantively, realists never claimed that relative gains were all that mattered—to assert this would be to declare international politics a zero-sum game—and many realists have been sensitive to possibilities of mutual security. Thus within a few months of the explosion of the first atomic bomb, realist scholars noted that once both sides had a sufficient number of these weapons, little could be gained by further increases and there was little to fear from the other side’s increases. The title of the first major book on the subject, The Absolute Weapon, indicated quite clearly the radical change from a world in which the greatest form of military power was relative.12 Indeed, this effect also undercuts much of the concern over relative gains in the economic area because they have much less impact on security.13 Neoliberals also have adopted a less extreme position on the absolute-relative gains debate. They initially cast their arguments in

terms of absolute gains, but soon acknowledged that it is dangerous for one state to seek absolute gains that would put it at a relative disadvantage vis-à-vis an adversary.14

**AREA OF DISAGREEMENT: NOT CONFLICT, BUT UNNECESSARY CONFLICT**
The disagreements between realism and neoliberalism have not only been exaggerated, but they have also been misunderstood. Neoliberalism does not see more cooperation than does realism; rather, neoliberalism believes that there is much more unrealized or potential cooperation than does realism, and the schools of thought disagree about how much conflict in world politics is unnecessary or avoidable in the sense of actors failing to agree even though their preferences overlap.15 To put it in a context that frames the next section of this article, they differ over the changes that they believe are feasible and required to reduce conflict.

When a realist such as Stephen Krasner argues that much of international politics is “life on the Pareto frontier,” he implies that states already have been able to cooperate to such an extent that no further moves can make all of them better off.16 For neoliberals, in the absence of institutions we are often far from this frontier, and much of international politics resembles a prisoner's dilemma or a market failure in producing suboptimal outcomes for all concerned. Although neoliberals are strongly influenced by neoclassical economics, they reject the idea that the free play of political forces will capture all possible joint

14. The greatest deficiency in the relative/absolute gains literature is that it has remained largely at the level of theory and prescription, with much less attention to when decisionmakers do in fact exhibit relative-gains concerns. Thus as noteworthy as the fact that leading academics employed impeccable logic to demonstrate the irrelevance of relative advantage in a world of mutual second-strike capabilities was the fact that each side’s decisionmakers remained unpersuaded, continued to fear that the other sought nuclear superiority, and sought advantage, if not superiority, for itself. For a related argument, see Glaser, “Realists as Optimists,” pp. 86–88. For a good empirical study in the trade area, see Michael Mastanduno, “Do Relative Gains Matter? America's Response to Japanese Industrial Policy,” *International Security*, Vol. 16, No. 1 (Summer 1991), pp. 73–113.

15. For a parallel discussion of “real” and “illusory” incompatibility, see Kenneth E. Boulding, “National Images and International Systems,” *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, Vol. 3, No. 2 (June 1959), p. 130. This distinction and the one I am making are not without their difficulties, as I discuss below. The move from conflicting preferences to conflictful behavior is not entirely direct because if information is complete and outcomes are infinitely divisible, the actors should be able to find a way of reaching the outcome that is cheaper than engaging in costly conflict. This is known as the Hicks paradox in economics and was introduced into the international relations literature by James D. Fearon in “Rationalist Explanations for War,” *International Organization*, Vol. 49, No. 3 (Summer 1995), pp. 379–414. The subject is important but not central to the issues of concern here.

Thus the old joke about two neoclassical economists walking down the street: one sees a $20 bill, but before he can bend down to pick it up, his colleague says, “Don’t bother; if it were really there someone would have gotten it before us.” For neoliberal institutionalists, the world is littered with $20 bills. Because they believe that there are many mutually beneficial arrangements that states forgo because of the fear that others will cheat or take advantage of them, they see important gains to be made through the more artful arrangement of policies. Like neoclassical economists, some realists doubt this, believing that all available $20 bills have already been picked up. For them, it is unfortunately true that we live in the best of all possible worlds. And if this is the case, distributional issues loom large, making it hard to see how neoliberalist analysis can be brought to bear.

To proceed further, we need to divide realism into offensive and defensive categories. Offensive realists think that few important situations in international politics resemble a prisoner’s dilemma. This model does not elucidate the most crucial area of the pursuit of security by major powers because mutual security either is not sought or cannot be gained: one or more of the states is willing to risk war to expand or has security requirements that are incompatible with those of others. Thus for John Mearsheimer, states maximize power (which must be seen in relative terms) either because it is the means by which they can be secure or because they want other values that power is (correctly) believed to bring. For Colin Gray, arms races are a reflection of conflicts of interest, and wars result not because of the mutual pursuit of security but because one if not both sides is aggressive. For Randall Schweller, it is especially important to “bring the revisionist state back in” because security-seeking states do not get into unnecessary conflicts: they are able to discern

17. This is not to say that all arguments that actors are below the Pareto frontier share neoliberalism’s stress on the importance of institutions. Thus Deborah W. Larson’s analysis of missed opportunities during the Cold War seeks to demonstrate that, at a number of points, lack of trust and related psychological impediments prevented the United States and the Soviet Union from relaxing tensions and reaching agreements that would have made both of them both better off. See Larson, Anatomy of Mistrust: U.S.-Soviet Relations during the Cold War (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1997).


one another’s intentions and can move sufficiently quickly to protect themselves if others should become menacing. 21

Defensive realists disagree, and take a position on the role of unnecessary conflict that has more in common with neoliberals. Scholars such as Charles Glaser, John Herz, Stephen Van Evera, and myself see the prisoner’s dilemma as capturing important dynamics of international politics, especially through the operation of the security dilemma—the ways in which the attempt by one state to increase its security has the effect (often unintended and sometimes unforeseen) of decreasing the security of others. Often states would be willing to settle for the status quo and are driven more by fear than by the desire to make gains. According to this “spiral model” of international politics, both structural and perceptual reasons conspire to render self-defeating the actions states take to protect themselves. In many cases, it is the interactive process among states that generates conflict rather than merely reveals or enacts the preexisting differences in goals. Both sides would be satisfied with mutual security; international politics represents tragedy rather than evil as the actions of states make it even harder for them to be secure. This is not true in all cases, however. Aggressor states are common; security and other interests often create differences that are irreconcilable. In these and only these instances, defensive realists see conflict as unavoidable.

Despite important similarities, three differences make defensive realists less optimistic than neoliberals. First, as noted above, defensive realists believe that only in a subset (size unspecified) of situations is conflict unnecessary. Second, and related to this, they believe that it is often hard for states to tell which situation they are in. The difficulty status quo powers have in recognizing one another, in part because of deeply rooted political and perceptual biases, is compounded by the high price to be paid for mistaking an expansionist state for a partner that seeks mainly security. Third, defensive realists have less faith in the ability of actors to reach common interests than do neoliberals: in some cases, mistrust and fear of cheating may be too severe to be overcome. The extent of the differences between the schools of thought are difficult to estimate, however, because realism and neoliberalism have rarely analyzed com-

parable situations. Unlike defensive realists, neoliberals have concentrated on areas in which the costs of mistakenly believing that the other will cooperate are not prohibitive, and in which gains in efficiency are likely to be greater than conflicts over distribution. But it also seems that neoliberals see the restraints that actors can impose on others and themselves as stronger than defensive realists believe them to be. If arrangements to increase cooperation are so feasible, however, the obvious question, which I touch on later, is why they are not employed more often: Why are there still $20 bills on the ground?

In summary, offensive realists think that the conflict we observe in international politics represents real incompatibility between desired states of the world. The famous example is the reply that Francis I of France gave in the early sixteenth century when he was asked what differences led to constant warfare with Spain's Charles V: "None whatever. We agree perfectly. We both want control of Italy!" At the very least, offensive realists note, modeling politics as a prisoner's dilemma conceptualizes cooperation as a single alternative, the only one that is better over the long run than mutual defection. In fact, there are many outcomes better than mutual defection, and these distribute the gains in quite different ways and are inevitable sources of conflict. Neoliberals attribute much conflict to the failure to employ institutions that could move states to the Pareto frontier by facilitating secure and equitable agreements. Defensive realists fall between these views, arguing that a great deal depends on whether the state (assumed to be willing to live with the status quo) is facing a like-minded partner or an expansionist. In the latter case, their analysis parallels that of the offensive realists; in the former case, it is not unlike that of neoliberals.

Changes Needed for Cooperation

Realists and neoliberals have different perspectives on what would have to change to increase cooperation in a particular situation. These differences can be understood by applying Robert Powell’s distinction between preferences

23. A particularly insightful use of counterfactuals to explore changes that could have avoided a major war is Paul W. Schroeder, “Embedded Counterfactuals and the Case for World War I as an ‘Unavoidable’ War,” in Richard Ned Lebow, Philip E. Tetlock, and Geoffrey Parker, eds., “Unmaking the West: Exploring Alternative Histories of Counterfactual Worlds,” unpublished book manuscript, Ohio State University. I am concerned here with short-run changes that could reduce a current conflict, not with changes such as instituting a world government, making all states democratic, or using future DNA technology to alter human nature.
over strategies, or ways to reach goals, on the one hand, and changes in preferences over goals or outcomes, on the other. Neoliberals are more optimistic than realists because they believe that changes in preferences over strategies usually are sufficient to produce mutual benefit. Much of this change can come by more and better information—information about the situation, information about what the other side has done and why it has done it, and information about what the other side is likely to do in the future. States can cooperate by reducing transaction costs (the costs and risks associated with reaching and carrying out agreements) and, in turn, the successful reduction of such costs can facilitate cooperation. Institutions can play a large role here, and this helps explain why institutionalized cooperation can continue even when the initially propitious conditions have disappeared. But it is hard to see how changes in information can be effective when changes in preferences over outcomes are required. Thus neoliberals do not discuss how states do or should behave when vital interests clash: there are no neoliberal analyses of the Cold War, the diplomacy of the 1930s, or relations between the United States and Iraq, and the approach could help in Kosovo only if there are some outcomes acceptable to both sides absent changes in power.

Offensive realists see much less room for increasing cooperation. Aggressors may be deterred or defeated, but given that the security dilemma is irrelevant or intractable, additional information cannot lead to conflict-reducing changes in preference over strategies. Furthermore, changes in preferences over outcomes may be out of reach if all states seek to dominate. Altering the incentives states face may be effective, but this will benefit one side only. Although changes in relative power drive much of international politics, they too alter what each state gains and do not bring mutual benefit. Increasing the costs of war may reduce violent conflict, but rarely can cooperation be increased by changing beliefs and information about the other or the world.

For defensive realists, much depends on the nature of the situation: the changes required when a status quo power faces an expansionist power are

very different from the changes that could increase cooperation among status quo powers that fear one another. When dealing with aggressors, increasing cooperation is beyond reach, and the analysis and preferred policies of defensive realists differ little from those of offensive realists; when the security dilemma is the problem, either or both sides can seek changes in preferences over strategies (both their own and those of the other) in the form of implementing standard “cooperation under anarchy” policies. In these cases, defensive realists and neoliberals see similar ways to reduce conflict. Both embrace the apparent paradox that actors can be well advised to reduce their own ability to take advantage of others now and in the future. Both agree that cooperation is more likely or can be made so if large transactions can be divided up into a series of smaller ones, if transparency can be increased, if both the gains from cheating and the costs of being cheated on are relatively low, if mutual cooperation is or can be made much more advantageous than mutual defection, and if each side employs strategies of reciprocity and believes that the interactions will continue over a long period of time.\(^{27}\)

Thus for defensive realists, diagnosis of the situation and the other’s objectives is a critical and difficult step, which explains why analysts of this type come to different policy prescriptions if they have different views of the adversary.\(^{28}\) For example, much of the American debate over how to respond to North Korea’s nuclear program turns on beliefs about whether that country is driven by insecurity and seeks better relations with the United States on

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27. Kenneth A. Oye, ed., Cooperation under Anarchy (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1986), which includes essays by defensive realists and neoliberals. These arguments were developed in works that formed the basis for the Oye volume: Robert Axelrod, The Evolution of Cooperation (New York: Basic Books, 1984); Robert Jervis, “Cooperation under the Security Dilemma,” World Politics, Vol. 30, No. 2 (January 1978), pp. 167–214; and Keohane, After Hegemony. It is not true, however, that a long “shadow of the future” by itself increases cooperation. When an agreement is expected to last for a long time, the incentives to bargain harder are greater. See James D. Fearon, “Bargaining, Enforcement, and International Cooperation,” International Organization, Vol. 52, No. 2 (Spring 1998), pp. 269–305. Similarly, when what is at stake are actors’ reputations for standing firm, as was true in many Cold War interactions, then issues of little intrinsic importance produce very high conflict. Much of the relative gains problem turns on the expectation that the outcome of the current interaction will strongly affect the actors’ future well-being; states often fight at one time because they fear that otherwise they will be at a greater disadvantage in the future. Neoliberals argue that institutions can curb these effects.

28. For the importance of diagnosis, see Alexander L. George, Bridging the Gap: Theory and Practice in Foreign Policy (Washington, D.C.: United States Institute of Peace, 1993). See also Robert Jervis, Perception and Misperception in International Politics (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1976), chap. 3. In many cases, contemporary policymakers or later analysts may not be clear as to whether they are disagreeing about the nature of the situation the state is in or the policies that are appropriate for that situation.
acceptable terms or whether its goal is to push the United States off the peninsula and dominate South Korea, in which case North Korea would not refrain from developing atomic bombs in return for a reasonable agreement and instead would respond only to coercion.29

Often more fine-grained distinctions about preferences are required to understand what needs to change to increase cooperation. Because states have ladders of means-ends beliefs, some preferences over outcomes are, from a broader perspective, preferences over strategies. Thus many conflicts can be seen as both an avoidable security dilemma and the product of irreconcilable differences. For example, it can be argued that at bottom what Japan sought in the 1930s was security: dominance over the East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere was desired not as an ultimate value or even for national wealth but as a source of strength and security. This in turn was needed not because Japan was under immediate Western pressure—this was an effect not a cause of Japan’s policy—but rather because of the expectation that eventually the West would menace Japan. Cooperation would have been possible if the United States and Great Britain had been able to reassure Japan of their continuing goodwill (assuming that Japan did not engage in military adventures), but this was difficult if not impossible for states in anarchy. Although Japan’s ultimate goals would not have to have changed to produce cooperation, “mere” alterations in images of the other side and the deployment of conflict-reduction strategies could not have kept the peace. Similarly, even if the United States and the Soviet Union ultimately sought security during the Cold War, deep internal changes were a prerequisite for far-reaching cooperation because each believed that the other would be a menace as long as its domestic system was in place.

Institutions and Cooperation

As their name suggests, neoliberal institutionalists stress the role of institutions, broadly defined as enduring patterns of shared expectations of behavior that have received some degree of formal assent.30 Here too it is important to

understand the disagreement with realists, which is not over the existence of institutions or the fact that they are found where cooperation is high, but over the claim that they are more than instruments of statecraft and have an independent impact, “a life of their own.” The obvious threat to the latter argument is the assertion of endogeneity—if it is predictable that certain kinds of institutions will produce increased cooperation, then actors will establish such arrangements when and only when they want this outcome, which is likely to be consistent with realist analysis. As Charles Glaser puts it, institutions are “the product of the same factors—states’ interests and the constraints imposed by the system—that influence whether states should cooperate.” Neoliberals think that establishing an institution can increase cooperation. Realists believe that this is not so much a false statement as a false remedy, because the states will establish an institution if and only if they seek the goals that the institution will help them reach.

The contrast between realist and neoliberal views can be brought out by differing interpretations of Page Fortna’s important finding that cease-fires are likely to be maintained when devices such as buffer zones, inspections, and arms limitations are involved. Even though this conclusion holds when situational variables are held constant, the endogeneity problem arises as it must with any study comparing the outcomes of cases in which policymakers institutions and their leaders can maximize their own self-interest at the expense of those of the principals.


32. Keohane and Martin, “Institutional Theory, Endogeneity, and Delegation.” This is consistent with Keohane’s “functional theory regimes” in After Hegemony, chap. 6.


make different choices, and this allows neoliberals and realists to make different interpretations. A neoliberal would argue that the efficacy of these arrangements shows their independent impact and implies that they would produce some good effect if they had been employed in other cases. Realists see the finding as a demonstration of the importance of statecraft but are skeptical of the implications for other cases, arguing that no set of control variables can capture all the factors that go into decisionmakers’ judgments. There are likely to be good reasons why certain arrangements are adopted in some cases and not in others; if states had wanted to make it more difficult to break the cease-fire in the latter cases, and if technology, terrain, and third-party influences had permitted this, then they would have done so. The arrangements were reflections of the actors preferences over outcomes, and the cease-fires that broke down were then not instances of mutually undesired and unnecessary conflict. This kind of reasoning leads realists to argue that the key errors of reformers after World War I were to believe that the war had been caused by a lack of mechanisms for conflict resolution and to conclude that the path to peace was to establish such an organization even in the absence of shifts in the goals of the states.

Three Kinds of Institutions

To analyze the role played by institutional arrangements and the links among interests, policies, and cooperation, we need to distinguish among three kinds of institutions. What is crucial is whether the arrangements merely further established interests or change preferences over outcomes, thereby permitting forms and degrees of cooperation that cannot be reached through the provision of more information and the deployment of standard ways to give actors confidence that agreements will be maintained. It is when institutions are autonomous in this sense that neoliberal analysis makes its most distinctive contribution.

INSTITUTIONS AS STANDARD TOOLS: BINDING AND SELF-BINDING
The first kind of institutions are well-known instruments of statecraft such as alliances and trade agreements. Neoliberals have argued that realists cannot explain why these agreements have any impact, given their strong arguments

about anarchy and the difficulties of making credible commitments. Although neoliberals have added to our knowledge of the mechanisms involved, in fact mechanisms are consistent with defensive realism’s analysis of how actors can overcome prisoner’s dilemmas, as noted earlier. Furthermore, there is no dispute that these institutions are reflections of states’ preexisting interests.

Many institutions that make it more difficult and costly for states to defect in the future, and so modify anarchy, similarly embody preferences over outcomes. Realists are likely to stress the objective of binding others to keep their commitments; neoliberals are more sensitive to the fact that it can be equally important for actors—indeed, for powerful ones, more important—to bind themselves.36 But the difference is in emphasis only, and a defensive realist would not be surprised by a German official’s recent explanation of his support for strong European institutions: “We wanted to bind Germany into a structure which practically obliges Germany to take the interests of its neighbors into consideration. We wanted to give our neighbors assurances that we won’t do what we don’t intend to do anyway.”37

Although realists see binding as somewhat more difficult and less likely to be desired than do neoliberals, they do not deny that states can take themselves out of anarchy if they choose to cede much of their sovereignty to a central authority, as the thirteen American colonies did. It is probably true that neoliberals see the “web of interdependence” among countries as stronger than do realists, in part because they believe that elites and members of the public place greater value on economic values as compared to security, status, and


self-assertion. But these differences are elusive because they are matters of degree. No one thinks that institutions can be fully binding: even states such as Yugoslavia and the Soviet Union that once shared common institutions and were economically integrated have come apart in the face of strong conflicts, and the United States was held together only by force in its civil war. No one denies that institutions can be broken without any costs—indeed, these costs are what gives each actor some confidence that others will continue to respect them. But what is crucial is that irrespective of their strength, these arrangements are instituted because national leaders want them to have binding effects. The institutions can then be important, but even if they involve giving power to autonomous actors such as the United Nations’ secretary-general or the World Trade Organization, they are not autonomous in the sense of overriding or shaping the preferences of those who established them.

INSTITUTIONS AS INNOVATIVE TOOLS
The second set of institutions are ones that are potential tools but remain outside the realm of normal statecraft because leaders have not thought of them or do not appreciate their effectiveness. Here there is an area of unrealized common interest, and greater cooperation could be secured by increasing information and knowledge. Because people learn from experience, problems that could not have been solved in the past may be treatable today. Furthermore, scholars can discover the efficacy of neglected instruments. For example, Keohane and Martin not only argue that it can be in the interest of states to delegate authority to unbiased bodies, but imply that this is not apparent to all decisionmakers. Thus increased understanding could allow them to cooperate more. Similarly, when defensive realists called for arrangements that decreased the “reciprocal fear of surprise attack” and developed the theory of arms control, they implied that a fuller and more accurate appreciation of crisis instability as a cause of war could lead to greater cooperation.

As is the case with other analyses that are simultaneously descriptive and prescriptive, however, there is tension between the claim that academics have ignored some kinds of institutions and the argument that it is states that have neglected them. To the extent that scholars can show that their peers have not appreciated a range of devices that states have in fact utilized, they undercut the claim that this finding can increase cooperation. My sense is that academics underestimate the ingenuity of skilled practitioners, although they may play a role in spreading such skill. For example, the recent settlement of the longstanding border dispute between Peru and Ecuador created “peace parks,” including a square kilometer that was the site of the last Ecuadoran stand against Peru in 1995 and the grave of twelve Ecuadoran soldiers. Although this land is in Peru and will remain under Peruvian sovereignty, it will be under Ecuadoran control. If neoliberals could point to underutilized institutions or invent new ones, they could perform a major service, but because these instruments would still reflect underlying interests, realist claims would not necessarily be disturbed.

INSTITUTIONS AS CAUSES OF CHANGES IN PREFERENCES OVER OUTCOMES

The case is different, however, with a third kind of institution—those that change preferences over outcomes. Realists say that in a system of self-help, institutions cannot stop states from fighting “when push comes to shove.” Neoliberals reply that even if this is correct, it misses the more important point that institutions can make it less likely that push will come to shove by providing information, altering the consequences of shoving, and diminishing the desire to push. But if we are to classify the institutions as more than instruments of underlying interest, these changes must be unanticipated by the actors.

Borderline cases are attempts at what might be called “deep self-binding.” For example, the German effort discussed earlier can be seen as an attempt to shape not only future German behavior, but also future German preferences over outcomes. Just as Gary Becker argues that individuals may act in a certain

way to influence what their later tastes will be, so today's German leaders may want to strengthen European ties to ensure that later Germans would not even contemplate or think desirable any independent military action or the pursuit of security policies that could endanger other European countries. If international institutions serve these functions, they can increase cooperation, and, more important, shape the future, but they still are serving the goals envisaged by the current decisionmakers.

This is not true if the changes that occur are unforeseen and unintended. The classic example is Ernst Haas's analysis of the spillover processes of regional integration in which decisionmakers seek limited cooperation but the policies they adopt for this purpose trigger changes in laws, incentives, interest group strategies, and eventually loyalties that lead to much greater integration. The great diminution of national sovereignty that we have seen, the delegation of significant power to supranational bodies, and the development of some degree of popular identification with Europe rather than with individual nations were not what most of the European leaders sought at the start, but rather were the product of the institutions they established. The institutions had "a life of their own" in not only binding the states more than the founders foresaw, but in changing beliefs about what is possible and desirable: they shaped, as much as they reflected, interests. When these processes operate, people are instruments of institutions rather than the other way around.


Less dramatically, arrangements developed for one purpose can be put to uses that were not originally contemplated. Thus Lisa Martin shows that Great Britain was able to gain European support for economic sanctions against Argentina during the Falklands War by using the coordinating mechanisms and forums of the European Community. These institutions had been developed to facilitate economic integration within Europe; no one had thought that they would assist one EC member in its security policy against an outsider. But this did turn out to be the case, and their utility may have increased the faith that members (especially Great Britain) placed in them. Similarly, the consortium established to build nuclear reactors in North Korea as part of the bargain that ended the crisis with the United States in 1994 became an important venue for direct and quiet talks between North and South Korea. Processes of biological evolution work in this way. Many new features of plants and animals are highly adaptive when they are fully developed. But, like wings on birds, they can rarely appear all at once and complete. If they are to arise, then, they must serve other functions in their half-way stages.

The North Atlantic Treaty Organization is an example. Although NATO’s functioning during the Cold War did not transform its members and it retains its original purpose of “keeping the Americans in, the Germans down, and the Russians out,” its operation has influenced beliefs and preferences at all levels of government—from the members of the bureaucracy who have a stake in its success, to foreign office officials who have a potent new tool of joint action,

46. Sigal, Disarming Strangers, p. 203.
to political leaders who will lose domestic or international support if they act unilaterally rather than through the institution.

More broadly, institutions can generate many different kinds of powerful feedback. For example, the Anglo-French Entente of 1904 created a dynamic that greatly increased cooperation between these countries and also between them and Russia in ways that were not initially foreseen or desired (and, as both a cause and an effect of these changes, increased Anglo-German hostility).  

In other cases, the institutions can erode the power of those who played the dominant role in establishing them by giving voice, legitimacy, and forms of influence to weak or new actors, as has proven the case with important international organizations, including regional development banks.

Perhaps the most important path by which institutions can change preferences is through domestic politics. Drawing on liberalism, neoliberalism holds that states are not all alike and that preferences in part arise internally. To the extent that this is correct, international arrangements can alter the power, beliefs, and goals of groups in society in ways that will affect foreign relations. Thus arms control agreements can strengthen the hands of “doves”; lowered tariff barriers can drive out inefficient producers and bolster the advocates for still lower tariffs; one of the less foolish arguments in favor of expanding NATO is the belief that this will give reformers in East Europe greater influence.

I think we have underestimated the importance of these dynamic effects of institutions. Although the instruments of diplomacy, including standard and innovative institutions, are adequate for realizing some degree of cooperation, they are fragile and leave the world full of conflict unless they produce or are accompanied by deeper changes in what the actors want and how they conceive of their interests. Many of these effects were not expected at the time

52. Thus my analysis of the Concert of Europe that is based on defensive realism denies or at least ignores the deeper changes that Paul W. Schroeder argues had occurred. See Schroeder, “Did the
because although states often seek to bind others and even themselves to behave in certain ways in the future, only rarely will they consciously seek to alter their values and preferences over outcomes. So it is perhaps the unintended consequences of institutions that are not only the most interesting, but also the most powerful. This raises an obvious question for scholars: If we teach decisionmakers that institutions can have unintended effects, that small steps toward cooperation may lead to limitations on national sovereignty and broad changes in politics, preferences, and values, will they hasten on or be forewarned and refrain from taking these steps?

Conclusions

I have sought to clear away some of the underbrush obscuring the differences between realist and neoliberal schools of thought. The former, especially in its defensive variant, does not deny the possibility of cooperation. Cooperation does need to be explained, but it is a puzzle rather than an anomaly. That is, although realists do need to explain the conditions that lead to cooperation, its existence is not necessarily discrepant with the approach any more than the existence of conflict disconfirms neoliberalism. But neoliberals see more conflict as unnecessary and avoidable than do realists. The contrast is greater with offensive realists, who believe that the compelling nature of the international environment and the clash of states’ preferences over outcomes put sharp limits on the extent to which conflict can be reduced by feasible alternative policies. Defensive realists believe that a great deal depends on the severity of the security dilemma and the intentions of the actors, which leads these scholars to a position that is not only between the offensive realist and neoliberal camps but is also contingent, because prescriptions depend heavily on a diagnosis of the situation.

It is useful to ask whether changes in preferences over strategies would be sufficient to produce greater cooperation. Neoliberalism argues that this is often the case and, more specifically, that institutions are efficacious instruments for this purpose. But this raises two related questions. If institutions can
bring such mutual benefit, why have states not employed them more often? Second, are institutions effects or causes? The answer to the first question may turn on a response to the second: realists usually argue that institutions are largely effects and are established when and only when decisionmakers believe that there are mutual benefits to be gained. They are tools of statecraft, important ones to be sure, but mainly a reflection of state interest. If leaders have not fully appreciated the role that institutions can play, however, scholarly ingenuity and research can lead to their deployment in situations in which they would have otherwise been neglected. Even more interestingly, when the actors have limited foresight, institutions can be autonomous not only in the sense of helping actors limit the pernicious effects of anarchy, but in more deeply affecting actors’ preferences over outcomes. They may then shape what actors seek and want, usually in ways that were not contemplated at the start. This, it seems to me, is a very fruitful area of research, as is the related question of what our theories assume about the knowledge and expectations of the actors we are studying.
INTERNATIONAL THEORIES OF COOPERATION AMONG NATIONS
Strengths and Weaknesses

By HELEN MILNER


COOPERATION among nations has become the focus of a wide range of studies in the past decade, a subject of interest to political scientists, economists, and diplomats. This academic effort has been sparked in part by the increasingly visible attempts of states since the early 1970s to organize cooperation in economic and security affairs. Activities to achieve cooperative outcomes have probably been more prominent in this period than at any other time since the end of World War II. Then, as today, cooperation has proved to be as elusive to realize as to analyze.

* I would like to thank David Baldwin, Robert Jervis, and Robert Keohane for their helpful comments.


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During the past decade much of the international relations literature about cooperation has adopted a distinct approach, which has tended to focus on the systemic level of analysis, that is, on the sources of and constraints on cooperative behavior among states as a function of the international system. This tendency has been part of the recent general emphasis on systemic factors in international relations. Much of this literature has also used game theory as its central tool of analysis. Indeed, prisoners’ dilemma (PD) has proliferated as the key metaphor of international politics. While not all of the literature has adopted these methods, much of it has been systemic and game-theoretic. This review argues that these methodological choices have contributed to both the greatest strengths and the most glaring weaknesses of the literature in explaining cooperation among nations.

The recent literature on international cooperation has made two general contributions. First, there is now a consensus on a definition of cooperation, which can help distinguish what behavior counts as cooperation. Knowing what we mean by cooperation is certainly an important first step. Second, the literature has developed propositions about the conditions under which cooperation is likely to emerge, by using game theory to model relations at the systemic level. In relying on only a few assumptions, scholars have attempted to combine parsimony with explanatory power. The next section examines the strengths of the current literature; and the one following that considers how the same methodological approaches that give the literature its explanatory vigor also account for its greatest weaknesses.

The Strengths: A Definition and Some Hypotheses

A notable feature of the recent literature on international cooperation is the acceptance of a common definition of the phenomenon. Following Robert Keohane, a number of scholars have defined cooperation as occurring “when actors adjust their behavior to the actual or anticipated preferences of others, through a process of policy coordination.” Policy coordination, in turn, implies that the policies of each state have been adjusted to reduce their negative consequences for the other states.

This conception of cooperation consists of two important elements.

1 See Keohane (fn. 1); Kenneth A. Oye, ed., Cooperation under Anarchy (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986); Putnam and Bayne (fn. 1), as well as Grieco and Haas.


3 Social psychologists and sociologists use a similar definition of cooperation. See Morton Deutsch, “A Theory of Cooperation and Conflict,” Human Relations 2 (1949); Talcott Par-
First, it assumes that each actor’s behavior is directed toward some goal(s). It need not be the same goal for all the actors involved, but it does assume rational behavior on their part. Second, the definition implies that cooperation provides the actors with gains or rewards. The gains need not be the same in magnitude or kind for each state, but they are mutual. Each actor helps the others to realize their goals by adjusting its policies in the anticipation of its own reward. Each actor is not necessarily out to help the other, though; it is the anticipation of bettering one’s own situation that leads to the adjustment in one’s policies.

Defining what is not cooperation is also important. Cooperation is usually opposed to competition or conflict, which implies goal-seeking behavior that strives to reduce the gains available to others or to impede their want-satisfaction. But there are other alternatives to cooperation as well. Unilateral behavior, in which actors do not take account of the effects of their actions on others, and also inactivity are alternatives to cooperation. Although such behaviors may not attempt to lower the gains of others, they can be considered uncooperative if they do not reduce the negative consequences for others of each party’s policies. What counts as cooperation thus depends on the two elements mentioned above: goal-directed behavior that entails mutual policy adjustments so that all sides end up better off than they would otherwise be.

One function of a definition is to enable us to classify different acts as being an instance of the concept at hand. Having a widely accepted definition of international cooperation should make it easier to agree on which acts count as cooperation and which do not. Keohane, Kenneth Oye’s *Cooperation under Anarchy* volume, Joseph Grieco, and Peter Haas all employ the same definition. They should therefore be able to agree on what is cooperative behavior and what is not. Indeed, this seems to be the case. Their disagreements are not about what constitutes cooperation; they are about what causes it. This, however, may be fortuitous, since the empirical classification of events as cooperative can be very difficult. Establishing the counterfactual may pose great problems: without some process of policy coordination, would the states have behaved differently? The strategic misrepresentation of preferences may add to this problem. Determining the beginning and end of an attempt at cooperation can also be problematic. Finally, it may not be easy to demonstrate that each side adjusted its policies in the expectation of gains. Arriving

at a common definition of cooperation is an important first step, then, but it does not alleviate the empirical difficulties in using the concept.

Cooperation can be achieved in a number of ways. It can be tacit and occur without communication or explicit agreement. The metaphor of iterated prisoners' dilemma captures this type of situation, as Axelrod shows in *The Evolution of Cooperation*. Explicit agreement is not necessary; rather, cooperative behavior emerges as the expectations of the actors converge.

Cooperation can also be negotiated in an explicit bargaining process. This appears to be the most common type of cooperation examined by the recent international relations literature. Keohane, in *After Hegemony*, and Oye's *Cooperation under Anarchy* examine processes of conscious, negotiated policy coordination. Greco focuses on negotiations surrounding the distribution of gains among states and seeks to explain the different levels of cooperation achieved on various non-tariff barrier (NTB) codes in the Tokyo Round of the GATT trade negotiations. Haas explores the negotiation and performance of the Mediterranean Action Plan to reduce pollution in the Mediterranean. He looks to explain cooperation by examining the impact of ideas and learning promoted by a cohesive scientific community. Explicit cooperation, as in these cases, is easier to identify than is tacit cooperation, since in the latter the counterfactual is especially difficult to establish.

Finally, cooperation can be imposed. The stronger party in a relationship can force the other side to alter its policies. If the stronger party also adjusts its own policies and attempts to realize mutual gains, cooperation has occurred. Some versions of hegemonic stability theory explain cooperation in these terms. Joanne Gowa notes that a hegemon can serve as the functional equivalent of a common authority in international politics and thus can promote cooperation.

As is true of citizens in dominant societies with well-established political regimes, states operating within a subsystem established by a dominant state are either empowered or constrained to cooperate: would-be cooperators can elect to cooperate secure in the knowledge that the dominant power will prevent their exploitation; would-be defectors are deterred by the expectation that the dominant power will sanction defection.2

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1 The three forms used here were suggested by the discussion of regimes in Young (fn. 1), 87-96.
The notion of cooperation imposed by a stronger player may seem anomalous, but as long as mutual policy coordination to realize joint gains occurs, then it is cooperation by our definition. The joint gains in such a situation need not be equal, however. Indeed, the more asymmetric the power relationship, the more unequal the distribution of gains is likely to be. But it does not follow that the asymmetries of gains will always favor the stronger state; and, as will be discussed later, the opposite may well be true more of the time. In any case, the definition of cooperation itself says nothing about how the mutual gains from cooperation will be distributed. The conditions that facilitate cooperation, though, may.

Although a commonly accepted definition of cooperation seems to exist in the literature, this has not eliminated the problems of identifying events as cooperative or not. It has, however, reduced argument over the concept and allowed hypotheses about cooperation to be developed. A second supposed contribution of the recent international relations literature has been the development of hypotheses about the conditions under which cooperation is likely to occur. While these hypotheses do not constitute a theory of cooperation, they do suggest a series of variables that might affect the likelihood of the emergence of cooperation among nations. At least six different hypotheses can be culled from the literature. Each of these has problems and remains tentative.

**Absolute Gains, Relative Gains, and Reciprocity Hypotheses**

A central proposition in the literature is that states cooperate in order to realize absolute gains. Following economic reasoning, it is posited that states act rationally to increase the net benefits they receive. For instance, in *The Evolution of Cooperation*, Axelrod assumes that states seek to maximize their utility. This is why cooperating in the PD situation is their preferred strategy. But in an anarchic world maximizing absolute gains in the PD is best achieved by following a strategy of reciprocity. Due to cheating and the inability to sanction it, the optimal way to achieve absolute gains is by using a Tit-for-Tat (T-f-T) approach to induce mutual cooperation.

Axelrod, Keohane, and some authors in the *Cooperation under Anarchy* volume argue that cooperative behavior may be more likely when states pursue a strategy of reciprocity, because they know they will be punished for defecting and rewarded for cooperating. For game theorists, the key elements associated with reciprocity are sanctioning and iteration. Cooperation (in the PD) is possible when defections can be punished, and this is possible only when the game is repeated. Cooperation arises tacitly; it evolves over time as the actors' expectations converge. In more
complicated (and realistic) social interactions, the notion of reciprocity is less straightforward. In these instances, as Keohane points out, its central elements are contingency and equivalence. Reciprocity involves the exchange of roughly equivalent values of both goods and bads. Lack of equivalence is likely to lead actors to misunderstand the strategy and tends to produce escalating feuds rather than cooperation. What constitutes rough equivalence is a difficult issue.

The core argument of Grieco's book challenges the absolute gains assumption. Grieco argues that states also pursue relative gains, always seeking to compare their absolute gains with those of other states. Relative gains are not their only concern; absolute gains do matter. But, in this setting, cooperation, he suggests, is much more difficult even when all sides can achieve absolute gains, because no state wants to realize fewer absolute gains than any other. Concern for relative gains is thus likely to impede cooperation. Grieco's argument is supported in part by work done by Duncan Snidal, who shows that cooperation becomes more difficult as relative gains concerns increase, thereby transforming situations into and exacerbating PD.

This argument leads to Grieco's central proposition about cooperation. While his book is mostly about why cooperation should never occur, he does identify one condition that promotes it: the achievement of a balanced distribution of gains.

Faced with both potential problems—cheating and gaps in gains—states seek to ensure that partners comply with their promises and that their collaborative arrangements produce "balanced" or "equitable" achievement of gains. According to realists, states define balance and equity as a distribution of gains that roughly maintains pre-cooperation balances of capabilities. To attain this... states offer their partners "concessions"; in exchange, they expect to receive approximately equal "compensations"... "no nation will concede political advantages to another nation without the expectation, which may or may not be well-founded, of receiving proportionate advantages in return." (p. 47)

Grieco's notion of balanced exchange sounds remarkably like Axelrod's notion of Tit-for-Tat or Keohane's conception of reciprocity. Indeed, the pursuit of absolute gains combined with reciprocity may be equivalent to the assumption that states focus on relative gains. To say, as reciprocity implies, that the absolute gains received for cooperating must be roughly equivalent is to say, in effect, that states must achieve no relative gains in

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3 Keohane, "Reciprocity in International Relations," International Organization 40 (Winter 1986). 5
the exchange. Balanced exchange, then, is central to explaining cooperation for those assuming either absolute gains or relative gains motivations. The issue is really what leads to this desire for balance, or equivalence—that is, fear of cheating or fear of strengthening the other. As we shall explore later, these two motivations may not be that distinct either.

Grieco’s cases seem to support his proposition: in the issue-areas where a balanced exchange of gains could not be found, collaborative agreement was not possible (chap. 7). The failure to find a reciprocal agreement—that is, one in which “specified partners exchange items of equivalent value in a strictly delimited sequence,” to use Keohane’s words—led to the breakdown of cooperation, a finding in line with important research in social psychology and with Axelrod’s central argument. Again, relative gains concerns may not differ empirically from absolute gains pursuits when combined with reciprocity.

Two related points are raised by this discussion. First, what is balanced, or reciprocal, exchange? Second, when is balanced, or reciprocal, exchange possible? What balanced or equivalent means for the different authors is unclear. It could mean that gains are distributed equally to all players or that they are distributed proportionally to some value, such as the players’ prior power positions or their costs or investments in the issue. In the first case, equal absolute gains imply no relative changes if and only if the states are equivalent in all aspects. In the latter case, proportional absolute gains imply no relative changes. This latter case seems to be closest to the notion of reciprocity as commonly used.

Axelrod, for example, assumes in his game model that exchange is balanced, the payoffs to the players being symmetric. This is a strong assumption, which does not take us far if the key issue is whether balanced exchange can be achieved. Grieco’s main criticism of Axelrod (and of others) is that he neglects how the net benefits of collaboration are distributed among the players. But Grieco’s own discussion does not advance us far either. He posits that any agreement that produces benefits can be made roughly balanced if side-payments are possible (and states can agree on what equivalent or balanced means). The provision of

10 Also: “Disputes and strains in international institutions, and indeed the outright collapse of international arrangements, may be rooted in their failure to bring about a balanced sharing among partners of the gains and costs arising from joint action” (Grieco, 48).

11 Keohane (fn. 8), 4.


13 Axelrod (fn. 1), 30–31; for an argument against the idea that symmetry of the payoffs matters for the outcome, see p. 17.

14 The issue of what states and their decision makers perceive as being “balanced” or
side-payments appears to be at the core of cooperative endeavors both within and among states” (p. 231). But he has little to say about when and how side-payments are made. In contrast, Haas shows repeatedly how side-payments were used to induce cooperation. Issues were linked, or even created, to be able to provide states with benefits from other issue-areas: “Tradeoffs between the Med Plan components allowed for side-payments leading to continued cooperation” (p. 184)\(^\text{15}\). Using side-payments to equalize the benefits of cooperation for all the players may then be an important step in arriving at a “balanced” agreement. The question of what constitutes a balanced agreement is critical to identifying the primary motivator of states’ behavior: pursuit of absolute gains or pursuit of relative gains. The issue of what circumstances enable balanced exchange and side-payments to be reached is also important and understudied.

**Number of Actors Hypothesis**

A second hypothesis advanced by the recent literature deals with the number of states involved in the issue. The hypothesis is that “the prospects for cooperation diminish as the number of players increases.”\(^\text{16}\) In the *Cooperation under Anarchy* volume, the problem with large numbers is related to the defection problem; it is posited that large numbers increase the probability of defection and reduce the feasibility of sanctioning defectors. They create serious collective action problems for states. This argument seems to suggest that two is the ideal number of players, though the point is never explicitly stated. Indeed, the extensive use of two-person games reinforces this impression.

Is it necessarily the case, though, that the fewer the actors the better the prospects for cooperation? Several strands of argument challenge this claim. First, if one is concerned about more than just cheating, such as whether a balanced agreement can be struck, a larger number of players may be better, since it provides more opportunities for exchanges and side-payments. Greco argues that “the state will prefer more partners, for larger numbers would enhance the likelihood that relative gains advantageous . . . better-positioned partners could be offset by more favorable sharings arising from interactions with weaker partners” (p. 228).

\(^{15}\) For examples, Haas does not believe, however, that side-payments were the key to cooperation (see p. 188).

\(^{16}\) Oye (fn 2), 18. It is unclear exactly which actors one is supposed to count: all potential cooperators, only those who negotiate, or only those who agree to cooperate in the end.
Up to some point, then, more players may not necessarily hinder cooperation.

Second, the number of actors may not be a structural condition but rather may be a strategic one that can be manipulated by the actors themselves. In such cases, situations involving large numbers can be broken down into situations involving smaller numbers. As Lipson shows in his article in *Cooperation under Anarchy*, due to the asymmetries in the size of the various actors and in their influence, the many creditor banks were able to coordinate their actions by splitting the negotiations over rescheduling into parts; they thus reduced the number of creditors negotiating with the debtors. There are, as well, other means to reduce the problems stemming from large numbers.¹²

Third, as recent work in game theory shows, the possibility of cooperation in a relative gains environment can be enhanced by increasing the number of players. Snidal argues that it is probably more dangerous to suffer a loss in a world with fewer actors than in one with more players, since “more actors enhance the possibilities of protecting oneself through forming coalitions and, generally, the less well united one’s enemies, the safer one is.”¹³ Concerns over relative losses can be attenuated in a multilateral setting. These three points suggest that the relationship between the number of actors and cooperation may be quite complex. The logic linking the two is still not well understood and has not been examined much empirically.

**Iteration Hypothesis**

A third hypothesis explaining cooperation focuses on the players’ expectations about the future. Their willingness to cooperate is influenced by whether they believe they will continue to interact indefinitely. Many have shown that adding repeated play (iteration) to the PD game makes the cooperative outcome more likely,¹⁹ as, over time, the value of continued cooperation comes to outweigh the benefits of defection at any one time. This depends, of course, on the rate at which the players discount anticipated gains: the more heavily the future is discounted, the less likely is cooperation.²⁰ While some game-theoretic models and experi-

¹² The principal supplier rule in cart negotiations is an example.
¹³ Snidal (fn. 9), 716.
¹⁹ Iteration in different games has different effects. In a game of Chicken, it may not promote cooperation.
²⁰ Axelrod (fn. 1) and Snidal (fn. 9) show through simulation how increasing discount rates makes the PD game more conflictual and cooperation less likely.

Robert Tebner has shown (1) that even without reciprocity an agreement can be self-enforcing—that is, no outside party is needed to enforce it—“as long as each party believes himself to be better off by continuing the agreement than he would be by ending it” and (2)
ments in social psychology have examined the impact of different
discount rates on cooperation, there is little theorizing about what condi-
tions generate enough iteration or a low enough discount rate to induce
cooperative behavior. Absent some theory about these two conditions, it
is all too easy to explain any instance of cooperation or defection by sim-
ply asserting that some change in these variables has occurred. As in the
Cooperation under Anarchy volume, this problem can be exacerbated
when authors vacillate between seeing these as structural variables (i.e.,
inherent in the situation) or more manipulable ones. Like the number of
players, the degree of iteration and the rate of discount may be alterable
by the actors and may depend on the perceptions and expectations of
decision makers. Subjective evaluations, that is, may be very important.
These kinds of issues make empirically evaluating the hypothesis about
the effects of iteration rather challenging.

International Regimes Hypothesis

A fourth hypothesis advanced to explain cooperation centers on the role
of international regimes, which are defined as sets of norms, principles,
rules, or decision-making procedures around which actors' expectations
converge. Regimes, it is contended, facilitate cooperation through the
functions they perform for states. They mitigate the effects of interna-
tional anarchy for states by aiding in the decentralized enforcement of
agreements. Again, the focus is primarily on the role of regimes in solv-
ing the defection problem. Regimes are seen as improving each side's
information about the behavior of the others—especially about the like-
lihood of their cheating and actual compliance. They are also thought to
change the pattern of transaction costs of cooperating by reducing “in-
centives to violate regime principles.”

Thus, regimes reduce states' uncertainty and hence their fears that others will defect and in turn their
own propensity to do so. In the Cooperation under Anarchy volume Jervis's discussion of the concert system and Lipson's chapter on the long-
term relationships among banks show how regimes may work to pro-
mote cooperation.

Others have noted, however, that the very existence of a regime indi-
cates a prior series of decisions by states to cooperate. Indeed, as Grieco
argues, the focus on defection misses this fundamental fact of an earlier
bargain to cooperate and the distributional politics surrounding it. The

that this occurs when two conditions are met: the sequence of interactions has no final ele-
ment and the future discount rate is low enough. See Telser, "A Theory of Self-Enforcing

Keech, fn. 1], 90.
regime literature has also been attacked for its inattention to power issues. The distribution of power internationally is seen as underlying regimes and as being responsible for changes in them. A recent critic states:

For a very large class of global issues, . . . power needs to be given pride of place. . . . Neoliberal speculations about the positive consequences of greater information are fascinating (even if empirical demonstrations of such benefits are scarce). But they obscure considerations of relative power capabilities, which draw attention to how the payoff matrix was structured in the first place, how the available options are constrained, who can play the game, and, ultimately, who wins and who loses.\textsuperscript{21}

Given their concerns about relative position, states are likely to disagree about the amount of information they will release to others and about the principles that define the regime. The latter principles determine how the regime imposes costs and benefits on different actions. Thus, the provision of information and the structure of transaction costs are highly political issues.

This said, it is noteworthy that even the critics of the regime hypothesis agree with its central points. Grieco critiques Keohane's arguments about regimes by examining international trade negotiations conducted \textit{within} the existing trade regime, the \textsc{gatt}. He details disagreements over trade rules regarding the provision of information. Clearly, states see provision of information as a key political issue, but it is also apparent that regimes can provide much information and this can be influential, as the fears of some states reveal. For instance, in considering the unwillingness of the \textsc{ec} to cooperate within \textsc{gatt}, Grieco explains that "as a result of the rules all would enjoy some level of absolute gains in terms of increased information about one another's subsidies, but non-European Community states would receive greater information about European Community programs than the reverse" (pp. 218–19). Again, a balanced exchange of information is critical because reciprocity enhances the likelihood of cooperation. In his conclusion Grieco echoes Keohane, showing how the informational functions of the \textsc{gatt} promote cooperation. Through "periodic reviews and safeguard clauses" in the \textsc{gatt}, "states can seek redress to problems connected with the balance of rights and obligations of membership," such a balance being necessary for cooperative agreement. The \textsc{gatt} also provides for "periodic reviews and renegotiation efforts," which serve as "voice alternatives . . . [making

states) more willing to join such arrangements in the first place and, if problems do arise, to remain loyal to them" (p. 234).

Haas, while hardly mentioning regimes, notes repeatedly the importance of the provision of information by other international organizations in the establishment of the Med Plan and later by the Med Plan itself. Initially, members of the UN (the UN Environmental Program [UNEP]) provided information that fostered cooperation: "By publicizing the problem of marine pollution UNEP helped persuade Mediterranean governments of the importance of accepting the new goal of environmental protection, and even making nominal economic sacrifices to accomplish it" (p. 167). Later, the Med Plan developed its own information functions: "States did come to appreciate the value of information and diplomatic channels established by the Med Plan, and cooperated in areas in which such benefits were made available" (p. 183).23 The role played by the information-provision function of regimes in fostering cooperation thus seems to be affirmed even by critics of the argument.

In addition, there is empirical evidence that regimes can reduce transaction costs for states negotiating collaborative agreements. Grieco, for example, focuses on the EC as a major international actor in the catat negotiations. Indeed, it is surprising to find a "realist" taking the position that an international organization like the EC can be an actor comparable to nation-states like the U.S. and Japan, but clearly that is Grieco's view. The existence of the EC lowered transaction costs by reducing the number of actors involved. Haas notes similarly that the "Med Plan also served to reduce transaction costs between governments [by] holding annual intergovernmental meetings and more frequent expert meetings" (pp. 184-85).

The notion that regimes facilitate cooperation is lent some credence by the books under review. But can the regime hypothesis tell us anything about the tacit or explicit bargaining that occurs when cooperation is initiated? If the cooperative agreement is made prior to the establishment of the regime, then it cannot help. If, however, an established regime in one issue-area aids in the negotiation of cooperation in another, then the regime hypothesis may have broader significance. And if balanced or reciprocal agreements are the key to successful cooperation, then the functions of regimes that promote such balance may be important. Keohane suggests one such function:

23 Haas claims later that this information-provision function was superseded as the primary function of the Med Plan regime (p. 185).
The nesting pattern of international regimes affects transaction costs by making it easier or more difficult to link particular issues and to arrange side-payments, giving someone something on one issue in return for help on another. Clustering of issues under a regime facilitates side-payments among these issues: more potential quids are available for the quo. Without international regimes linking clusters of issues to one another side-payments and linkages would be difficult to arrange in world politics.24

Regimes then may promote the negotiation of balanced agreements, and hence cooperation, in new areas through the issue linkage and side-payments they make available. This type of facilitation is evident in Haas's study. The UN, through its unep, made side-payments to states that would have to pay high costs in the Med Plan to get them to agree to start the regime. Through "its principle of geographic distribution" of rewards, the unep helped states find a balanced agreement as the basis for the Med Plan (p. 79). Regimes in one issue-area may thus promote cooperation elsewhere by allowing states to link issues in their search for a balanced distribution of the costs and benefits of cooperation. This hypothesis, like the others, calls for more empirical evaluation.

**Epistemic Community Hypothesis**

A fifth hypothesis in the recent international relations literature deals with the role of "epistemic communities" in advancing cooperation. Such a community is "a professional group that believes in the same cause-and-effect relationships, truth tests to accept them, and shares common values; its members share a common understanding of a problem and its solution" (Haas, 55). The existence of an epistemic community would seem in this view to be a prerequisite for cooperation. But Haas does not make this claim. Indeed, if an epistemic community seems as if it should initiate cooperation by spreading its common understanding of an issue, this is not what the Med Plan reveals. Ironically, initiation was less the result of states learning from the epistemic community than of their persisting in erroneous beliefs that the community knew were false. As Haas describes it:

Many [national] officials thought pollution was a commons problem, and thus required coordinated action throughout the region. They assumed that currents transferred the pollutants fairly freely among countries. unep officials were well aware that currents were not sufficiently strong to transmit pollutants across the Mediterranean Basin . . . but they hoped to complete an agreement, so they just smiled and nodded when others charac-

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terized Mediterranean pollution as a commons problem. Only later did studies reveal to marine scientists that currents were too weak to fully exchange the wastes between the northern and southern shores; regional pollution was not a true collective good, and could be managed bilaterally or subregionally, although this fact was never fully appreciated by foreign ministry officials, who continued to accept pollution as a regionally shared problem. This false perception actually facilitated resolution of the problem. (pp. 70–71)

Only later in the negotiations did the epistemic community provide information and side-payments that fostered agreement. Their role here was similar to that of a regime. One difference between regimes and epistemic communities seems to lie in the type of information each provides. Both can reduce uncertainty. But whereas a regime gathers data on the preferences and compliance of other members, an epistemic community furnishes negotiators with “expert” information—a particular solution or compromise that advances the negotiations by coordinating states’ expectations. Information from the community creates “focal points” that promote agreement.25

Haas’s central hypothesis about epistemic communities seeks to explain the extensiveness and durability of cooperation rather than its initiation. Haas hypothesizes: “The strength of cooperative arrangements will be determined by the domestic power amassed by members of the epistemic community within their respective governments” (p. 57). His study shows that “the strongest supporters of the Med Plan were the countries in which the epistemic community was most active” (pp. 218–19). These actors reshaped their states’ definition of the national interest in ways that allowed those states to be more cooperative. Thus, epistemic communities and domestic politics are linked. How the epistemic community penetrated domestic politics and altered states’ preferences is less well documented, however.

The epistemic community hypothesis has strong affinities with the regime argument. Both reduce uncertainty, provide information, and facilitate negotiation. Haas’s study prompts one to ask whether prior international regimes created the epistemic community. Without the UN, for instance, would there have been an epistemic community and would the Med Plan have been created? Furthermore, do not both regimes and epistemic communities rely on prior agreements to cooperate and should not these agreements be the focus of our attention? The regime and epistemic community literatures would answer yes to the first question

25 Haas suggests as much; see chap. 8.
and no to the second: whereas initial agreements may be explained by other factors, the strength and durability of collaborative arrangements can only be explained in terms of regimes and such communities. These claims require further examination.

**Power Asymmetries Hypothesis**

A final hypothesis implicit in some of the recent literature suggests that imbalances in power—often in the form of hierarchies—are conducive to cooperation, an argument that resembles hegemonic stability theory. These differences in influence allow stronger actors the greater role in organizing the system; cooperation here is closer to the imposed variety than to the tacit or negotiated forms of the preceding hypotheses. Grieco and Haas would expect these asymmetries to be reflected in the cooperative bargain, with the stronger actors obtaining the more favorable terms. In both studies, interestingly, the weaker states—the EC for Grieco and the southern states for Haas—obtain the better terms. Although Grieco does not relate this to hegemonic stability theory, Haas interprets his finding that France did not prevail as a disconfirmation of the theory, which may be an accurate assessment if he is referring to the version of the theory implying that the hegemon uses coercion to extract benefits for itself. But the asymmetries still contributed to the achievement of a cooperative solution; the stronger states were able to provide benefits to the others to induce their cooperation, as benign versions of hegemonic stability theory suggest. Thus, the argument that a single, overwhelmingly powerful actor is necessary for cooperation may lack support in these books; but the hypothesis that asymmetries in actors' influence contribute to cooperation may be tenable.

The recent literature on international cooperation has thus developed at least six fairly powerful hypotheses to explain the phenomenon. The hypotheses tend to derive from a few basic assumptions, to focus on systemic or structural variables, and to rely on game theory. Each of these hypotheses has its own problems and has only limited empirical support. Nonetheless, they and the underlying common conception of cooperation are the central achievements of this recent literature.

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26 For instance, Cownes (in Oye, fn. 2) argues that asymmetries in influence mean weaker states can be more sure of retaliation by stronger ones, thus reducing their temptation to defect. Lipson (in Oye, fn. 2) claims that asymmetry on each side allows the number of actors to be reduced, which facilitates negotiation.

27 For further support, see Snidal (fn. 1) about k-groups; and Barry Eichengreen, *Elusive Stability* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 113–57, 271–311.
THEORIES OF COOPERATION

The Weaknesses: Assumptions about International Politics and Neglect of Domestic Politics

The recent literature on cooperation suffers from at least two serious drawbacks, both of which derive from its reliance on systemic theories and game theory. The first problem flows from the assumptions used to generate the relatively parsimonious hypotheses. In particular, the way in which the assumption of anarchy is developed causes problems. Second, and relatedly, the literature is remarkable in its neglect of domestic politics. As will be argued, this poses a serious limitation for understanding cooperation. Systemic theory simply cannot take us far enough.

Axelrod (The Evolution of Cooperation), Oye’s Cooperation under Anarchy, and Greco share a central assumption: that states exist in an anarchic international system. From this common assumption, each draws distinct conclusions. For Axelrod, anarchy signifies a “noncooperative” PD situation. States, lacking a common authority, cannot make credible threats or commitments to sanction defection; nor can they practice cooperation. Their inability to make binding agreements and to communicate renders the game tacit—or noncooperative, in the language of game theory. A final by-product of anarchy is the assumption of “egocentrism,” which is interpreted to mean that actors maximize their absolute gains. Each of these deductions from the anarchy situation is debatable.

Schelling showed years ago that there are a variety of ways of making one’s threats and commitments credible in a system without a common authority; and Gowa has argued that there can be functional equivalents to such authority—such as a hegemon—which also enhance states’ credibility.28 On the other hand, noncooperative games characterize domestic politics as well. Lack of credibility in one’s threats and promises is a problem within states; governments, political parties, and business firms all worry about their own capacity and that of others to live up to their stated commitments.29 While the assumption of noncooperativeness is intended to make the game situation more difficult and realistic, it may actually lead to the opposite outcome. States can and do communicate, and this communication is an important part of the game. Since situations are rarely as well defined and simple as the PD game, communi-

28 Schelling (fn. 6); Gowa (fn. 7).
cation is often essential to indicate what the payoff structures are and what cooperation means. Gowa, Jervis, and Larson have pointed out that without a common understanding of these elements, countries are likely to end up in an escalating feud if they try to play Tit-for-Tat. Communication, if it includes deception and persuasion, may make the game nastier than noncooperative PD and may lead to reversed conclusions about the benefits of reciprocity.

The argument that maximizing absolute gains flows from anarchy is also suspect, as Gowa, Jervis, and Grieco note. States may focus on relative gains instead; they may be motivated by envy. Whether they are egoistic or envious has little to do with whether the system is anarchic. Moreover, both envy and egoism motivate actors within states, where anarchy supposedly does not reign. The assumption of anarchy, employed to make the argument systemic, is accompanied by a series of other assumptions, most of which flow from game theory and few of which are systemic. Most telling, the solution to Axelrod’s cooperation problem at the systemic level—that is, reciprocity—is also the solution to the cooperation problem among actors within states. As Alvin Gouldner noted thirty years ago, reciprocity is the fundamental cement that holds society together.

Grieco starts from the same systemic assumption as do Axelrod and the Cooperation under Anarchy volume, but he proceeds to make a different argument. For him, international politics is anarchic, but it is fundamentally about relative gains. As he stresses:

States are fundamentally concerned about their physical survival and their political independence, which both result from and depend upon a state’s own efforts and thus its relative capabilities. As a result, states want to know what the impact will be of virtually any relationship on their relative defensive capabilities: hence the realist insight that states in anarchy are generally defensive positionists. Defensive positionism, in turn, generates a relative-gains problem for cooperation: a state will decline to join, will leave, or will sharply limit its commitment to a cooperative arrangement if it believes that gaps in otherwise mutually positive gains favor partners. (p. 10)

Grieco’s argument has several steps, which he implies form a logical progression. In an anarchic world (1) states fear for their lives: this fear means (2) that they can depend only upon their own capabilities to survive, (3) that changes in one’s capabilities relative to other states are a

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30 Gowa (fn. 7); Jervis (fn. 14); Robert Jervis, “Realism, Game Theory, and Cooperation,” *World Politics* 40 (April 1988), 334-35; Grieco.
31 Gowa (fn. 7); Jervis (fn. 30); Grieco.
state's central concern, and finally (4) that states will not accept cooperative agreements that are relatively unfavorable since this reduces their security.

For Grieco, anarchy implies a Hobbesian worldview. States are literally seen in a state of war of all against all. States constantly fear for their survival and see others as trying to dominate or destroy them. An "absolutely necessary effect of anarchy [is] the danger states perceive that others might seek to destroy or enslave them" (pp. 49–50). This is an extreme depiction of the state's vulnerability in the international system. Many have noted that states, being larger and more highly differentiated institutions, have much less to fear in an anarchic situation than do individuals. The argument about interpersonal relations used by Hobbes is stretched in the international context. The acuteness of states' insecurity varies substantially as a function of conditions other than a lack of common government. Jervis discusses a number of these conditions.

The fear of being exploited (that is, the cost of en) most strongly drives the security dilemma; one of the main reasons why international life is not more nasty, brutish, and short is that states are not as vulnerable as men are in a state of nature... The easier it is to destroy a state, the greater reason for it either to join a larger and more secure unit, or else to be especially suspicious of others... By contrast, if the costs of en are lower they can afford to take a more relaxed view of threats.33

The degree of fear states have for their survival varies importantly from and independently of the lack of common authority.34 The more prevalent are conditions that mitigate states' vulnerabilities, the less germane will be Grieco's argument.

Robert Powell further develops this point in a formal model.35 He maintains that the assumption of relative versus absolute gains is less important than the structural conditions facing states. The critical factor is the cost of using force in the international system. If the costs are low, then relative gains predominate and cooperation is unlikely. Such a situation creates opportunities for states to exploit relative gains to their advantage. And when combined with anarchy (that is, when there is no common government to ensure states will not exploit these advantages) cooperative behavior is undermined. Where force is costly, relative gains cannot be exploited, and cooperation will emerge, even in the pres-

33 Jervis (fn. 1), 172.
34 This is true domestically as well; with a common authority, the vulnerability of individuals varies greatly. Living in New York City and living in Princeton, New Jersey, provide different levels of security.
ence of anarchy. The assumption of anarchy then does not imply relative or absolute gains. Rather, anarchy is a constant, while other systemic constraints vary. According to Powell:

The general problem confronting a state in this system is one of constrained optimization in which the units are trying to maximize their absolute level of economic welfare subject to a set of constraints in which a unit’s current relative gain may be translated to a future absolute gain for that unit and future absolute loss for the other units.36

This is one way of reconciling the arguments about absolute and relative gains, but it does not explain Grieco’s cases, where force is not a relevant concern. The general point, though, is still valid: where conditions mitigate a state’s sense of vulnerability, relative gains should matter less—even in the presence of anarchy.

Next, Grieco argues, states must depend on their own capabilities, on self-help: no state can afford to depend on any other, for “today's ally [can] become tomorrow’s enemy” (p. 47). Is self-help the best way to preserve one’s security in anarchy? Not, it seems, once more than two actors are admitted to the model. With three actors in the system, cooperation between two may be far more efficacious than going it alone. Indeed, balance of power theories based on anarchy predict this: states will cooperate to counterbalance others whose relative power is growing. In Grieco’s two-person model cooperation is difficult; as Snidal shows, however, the addition of more players increases the likelihood that groups will cooperate to enhance their security. Indeed, the relative gains of your allies in this situation may enhance your own security. Furthermore, failure to cooperate may have devastating consequences. If you refuse to work with others, they may work together and gain even greater relative advantages over you than they might otherwise.

This point casts doubt on the third step in Grieco’s argument: that fear of others and the necessity for self-help create a situation in which the relative gains of others are always a cause for concern. Relative gains, he argues, are not the only concern, but they are always central. States must be “defensive positionals” first and foremost.

Driven by an interest in survival and independence, states are acutely sensitive to any erosion of their relative capabilities. . . . Capabilities—and especially their amount and quality compared to others—are the ultimate basis for state security and independence in the self-help context of international anarchy. As a result, realists find that the fundamental goal of states in any relationship is not to attain the highest possible individual

36 Ibid., 24.
gain or payoff; instead, it is to prevent others from achieving advances in their relative capabilities. (p. 39)

While Grieco is concerned with both absolute and relative gains, he gives priority to the relative element. According to his model, as each state’s sensitivity to relative gaps in payoffs from cooperation rises in a two-person game, the possibility of cooperation declines. Although he discusses what influences this sensitivity only briefly (see p. 46), he generally assumes that it is substantial.

A state’s sensitivity coefficient to gaps in gains may vary according to its partners, its own circumstances, and the type of cooperative endeavor to which it has committed itself. Yet given the uncertainties of international politics, and of the importance of relative power in interstate relations, realist theory would expect every state’s level of k to be greater than zero in virtually all its cooperative relationships. . . . Thus gaps in payoffs favoring partners will always detract from a state’s utility to some degree. (pp. 46–47)

Concern for relative gains should be a variable, but Grieco tends to employ it as a constant. As Snidal demonstrates, this is a real problem, since variance in the concern for relative gains substantially affects the prospects for cooperation.37 Moreover, even if relative gains are central, does that necessarily impede cooperation? As noted above, adding more players raises the likelihood of cooperation. Adding issues should also increase cooperation. Thus, on any single issue, two states may be directly opposed; but on several, they are likely to have different preference rankings and be able to make exchanges across issues.38

Each party’s interests may appear to be opposed on specific items, but the values and priorities underlying the set of issues often provide the basis for cooperation. . . . [T]here are various ways of achieving [an agreement that satisfies the more basic interests of all parties], including formulating package deals that involve conceding on issues of low priority in exchange for reciprocal concessions on more important issues, logrolling, fractionating larger issues into smaller segments.39

Therefore, the addition of either issues or actors, or both, reduces the difficulty of cooperation in relative gains situations.

37 Snidal (fn 9).
38 If one assumes that states are identical and have the same preference rankings, this argument fails. But such an assumption is heroic. Domestic politics are central here, too.
While these points mitigate the pessimism of Grieco’s argument by suggesting that cooperation is possible even in relative gains contexts, they are not fatal to his main point. He argues that the relative gains dynamic and the absolute gains dynamic differ in the concerns they raise. The latter leads to an emphasis on cheating and ways to prevent it. His argument focuses on the terms of the agreement being negotiated, that is, on the distribution of net benefits. He maintains that only balanced agreements produce cooperation. This distinction between cheating and the distribution of gains may be overstated, as was mentioned earlier. It is true that for Axelrod and for the Cooperation under Anarchy volume relative gains are not the focus of attention. This is a consequence of their use of simple games. Payoffs are assumed to be symmetric, and hence in PD one maximizes one’s relative gains by cheating (DC). One fears cheating on the part of others because that would maximize not only their absolute advantage but also their relative one. Hence cheating in PD is equivalent to maximizing one’s relative gains. Furthermore, it does not seem inconsistent with Axelrod’s model to argue that as the payoffs from cooperation (CC) become increasingly asymmetric converging on the sucker’s payoff (CD), the likelihood of mutual defection (DD) will rise, which is Grieco’s point. Cheating in a tacit, sequential game may be equivalent to obtaining an agreement whose relative gains are unfavorable. The lack of interest in the nature of the cooperative solution shown by Axelrod and the Cooperation under Anarchy volume is, nevertheless, an important oversight.

The claim of the absolute primacy of relative or absolute gains in international politics is debatable. The assumption of anarchy cannot be used to deduce either case. It is not anarchy that leads to relative gains concerns, or absolute gains ones, but other factors. At different times states at the international level are motivated by both concerns. And within states, where common authority exists, actors exhibit both envy and egoism.60 The characteristics of situations that make participants more prone to relative or absolute calculations need more study (and fewer assumptions). Here again scholarship about domestic politics may contribute to theorizing in international relations once one drops the assumption that anarchy means that international politics is radically different from domestic politics.61

60 Sociologists have been debating economists for years about this assumption for domestic society. See, e.g., Brian Barry, Sociologists, Economists, and Democracy (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978).

61 For more on this problem and other arguments about the troubles caused by the assumption of anarchy, see Helen Milner, “The Assumption of Anarchy in International Relations Theory,” Review of International Studies 17 (January 1991).
The final step in Grieco’s argument deserves scrutiny as well. Even assuming that all the preceding steps flow logically, does the link between relative gains and security follow? Does minimizing the relative gains of others in every situation necessarily maximize one’s own security and independence? Note that Grieco does not claim that one should maximize one’s own relative gains. This is important, for otherwise the security dilemma becomes operative, and each side’s attempt to maximize could leave it less secure as the other side responded. Though minimizing the other’s gains may avoid or mitigate this dynamic, will it promote one’s own security and power? Grieco’s view of power is rather crude. Any resource is a source of power, and hence of security, and thus should not be bargained away. He notes in passing that

the level of [the state’s sensitivity to relative gaps] is also likely to increase if payoffs in a particular issue-area are more rather than less easily converted into capabilities within that issue-area, or if those capabilities and the influence associated with them are more rather than less readily transferred to other issue-areas. (p. 46)⁹³

But issues concerning resource fungibility, conversion of capabilities, or the positive-sum nature of power are never raised elsewhere. Furthermore, the character of power in a relationship is unspecified. As Hirschman, Keohane and Nye, Baldwin, and others have shown, power in an interdependent relationship flows from asymmetry: the one who gains more from the relationship is the more dependent.⁴³ Threats to terminate the relationship differentially influence the side gaining relatively more. The side with leverage then is not the one with the greatest relative gains, but the one with the least. Giving relative gains to others may be a way of reducing their influence and increasing one’s own.

One response to this is that it may be true in particular instances. Thus, although giving relative advantages to others may temporarily enhance one’s own power and security, over time one will be weakened by such redistribution and one’s security will be endangered. This admission that giving relative gains to others can enhance one’s position in the short run at least is still damaging, for it reveals that no logical necessity links anarchy and fear for one’s security with minimizing the other’s relative gains. Indeed, in certain circumstances, allowing the other side to accrue relative gains may enhance one’s own security. Hence, depending on the

⁹³ Note how similar this is to Powell’s argument.
situation a country may increase its security and influence by either decreasing or increasing the other state's relative advantages. This is evident not only in Hirschman’s account of German behavior in the interwar period but also in Grieco’s own cases. Grieco notes that the U.S. was generally more powerful than the EC but that in the cases of successful cooperation the EC received the greater relative gains. "The EC supported those accords yielding it a favorable share of mutually positive gains, but the EC restricted its support for accords it believed would produce gaps in benefits favoring code partners, especially the U.S." (p. 68; see also chap. 7, esp. 168-69, 216-20). Cooperation was achieved in the former areas and blocked by the EC in the latter areas. Why would the more powerful U.S. agree to an outcome in which the EC gained relatively more? There are two plausible responses: the U.S. was maximizing its security by giving advantages to the Europeans à la Hirschman, or the U.S. was not interested in relative gains. The latter conclusion is no better for Grieco’s argument than the former since it implies that variance in states’ sensitivities to relative gains may be very important: all states may not be oriented primarily to relative gains, and thus cooperation may not depend solely on the distribution of these gains.

This section has argued that the assumptions used to build systemic models of international cooperation are not as simple and straightforward as they appear. The condition of anarchy, for one, is used to justify a host of contradictory assumptions and outcomes: that states are absolute gains maximizers or that they are relative gains minimizers; that anarchy creates conditions resembling tacit bargaining or that it creates conditions resembling full-scale negotiation. Each of these sets of assumptions represents a different theory of international politics. Moreover, it is unlikely that anarchy dictates one or another of these conditions all of the time. The motivations of states and the nature of the international game depend on other factors, some of which, as Powell shows, are systemic but many of which are located at the domestic level.

The neglect of domestic politics is then the second weakness of this literature. The theories in Axelrod, Oye’s Cooperation under Anarchy volume, and Grieco are concerned with the international systemic conditions that affect the possibility of cooperation. Domestic factors are consciously excluded or neglected.

Haas at least raises the issue of domestic politics, but even he deals with it in only a glancing way. His study falls somewhere between the international and domestic levels. He identifies a transnational epistemic community but argues that it works through the domestic political arena to change national preferences; that is, when a high level of uncertainty
surrounds an issue, decision makers are willing to give new scientific elites access to the policy process. If these new elites can get their views institutionalized in the domestic political arena, they can effect a change in national preferences and foreign policy, enabling greater compliance with internationally agreed upon practices. This process of domestic change is important for Haas’s argument, but he only describes and asserts the path of causality domestically. His sole test of the idea is to show that states with older environmental bureaucracies were more supportive of the Med Plan (Table 5.1 on pp. 132–33, 163). While this correlation is suggestive, he has no theory about domestic politics that explains why and when an epistemic community can have an impact on the domestic system. He simply assumes that without the scientists’ involvement, national policy would have been different.

There are two reasons for the neglect of domestic politics in the literature. One is the centrality of anarchy as the condition for differentiating between domestic and international politics; the other is the use of game theory, with its assumption of unitary, rational actors. This international focus is problematic in that it rests upon a series of unexamined assumptions about domestic politics that are crucial to the results. Important assumptions are made about three areas: the determination of the payoff structures (or national interests) of states, the strategies available to states to alter systemic conditions, and the capacity of states to ratify and implement cooperative arrangements.

Game-theoretic models of international cooperation rest heavily upon the specification of the payoff matrix, that is, upon the costs and benefits states receive for different outcomes. These payoffs—exogenous to the models—are simply assumed. As Benjamin Cohen notes, though:

The limitations, as every serious game theorist knows, lie in the methodology of game theory itself. . . . Even more critical is the familiar problem of specifying player motivations. Game models . . . provide insights into the strategic choices that can be expected of individual players once the orderings of all the actor’s preferences are fully detailed. . . . [T]here is nothing in the essential logic of game theory that tells us how the configurations of preferences get to be determined in the first place. By their very nature, game models are silent on the subject of what initially motivates players. Preference orderings at the outset are simply assumed to be exogenously—that is, arbitrarily determined. . . . The limitation of even the most ambitious applications of game theory lies in the tendency to concentrate on what comes out of state conceptions of self-interest rather than on what goes into them."

The determination of preference rankings need not pose a problem for theorizing at the systemic level. Theoretically, the payoffs could be postulated to depend solely on international variables and not at all on domestic ones. This, of course, is the approach of certain theorists of balance of power and hegemonic stability. Snidal notes that a deductive theory of preferences should precede the game model. He suggests that these theoretical derivations could be wholly systemic but adds that “state’s preferences may not always be tightly linked to the objective conditions. Perceptions and information processing, as well as organizational or bureaucratic imperatives, may change the relevant payoffs for decision makers.” Oye’s introduction and Axelrod and Keohane’s conclusion in Cooperation under Anarchy also note the importance of domestic politics and perceptions for the payoff matrix. While a purely systemic theory would require systemic derivations of the payoffs, all the payoff derivations in the Cooperation under Anarchy volume depend to some extent on domestic factors. For security issues, the perceptions of elites play a sizable role, whereas in economic issues the internal distribution of the costs and benefits of different international policies weighs heavily. On the whole, as Haas also maintains, the internal character of states and their elites is a central element in determining the preferences of states.

As indicated above, Grieco tends to overlook domestic variables. His argument about relative gains is cast at the international level; the comparison is between national gains for different states. Grieco acknowledges the drawbacks of his systemic approach by saying that “there is no doubt that domestic political institutions and dynamics also shape a nation’s foreign economic goals and strategies and especially its foreign trade policies”; but he justifies it nevertheless with the assertion that “even in an area such as trade where domestic factors are unquestionably operating, systemic-level factors still show themselves to be very important” (p. 24). As in the Cooperation under Anarchy volume, however,

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Snidal, in Oye (fn. 2), 42, and 40–44 for a wider discussion. Jervis (fn. 30) also makes this point (pp. 324–25).

For Jervis, it is the nature of the domestic regimes that influences the concert system; for Van Evera, the misperceptions of decision makers; for Conybeare, rent seeking by domestic interests; for Oye, the domestic costs of and economic beliefs of elites about alternative macroeconomic policies; for Lipson, the domestic relationship among banks (all in Oye, fn. 2).

Since he does not test domestic explanations against his international one, it is difficult to support this claim.
THEORIES OF COOPERATION

introductory remarks declaiming systemic theories slip into inductive case studies dependent on domestic factors. For instance, payoffs and hence the likelihood of cooperation depend on the perceptions of decision makers. The high value placed by the Europeans on technical barriers and government procurement codes—areas where cooperative attempts failed—and the low value placed by the Americans on codes on antidumping and countervailing duties—areas where cooperation was more prevalent—are induced from the statements of policy makers about their perceptions of the relative importance of these issues (Grieco, e.g., 208–9). A priori theories of preferences based on systemic factors are missing.

In another discussion, however, Grieco does have data suggesting a priori the "national interest" (the addition of producer, consumer, and foreign exchange gains) from the liberalization of agricultural trade. On the basis of Table 7.6, which shows the estimated welfare and foreign-exchange effects of a complete dismantling of all agriculture support programs, he concludes that "it is not surprising that the EC (as well as Japan and the Nordics) resisted the U.S. vigorously on [eliminating] agricultural export subsidies during the 1980s" (p. 180). But it is surprising: according to the table (add columns 1–3), the biggest net gainers from agricultural trade liberalization are Japan, Australia, New Zealand, and marginally the EC. The U.S. is a net loser. This a priori preference structure predicts the opposite of what happens, and the way to explain this outcome is through domestic politics: the privileged political position of agricultural producers in Japan and the EC. Because of their domestic political systems, gains to agricultural producers count more than gains to consumers. In general, the problem with assessing relative national gains is that one has to add up the net benefits for different domestic groups to arrive at a national assessment. The aggregation of preferences domestically is a difficult theoretical and practical issue. How to count costs and benefits to different groups is a fundamental problem. Calculating national payoffs implies a theory of domestic politics.

This problem arises in Haas's book as well. Although he realizes that "states may act based on interests that are derived internally, rather than on those provided externally from their systemic positions," he also implicitly injects his own theory of domestic politics. He argues that "an ecological epistemic community was able to identify and successfully imposed new state interests which did not directly reflect systemic or structural principals" (p. 231). His assumption seems to be that national interests are determined by elites that control government bureaucracies; it is a form of the bureaucratic politics argument. But, as his anomalous
French case shows, how bureaucratic interests are aggregated in policy-making requires a prior theory of domestic politics.

The second area in which domestic factors intrude into systemic theories of cooperation is the issue of strategy versus structural constraints. The hypotheses generated about cooperation rest on supposedly structural conditions inhering in the international environment: the degree of iteration, the discount rate, and the number of actors are viewed as being set by the objective character of the international situation at hand. All of these factors are influenced by domestic forces. As the *Cooperation under Anarchy* volume notes, the strategies of states and the perceptions of decision makers affect these conditions; that is, they are not really structural. For instance, the ability to play Tit-for-Tat and to recognize the other state's moves depends on internal factors. As Lipson maintains in discussing game theory:

> Our analysis...presumes that the states are coherent, unitary, rational actors. This strong assumption is, of course, descriptively inaccurate. Governments do not choose between alternative tactics, as a single decision-maker might, to maximize expected returns or to assure some minimum payoff. Rather, such choices are typically the product of politically mediated coalition bargaining...the process of building and sustaining domestic coalitions necessarily limits the capacity of modern states to devise and execute sophisticated strategies, which may require plausible threats to change policy sharply or to stick to one relentlessly.⁴⁹

Governments may be unable to play Tit-for-Tat. They may be unable to interpret accurately the moves of other states. Misperceptions, bureaucratic politics, and vested interests may systematically interfere to undermine—even to reverse—the hypotheses posited. When domestic factors are introduced into the argument, not only may the predicted effects of reciprocity, iteration, and numbers of actors fail to materialize, but the very opposite effects may manifest themselves.

In addition, the constraints that make states more vulnerable, which Greco mentions and Powell focuses on explicitly, may reflect domestic politics. Powell, for example, argues that the cost of using force is a structural variable. But this is debatable. These costs depend a great deal on decision makers' perceptions, the ability of the state to extract resources from domestic society, and the degree of public support for using force. Domestic factors may thus shape a state's sense of vulnerability as much as or more than systemic factors.

Finally, one area not considered by the literature examined here is the problem of ratifying cooperative agreements domestically. While this is

⁴⁹ Lipson (fn. 1), 10. Oye (fn. 2) also points this out (pp. 15–16).
part of the problem of pursuing strategies of reciprocity, it is also broader. States may devise internationally cooperative solutions and overcome cheating and relative gains concerns, only to find that their domestic situations will not support them. Cooperation may be unattainable because of domestic intransigence, and not because of the international system. This explanation applies to an important number of cases. The failures of the International Trade Organization, the Anglo-American oil agreement, the European Defense Community, the European monetary coordination in the 1970s, and the current Uruguay Round of the GATT are attributable less to concerns over cheating or relative gains than to the opposition of domestic actors. The domestic explanations for other cases, such as the U.S. failure to ratify the League of Nations and SALT II or the British abstention from European integration, are also arguably more salient than the international ones. It is therefore difficult, if not impossible, to explain any of these cases with reference solely to international factors. Domestic theories of international cooperation have, however, been few in number and weak in deductive argument.\footnote{One of the best recent attempts is Robert Putnam, "Diplomacy and Domestic Politics," \textit{International Organization} 42 (Summer 1988).}

Consideration of domestic politics seems essential for understanding international cooperation for three reasons. First, domestic politics tells us how preferences are aggregated and national interests constructed. Whether the focus is on absolute gains or relative gains, one still needs a theory of domestic politics to determine how gains and losses are calculated. A state's calculation of the net costs or benefits of an arms control accord or a trade liberalization agreement depends on the aggregation of the domestic preferences of its constituents. Second, domestic politics can help explain the strategies states adopt to realize their goals. Whether states are able to play T-f-T, employ side-payments, or use force depends very much on domestic factors. Strategies may be suggested by a state's structural position, but the nature of its political system, bureaucratic politics, the influence of special interests, and public opinion may ultimately determine which strategies states can pursue internationally. Third, the final step in establishing cooperative agreements occurs when domestic actors agree to abide by the terms negotiated internationally. Domestic ratification is thus essential. Policymakers know this, and hence when negotiating internationally they must always anticipate domestic reactions. International agreements can always be reached, but they can only be implemented if key domestic actors concur. For these three reasons, domestic politics are essential to understanding international cooperation.
No single theory of domestic politics exists today to explain international cooperation. Rather, there are four prominent theories, each of which highlights different factors. These theories will be examined in terms of the three variables emphasized above: how national interests are constructed, what international strategies can be employed, and when domestic ratification of international agreements can occur.

First, pluralist theories suggest that the preferences of interest groups and the dynamics of party systems should matter most. Groups or parties that anticipate net gains from cooperative agreements will vie with those likely to suffer losses, and the influence of these actors and their relative access to policy-making institutions will shape the state's preferences and bargaining abilities. The national interest will be the sum of the preferences of different interest groups as weighted by their access to policy-making institutions. Because these societal groups play such a central role, they can limit the international strategies available to a state. Furthermore, policymakers may depend heavily on these groups to negotiate the agreements since their preferences will be the key to ratifying the agreement.

Second, elite theories of politics, whether of democratic or other systems, locate the sources of cooperation in the nature of the national decision makers. The backgrounds, beliefs, and political context of these elites will shape international bargaining. Haas's argument is partially an elitist one. The national interest here is shaped by the calculations of political elites, as Haas claims for his epistemic community. Interest group preferences matter less. States' strategies will also be a function of these elites—that is, of their perceptions, political backgrounds, and degree of unity. Indeed, it is likely that political elites will employ similar strategies at home and abroad. Finally, in this case ratification will hinge on gaining the acquiescence of a majority of these elites.

Third, institutional theories of the state, such as bureaucratic and organizational politics or the "new institutionalism," focus on domestic decision-making structures. The character of domestic political institutions may condition both the preferences of a state and its ability to negotiate internationally. The national interest in this case depends on how political institutions shape actors' preferences and condition their

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access to decision-making forums. Haas, for instance, points to environmental elites who gained institutional access to the more established national environmental ministries, which then allowed them to reshape the "national interest" in the Med Plan. Certain types of institutions may also make it more feasible to play various strategies. For example, centralized systems may be better able to play Tit-for-Tat. In addition, a focus on institutions would seem critical to understanding domestic ratification. Does ratification require a formal legislative vote or a two-thirds majority versus a simple majority? Such conditions will shape the international negotiations as well as the domestic coalition-building process.

Finally, Marxist theories of politics illuminate the centrality of capitalism and classes for cooperation. For Marxist theories—whether structural or instrumental—it is the interests of capital that determine the national interest. This could imply a long-run set of preferences stressing the protection of capitalist accumulation or a shorter-run set of interests based on the preferences of particular capitalists. The national interest will nevertheless weight the demands of capitalist producers more heavily than those of other groups. The state's international strategic options are therefore either very limited due to the veto of capitalists or quite extensive if the state is structurally autonomous. Marxist theories hold, too, that domestic ratification hinges on the preferences of capital, but on this point the theories are also ambiguous. Domestic capital may desire international cooperation and pursue it through cross-national alliances and cartels. Or national capital of different states may battle each other for foreign markets, creating Lenin's imperialist war.

Much as different theories of international politics identify different variables as being central to cooperation, so do these four domestic theories. One can judge their relative merits only when specific hypotheses have been deduced from them and tested against the evidence, as the systemic-level theories examined here have begun to do.

Conclusion

With the end of the post-WWII international order, the need to devise new cooperative arrangements among nations has become essential. While cooperation may not always be beneficial depending on the issue and one's vantage point, attempts by states to reduce the negative effects of their policies on one another can improve the general welfare.

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The literature reviewed here tries to identify the systemic conditions under which collaborative activity may be promoted. Scholars have developed a common understanding of cooperation and a number of powerful systemic hypotheses to explain cooperation. These hypotheses remain problematic and tentative. They suggest that conditions that allow actors to interact in an iterated fashion using strategies of reciprocity may be conducive to cooperation. Achieving a "balanced" distribution of gains in negotiations may also prove crucial to reaching agreement. The existence of international regimes today in certain issue-areas may foster cooperation in other areas. Communities of transnational actors who share beliefs and epistemologies may also promote collaborative agreements. Finally, issues involving actors with different levels of capabilities may prove more amenable to cooperative agreement. Sorting out the different effects of these variables in practice is likely to be very difficult. For instance, in an area where a regime exists, iteration is extensive, and reciprocity is practiced (as in the GATT trade negotiations), how important are the problems of large numbers of actors and declining levels of asymmetry among them? The complex interaction of these variables in international politics makes it difficult to assess the conditions that promote cooperation.

The literature also has at least two weaknesses. First, in striving to build systemic theories, the authors begin with the assumption of anarchy and then add on a host of other assumptions that, it is implied, flow from the fact of anarchy. In reality though, these assumptions seem to depend on other factors, some domestic and some international. For example, anarchy does not determine whether relative or absolute gains dominate the motivations of states. Rather, that depends on the domestic character of states and other features of the issue-area. Second, the literature suffers from a systematic neglect of domestic factors—even while it depends on implicit theories about internal politics. Each state’s payoffs, its perceptions of “balance,” its time horizon and expectations about the future, and its capacity to employ strategies to modify the game are heavily conditioned by its domestic situation. Thus, for all that systemic theory has been touted for its supposed epistemological priority or inherent parsimony, the biggest gains in understanding international cooperation in the future are likely to come from domestic-level theories.
ACHIEVING cooperation is difficult in world politics. There is no common government to enforce rules, and by the standards of domestic society, international institutions are weak. Cheating and deception are endemic. Yet, as the articles in this symposium have shown, cooperation is sometimes attained. World politics is not a homogeneous state of war: cooperation varies among issues and over time.

Before trying to draw conclusions about the factors that promote cooperation under anarchy, let us recall the definitions of these key terms. Cooperation is not equivalent to harmony. Harmony requires complete identity of interests, but cooperation can only take place in situations that contain a mixture of conflicting and complementary interests. In such situations, cooperation occurs when actors adjust their behavior to the actual or anticipated preferences of others. Cooperation, thus defined, is not necessarily good from a moral point of view.

Anarchy also needs to be defined clearly. As used here, the term refers to a lack of common government in world politics, not to a denial that an international society—albeit a fragmented one—exists. Clearly, many international relationships continue over time, and engender stable expectations about behavior. To say that world politics is anarchic does not imply that it entirely lacks organization. Relationships among actors may be carefully structured in some issue-areas, even though they remain loose in others. Likewise, some issues may be closely linked through the operation of institutions while the boundaries of other issues, as well as the norms and principles to be followed, are subject to dispute. Anarchy, defined as lack of common government, remains a constant; but the degree to which interactions are structured, and the means by which they are structured, vary.

It has often been noted that military-security issues display more of the characteristics associated with anarchy than do political-economic

* We would like to thank the other authors in this project for their helpful suggestions. Robert Axelrod gratefully acknowledges the financial support of the National Science Foundation and the Harry Frank Guggenheim Foundation.
ones. Charles Lipson, for instance, has recently observed that political-economic relationships are typically more institutionalized than military-security ones. This does not mean, however, that analysis of these two sets of issues requires two separate analytical frameworks. Indeed, one of the major purposes of the present collection is to show that a single framework can throw light on both.

The case studies in this symposium have shown that the three dimensions discussed in the introduction—mutuality of interest, the shadow of the future, and the number of players—help us to understand the success and failure of attempts at cooperation in both military-security and political-economic relations. Section I of this essay synthesizes some of the findings of these case studies, and thereby helps to specify some of the most important ways in which these three factors affect world politics. It deals with issues in isolation from one another, as separate games or as a series of games, in order to clarify some basic analytic points. In this section, we follow the lead of game theorists, who have tried to avoid complicating their models with extraneous material in order to reach interesting conclusions. If the problem is a small event, such as a duel between two airplanes, our analysis of it may not depend on knowledge of the context (e.g., the purpose of the war). If the issue is of very high salience to participants, such as the 1914 crisis or the Cuban missile crisis, the extraneous issues (such as tariffs, or pollution of the Caribbean) may be so insignificant that they can be ignored. Either way, the strategy of focusing only on the central interaction is clearly justified.

Yet if the issue is neither isolated nor all-consuming, the context within which it takes place may have a decisive impact on its politics and its outcomes. As the case studies illustrate, world politics includes a rich variety of contexts. Issues arise against distinctive backgrounds of past experience; they are linked to other issues being dealt with simultaneously by the same actors; and they are viewed by participants through the prisms of their expectations about the future. To ignore the effects of context would be to overlook many of the most interesting questions raised by a game-theoretic perspective on the problem of cooperation.

In Section II, we therefore consider the context of issues; in so doing, we move outward from the three dimensions on which this collection focuses toward broader considerations, including linkages among issues, multilevel games, complications encountered by strategies of reciprocity

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in complex situations, and the role of international institutions. Analysis of the context of games leads us to regard context as malleable: not only can actors in world politics pursue different strategies within an established context of interaction, they may also seek to alter that context through building institutions embodying particular principles, norms, rules, or procedures for the conduct of international relations. In the conclusion, we will argue that a contextual approach to strategy—by leading us to see the importance of international institutions—helps us to forge necessary links between game-theoretic arguments and theories about international regimes.

I. The Effects of Structure on Cooperation

Three situational dimensions affect the propensity of actors to cooperate: mutuality of interest, the shadow of the future, and the number of actors.

A. Payoff Structure: Mutual and Conflicting Preferences

It is well established that the payoff structure for a game affects the level of cooperation. For comparisons within a given type of game, this idea was first formalized by Axelrod, who established a measure of conflict of interest for specific games, including Prisoners' Dilemma. Experimental evidence demonstrated that the greater the conflict of interest between the players, the greater the likelihood that the players would in fact choose to defect. Jervis has elaborated on these theories and shown that different types of games, such as Stag Hunt and Chicken, have different potentials for cooperation. He has also applied his strategic analysis to historical and contemporary problems related to the security dilemma. His work clearly indicates that international cooperation is much easier to achieve in some game settings than in others.

Payoff structures often depend on events that take place outside of the control of the actors. The economic depressions of 1873-1896 and of the early 1930s stimulated demands for protection by firms and individuals in distress, and therefore reduced the incentives of governments to cooperate with one another. The weakness and vacillation of the British and French governments before 1939 reduced the potential value

of anti-German alliances with those countries for the Soviet Union, making a Nazi-Soviet pact seem relatively more attractive.

This is obvious enough. Slightly less obvious is another point about mutuality of interests: the payoff structure that determines mutuality of interests is not based simply upon objective factors, but is grounded upon the actors' perceptions of their own interests. Perceptions define interests. Therefore, to understand the degree of mutuality of interests (or to enhance this mutuality) we must understand the process by which interests are perceived and preferences determined.

One way to understand this process is to see it as involving a change in payoffs, so that a game such as Prisoners' Dilemma becomes either more or less conflictual. To start with, Prisoners' Dilemma is a game in which both players have an incentive to defect no matter whether the other player cooperates or defects. If the other player cooperates, the first player prefers to defect: $DC > CC$. On the other hand, if the other player defects, the first player still prefers to defect: $DD > CD$. The dilemma is that, if both defect, both do worse than if both had cooperated: $CC > DD$. Thus, Prisoners' Dilemma has a preference ordering for both players of $DC > CC > DD > CD$.4

Now consider a shift in the preferences of both players, so that mutual cooperation is preferred to unilateral defection. This makes the preference ordering $CC > DC > DD > CD$, which is a less conflictual game called Stag Hunt.

Jervis's study of the shift from balance-of-power systems to concerts suggests that after world wars, the payoff matrix for the victors may temporarily be one of Stag Hunt: fighting together results in a short-lived preference for staying together. After a war against a hegemonic power, the other great powers often perceive a mutual interest in continuing to work together in order to ensure that the defeated would-be hegemon does not rise again. They may even feel empathy for one another, and take an interest in each other's welfare. These perceptions seem to have substantial momentum, both among the mass public and in the bureaucracy. Yet, the cooperation that ensues is subject to fairly easy disruption. As recovery from the war proceeds, one or both parties may come to value cooperation less and relative gains more. And if one side believes that its counterpart prefers to defect, its own preference will shift to defection in order to avoid the worst payoff, CD.

Actors can also move from Prisoners' Dilemma to more conflictual

4 The definition of Prisoners' Dilemma also includes one additional restriction: $CC > (DC + CD)/2$. This is to ensure that it is better to have mutual cooperation than to have an even chance of being the exploiter or the exploited.
games. If both players come to believe that mutual cooperation is worse than mutual defection, the game becomes Deadlock, with both sides having preferences of DC > DD > CC > CD. Since the dominant strategy of each player is to defect regardless of what the other does, the likely outcome is DD. Players in Deadlock, unlike those in Prisoners' Dilemma, will not benefit from repeated plays since mutual cooperation is not preferred to mutual defection.

Kenneth Oye provides a fine example of the movement from Prisoners' Dilemma to Deadlock in his essay on monetary diplomacy in the 1930s, in this collection. Shifts in beliefs, not only about international regimes, but particularly about desirable economic policy, led leaders such as Franklin D. Roosevelt to prefer unilateral, uncoordinated action to international cooperation on the terms that appeared feasible. Oye argues that the early 1930s do not mark a failure of coordination where common interests existed (as in Prisoners' Dilemma); rather, they indicate the decay of these common interests, as perceived by participants. In their essay in the present collection, Downs, Rocke, and Siverson argue that arms races are often games of Deadlock rather than Prisoners' Dilemma, making them much more difficult to resolve.

Beliefs are as important in the military area as in economics. Consider, for example, Van Evera's study of the beliefs leading to World War I. By 1914, what Van Evera labels "the cult of the offensive" was universally accepted in the major European countries. It was a congenial doctrine for military elites everywhere, since it magnified the role of the military and reduced that of the diplomats. It also happened to be disastrously wrong, since its adherents failed to appreciate the overwhelming advantage that recent technological change had given to the defensive (in what was soon to become trench warfare), and overlooked the experiences of the American Civil War and the Russo-Japanese War.

Gripped by this cult of the offensive, European leaders sought to gain safer borders by expanding national territories, and took more seriously the possibility of successful aggressive war; hence Germany and (to a lesser extent) other European powers adopted expansionist policies that brought them into collision with one another. European leaders also felt greater compulsion to mobilize and strike first in a crisis, since the penalty of moving late would be greater in an offense-dominant world; this compulsion then fueled the spiral of mobilization and countermobilization that drove the July 1914 crisis out of control. Had Europeans recognized the actual power of the defense, expansionism would have lost much of its appeal, and the compulsion to mobilize and countermobilize would have diminished. Put differently, the European payoff
structure actually would have rewarded cooperation; but Europeans perceived a payoff structure that rewarded noncooperation, and responded accordingly. Beliefs, not realities, governed conduct.

The case of 1914 also illustrates a point made above: subjective interpretations by one side become objective reality for the other side. When a European state adopted expansionist policies, those nearby found themselves with an expansionist neighbor, and had to adjust accordingly. For instance, Germany's expansionism, though largely based on illusions, led to a genuine change in Russia's environment. Russia adopted its inflexible war plan (which required mobilization against Germany as well as against Austria) partly because the Russians feared that Germany would strike into Russia's northern territories once the Russian armies were embroiled with Austria. Thus the Russian calculus was importantly affected by Russia's image of German intent, and Russia was driven to bellicose measures by fear of German bellicosity. German expansionism was premised largely on illusions, but for Russia this expansionism was a real danger that required a response.

This discussion of payoff structures should make it clear that the contributors to this volume do not assume that Prisoners' Dilemmas are typical of world politics. More powerful actors often face less powerful ones, yielding asymmetric payoff matrices. Furthermore, even symmetrical games can take a variety of forms, as illustrated by Stag Hunt, Chicken, and Deadlock. What is important for our purposes is not to focus exclusively on Prisoners' Dilemma per se, but to emphasize the fundamental problem that it (along with Stag Hunt and Chicken) illustrates. In these games, myopic pursuit of self-interest can be disastrous. Yet both sides can potentially benefit from cooperation—if they can only achieve it. Thus, choices of strategies and variations in institutions are particularly important, and the scope for the exercise of intelligence is considerable.

Our review of payoff structures also illustrates one of the major themes of this collection of essays: that political-economic and military-security issues can be analyzed with the same analytical framework. Admittedly, economic issues usually seem to exhibit less conflictual payoff structures than do those of military security. Coordination among bankers, as described by Lipson, has been more extensive and successful than most arms control negotiations, as analyzed by Downs and his colleagues; and the patterns of trade conflict and cooperation described by Conybeare are hardly as conflictual as Van Evera's story of World War I. On the other hand, the great power concerts discussed by Jervis, as well as several of the arms control negotiations, were more cooperative than the
trade and monetary measures of 1930-1933 delineated in Oye's essay. And postwar economic relations between the United States and Japan have been more conflictual than military-security relations. As an empirical matter, military issues may more often have payoff structures involving a great deal of conflict of interest; but there is no theoretical reason to believe that this must always be the case.  

B. THE SHADOW OF THE FUTURE

In Prisoners' Dilemma, concern about the future helps to promote cooperation. The more future payoffs are valued relative to current payoffs, the less the incentive to defect today—since the other side is likely to retaliate tomorrow. The cases discussed in the present essays support this argument, and identify specific factors that help to make the shadow of the future an effective promoter of cooperation. These factors include:

1. long time horizons;
2. regularity of stakes;
3. reliability of information about the others' actions;
4. quick feedback about changes in the others' actions.

The dimension of the shadow of the future seems to differentiate military from economic issues more sharply than does the dimension of payoffs. Indeed, its four components can be used to analyze some of the reasons why issues of international political economy may be settled more cooperatively than issues of international security, even when the underlying payoff matrices are similar—for example, when Prisoners' Dilemma applies. Most important is a combination of the first two factors: long time horizons and regularity of stakes. In economic relations, actors have to expect that their relationships will continue over an indefinite period of time; that is, the games they play with each other will be iterated. Typically, neither side in an economic interaction can eliminate the other, or change the nature of the game decisively in a single move. In security affairs, by contrast, the possibility of a successful preemptive war can sometimes be a tempting occasion for the rational timing of surprise. Another way to put this is that, in the international political economy, retaliation for defection will almost always be possible;
therefore a rational player, considering defection, has to consider its probability and its potential consequences. In security affairs, it may be possible to limit or destroy the opponent’s capacity for effective retaliation.

To illustrate this point, let us compare the case of 1914 with contemporary international debt negotiations. In 1914, some Germans, imbued with the cult of the offensive, thought that a continental war would permanently solve Germany’s security problems by restructuring power and territorial relations in Europe. For these German leaders, the temptation to defect was huge, largely because the shadow of the future seemed so small. Indeed, it seemed that future retaliation could be prevented, or rendered ineffective, by decisive German action. Moreover, in the opening move of a war the stakes would be far greater than usual because of the value of preempting before the other side was fully mobilized. This perceived irregularity in the stakes further undercut the potential for sustained cooperation based upon reciprocity.

By contrast, contemporary negotiations among banks, and between banks and debtor countries, are heavily affected by the shadow of the future. That is not to say that the stakes of each game are the same; indeed, there are great discontinuities since deadlines for rescheduling take on importance for regulators, banks, and the reputations of borrowers. But the banks know that they will be dealing both with the debtor countries and with one another again and again. Continuing interbank relationships imply, as Lipson points out, that small banks will think twice before doublecrossing large banks by refusing to participate in rescheduling. This is particularly true if the small banks are closely tied, in a variety of ways, to the large banks. Continuing relations between banks and debtor countries give the banks incentives to cooperate with the debtor countries, not merely in order to facilitate debt servicing on loans already made, but to stay in their good graces—looking toward a more prosperous future. The fact that Argentina, Brazil, and Mexico are so large, and are perceived to be potentially wealthy, is a significant bargaining asset for them now, since it increases the banks’ expected profits from future lending, and therefore enlarges the shadow of the future. Indeed, if these governments could credibly promise to favor, in the future, banks that help them now, and to punish or ignore those that defect in these critical times, they could further improve their bargaining positions; but, as sovereign governments whose leaders will be different in the future, they cannot effectively do so.

Reliability of information about the others’ actions and promptness of feedback are also important in affecting the shadow of the future,
although they do not seem to differentiate military-security from political-economic issues so clearly. Because of the absence of military secrecy, actors may sometimes have more reliable information on political-economic than on military-security issues. Banks thrive on differential access to information, and therefore hold it closely. Furthermore, since the systemic effects of political-economic actions are often difficult to judge, and “cheating at the margin” is frequently easy, feedback between policy and results may be slow. For instance, the distribution of benefits from the Tokyo Round of trade negotiations is still a matter of conjecture and political contention rather than economic knowledge. By contrast, the superpowers publish lists of the precise number of missiles in each other’s inventories, and we can assume that information about the effect of a military action by either side—short of a devastating surprise attack that would destroy command and control facilities—would be communicated almost immediately to the leaders of both states.

The length of the shadow of the future, like the character of payoff structures, is not necessarily dictated by the objective attributes of a situation. On the contrary, as we have just seen, expectations are important. International institutions may therefore be significant, since institutions embody, and affect, actors’ expectations. Thus institutions can alter the extent to which governments expect their present actions to affect the behavior of others on future issues. The principles and rules of international regimes make governments concerned about precedents, increasing the likelihood that they will attempt to punish defectors. In this way, international regimes help to link the future with the present. That is as true of arms control agreements, in which willingness to make future agreements depends on others’ compliance with previous arrangements, as it is in the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade, which embodies norms and rules against which the behavior of members can be judged. By sanctioning retaliation for those who violate rules, regimes create expectations that a given violation will be treated not as an isolated case but as one in a series of interrelated actions.

C. NUMBER OF ACTORS: SANCTIONING PROBLEMS

The ability of governments to cooperate in a mixed-motive game is affected not only by the payoff structure and the shadow of the future, but also by the number of players in the game and by how their relationships are structured. Axelrod has shown that reciprocity can be an
effective strategy to induce cooperation among self-interested players in the iterated, bilateral Prisoners' Dilemma, where the values of each actor's options are clearly specified. However, effective reciprocity depends on three conditions: (1) players can identify defectors; (2) they are able to focus retaliation on defectors; and (3) they have sufficient long-run incentives to punish defectors. When there are many actors, these conditions are often more difficult to satisfy. In such situations, it may be impossible to identify, much less to punish, defection; even if it is possible, none of the cooperators may have an incentive to play the role of policeman. Each cooperator may seek to be a free-rider on the willingness of others to enforce the rules.

We may call the difficulty of preventing defection through decentralized retaliation the "sanctioning problem." Its first form, the inability to identify defectors, is illustrated by the terrorist bombings against American installations in Lebanon in 1983. The United States did not know, at the time the bombings took place, who was responsible. The only state that could plausibly have been held responsible was Syria; but since the Syrians denied responsibility, retaliation against Damascus could have spread and deepened the conflict without punishing the terrorist groups themselves. The issue of identifying defectors is one aspect of a fundamental problem besetting efforts to cooperate in world politics: acquiring, in a timely fashion, adequate amounts of high-quality information. In order to maintain cooperation in games that reward un reciprocated defection, such as Prisoners' Dilemma, governments must have confidence in their ability to monitor their counterparts' actions sufficiently well to enable them to respond effectively to betrayal. As Lipson has pointed out, the greater perils of betrayal (to the side that is betrayed) in military-security than in political-economic relations put more severe demands on gathering information in the former than in the latter area.

The second form of the sanctioning problem occurs when players are unable to focus retaliation on defectors. This difficulty is illustrated by Conybeare's analysis of the Anglo-Hanse trade wars. The Hanseatic League was unable to punish English privateers for their depredations, and instead retaliated against English merchants in Hanseatic towns. This produced escalation rather than cooperation.

The third form of the sanctioning problem arises when some members of a group lack incentives to punish defectors. This obstacle to cooperation often arises where there are many actors, some of which fail

9 Axelrod (fn. 6).
10 Lipson (fn. 1).
to cooperate in the common effort to achieve some collective good. Oye observes that although British devaluation in 1931 hurt other countries, no single government had the incentive to devote its own resources to bring about a revision of British policy. This form of the sanctioning problem—lack of incentives to punish defectors—also arose in the debt negotiations of the 1980s. To prevent default, it was necessary to arrange rescheduling agreements involving additional bank lending. Smaller banks were tempted to refuse to provide new funds. Only the fact that the large banks had strong incentives to put pressure on smaller ones to ante up prevented rescheduling agreements from unravelling "like a cheap sweater."

When sanctioning problems are severe, cooperation is in danger of collapsing. One way to bolster it is to restructure the situation so that sanctioning becomes more feasible. Sometimes this is done unilaterally. Oye points out that external benefits or costs may be "privatizable"; that is, changes can be made in the situation so that the benefits and costs of one's actions are directed specifically at those with whom one has negotiated. He argues that in the early 1930s Britain eventually succeeded in privatizing its international currency relationships by adopting exchange controls and attaching conditions, negotiated bilaterally, to new loans. This transformation of the game permitted a modest revival of international lending, based not on open access to British capital markets but on bilateral reciprocity.

As our examples indicate, sanctioning problems can occur both in the international political economy and on military-security issues. They tend to be more severe on military-security than on political-economy issues, due to the high costs of punishing defections, the difficulties of monitoring behavior, and the stringent demands for information that are imposed when successful defection can dramatically shorten the shadow of the future. But since sanctioning problems occur on both types of issues, issue-area alone cannot account for their incidence or severity. To explain the incidence and severity of sanctioning problems, we need to focus on the conditions that determine whether defection can be prevented through decentralized retaliation: the ease of identifying sources of action, the ability of governments to focus retaliation or reward on particular targets, and the incentives that exist for members of a group to punish defectors.

While the likelihood that these problems will arise may be enhanced by an increase in the number of actors involved, difficulties may also appear on issues that seem at first glance to be strictly bilateral. Consider, for instance, the example of 1914. In the Balkan crisis, Austria sought
to impose sanctions against Serbia for its support of revolutionaries who tried to destroy the ethnically heterogeneous Austro-Hungarian empire. But sanctions against Serbia implied punishment for Russia, Serbia’s ally, since Russian leaders were averse to accepting another Balkan setback. Russian mobilization, however, could not be directed solely against Austria, since Russia only had plans for general mobilization. Thus, neither Austria nor Russia was able to focus retaliation on the defector; the actions of both helped to spread rather than to contain the crisis. With more clever and moderate leadership, Austria might have found a way to punish Serbia without threatening Russia. And a detailed plan for mobilization only against Austria could have provided Russia with a more precisely directed measure to retaliate against Austria’s ultimatum to Serbia.

Privatization is not the only way to maintain cooperation. Moreover, as some of our examples indicate, it can be difficult to achieve. Another way to resolve sanctioning problems is to construct international regimes to provide standards against which actions can be measured, and to assign responsibility for applying sanctions. Regimes provide information about actors’ compliance; they facilitate the development and maintenance of reputations; they can be incorporated into actors’ rules of thumb for responding to others’ actions; and they may even apportion responsibility for decentralized enforcement of rules.12

Charles Lipson’s discussion of the international lending regime that has been constructed by bankers reveals how regimes can promote cooperation even when there are many actors, no dominant power, and no world central bank. Creditor committees were established under the leadership of large money-center banks. Each money-center bank then took responsibility for a number of relatively large regional banks, which in turn were assigned similar responsibilities for smaller banks.13 As a result, a hierarchy of banks was created, isolating smaller banks from one another and establishing responsibility for enforcing sanctions. Small banks displaying tendencies toward defection were threatened with being outside the flow of information in the future and, implicitly, with not being offered participation in lucrative future loans. This informal hierarchy, of course, was reinforced by the presence of the U.S. Federal Reserve System looming in the background: stories, whether apocryphal or not, of small bankers being told to “cough up” by high officials of

12 Keohane (fn. 8), 49-132.
the Fed circulated in banking circles during the early 1980s. It would have taken a bold president of a small bank to ignore both the banking hierarchy and the danger of arousing the Fed's wrath by not participating in a rescheduling.

This reference to the role of institutions in transforming N-person games into collections of two-person games suggests once again the importance of the context within which games are played. In isolation, the basic concepts discussed in the introduction—payoff structures, iteration, and the number of players—provide only a framework for analysis. They take on greater significance, as well as complexity, when they are viewed within the broader context of other issues, other games, and the institutions that affect the course of world politics. We now turn to the question of how the context of interaction affects political behavior and outcomes.

II. THE CONTEXT OF INTERACTION

Whether cooperation can take place without central guidance depends not merely on the three game-theoretic dimensions we have emphasized so far, but also on the context within which interaction takes place. Context may, of course, mean many different things. Any interaction takes place within the context of norms that are shared, often implicitly, by the participants. John Ruggie has written of the "deep structure" of sovereignty in world politics, and also of the way in which shifting values and norms of state intervention in society—the emergence and legitimation of the welfare state—affected the world political economy between 1914 and 1945. International political-economic bargaining was fundamentally changed by the shift, during this period, from laissez-faire liberalism as a norm to what Ruggie calls "embedded liberalism."

Interactions also take place within the context of institutions. Robert Keohane has argued elsewhere that even if one adopts the assumption that states are rational and self-interested actors, institutions can be shown to be important in world politics. Institutions alter the payoff structures facing actors, they may lengthen the shadow of the future,

16 Keohane (fn. 8).
and they may enable N-person games to be broken down into games with smaller numbers of actors.

Using the game-theoretic perspective of this symposium, another way of looking at context may be especially revealing. This aspect has to do with what we call multilevel games. In such situations, different games affect one another, so that their outcomes become mutually contingent. Three such situations are particularly important for world politics: issue-linkage, domestic-international connections, and incompatibilities between games among different sets of actors. After considering these situations, we will turn to the implications of these multilevel games for the efficacy of a strategy of reciprocity in fostering cooperation.

A. MULTILEVEL GAMES

**Issue-linkage.** Most issues are linked to other issues. This means that games being played on different issues—different “chessboards,” in Stanley Hoffmann’s phrase—aff ect one another. Connections between games become important when issues are linked.

Issue-linkage in this sense involves attempts to gain additional bargaining leverage by making one’s own behavior on a given issue contingent on others’ actions toward other issues. Issue-linkage may be employed by powerful states seeking to use resources from one issue-area to affect the behavior of others elsewhere; or it may be employed by outsiders, attempting to break into what could otherwise be a closed game. Linkage can be beneficial to both sides in a negotiation, and can facilitate agreements that might not otherwise be possible. Actors’ resources may differ, so that it makes sense to trade one for the other: the United States, for instance, may provide economic aid to Egypt in exchange for Egyptian support for American policy in the Middle East. Furthermore, different players may have preferences of different intensities: thus, in a log-rolling game, each party trades its “vote,” or policy position, on an issue it values less highly for the other’s vote on one it values more highly.

The outstanding example of a successful bargaining linkage in our

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case studies is that of the Washington Naval Treaty of 1922. As Downs, Rocke, and Siverson show, these arms control negotiations were successful in part because they linked bargaining over arms with bargaining over other issues. As part of an agreement to limit battleship construction, Japan gave Britain and the United States guarantees regarding trade in China and limitations of fortification on certain Pacific islands; Japan received legal recognition of its right to certain territory taken from Germany after World War I. Bringing these issues into the negotiations to limit the building of battleships helped to make cooperation possible, not only on these specific issues but on the whole package.

Of course, not all issue-linkages promote agreement, any more than each exercise of power can be expected to lead to cooperation. Oye has distinguished between "backscratching," which he regards as welfare-enhancing, and "blackmailing," which may reduce welfare levels.20 The "backscratcher" merely offers, in return for compensation, to refrain from acting in what would otherwise be its own best interest. For instance, a debtor country, unable to make its payments on time without facing severe hardship or political revolution, may offer to continue servicing its debts only if compensated with new loans and an easier payment schedule. If this offer is rejected, the debtor does what it would have done without the offer: it defaults.

Backscratching entails a promise. Blackmailing, by contrast, implies a threat. As Schelling has pointed out, "the difference is that a promise is costly when it succeeds, and a threat is costly when it fails."21 Blackmailers threaten to act against their own interests unless compensated. Thus, a debtor country that would be hurt by defaulting may nevertheless threaten to do so unless compensation is offered. This threat, if carried out, would leave both the debtor (the blackmailer, in this case) and its creditors worse off than if it had merely acted in its own interest without bargaining at all. If the blackmailing strategy works, on the other hand, the effect will be to transfer resources from the creditors to the debtor, an action that will not necessarily improve overall welfare.

Although it may be difficult to differentiate between backscratching and blackmailing in practice, the distinction helps us to recognize that issue-linkages have dangers as well as opportunities. One side may demand so much of the other in other areas that cooperation will not take place even in the area of shared interests. This accusation is fre-

20 Oye (fn. 5).
QUENTLY MADE AGAINST HENRY KISSINGER’S VERSION OF LINKAGE. KISSINGER INSISTED THAT THE SOVIETS EXERCISE GREAT RESTRAN IN THE THIRD WORLD IN RETURN FOR AMERICAN COOPERATION ON ARMS CONTROL. IN OYE’S TERMS, KISSINGER WAS TRYING TO “BLACKMAIL” THE SOVIETS BY THREATENING TO ACT AGAINST THE UNITED STATES’ OWN INTERESTS (DELAY ARMS CONTROL) UNLESS THE SOVIETS COMPENSATED THE UNITED STATES WITH UNILATERAL RESTRAINT.

The most intriguing point about linkage that is highlighted by the case studies is the existence of what could be called “contextual” issue-linkage. In such a situation, a given bargain is placed within the context of a more important long-term relationship in such a way that the long-term relationship affects the outcome of the particular bargaining process. Two cases of contextual issue-linkage show that this form can often work to reduce conflict even without affecting the preferences of the participants on the specific issues being discussed. Oye notes that in 1936, the United States, Britain, and France were able to reach an agreement on international monetary reform because of the common security concern over a rising Nazi Germany. And as Downs and his colleagues point out, by far the most important cause of cooperation in arms races that ended peacefully has been the activity of a third power. For example, the Anglo-French naval arms race of 1852-1853 was resolved when the two states formed an alliance in order to fight the Russians in the Crimean War.

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS AND DOMESTIC POLITICS. Similar analytic questions arise in considering connections between international relations and domestic politics. Arms control negotiations involve not merely bargaining between governments, but within societies as well; the Carter administration was able to resolve the SALT II game with the Soviet Union, but not with the U.S. Senate. Trade issues typically also involve both international and domestic games. In the Tokyo Round, the same Carter administration—with a different responsible party, Robert Strauss—was able to mesh international and domestic games, playing them simultaneously rather than sequentially (international first), as had been done on some issues in the Kennedy Round a decade earlier. The result in this case was that the Tokyo Round trade agreements with


23 Oye (fn. 5), 17.
other countries were all ratified overwhelmingly by Congress, in contrast to the rejection of some of the international agreements made in the Kennedy Round.24

Such domestic-international connections are commonplace. Frequently, the incentives provided by domestic bargaining games inhibit effective foreign policy and may exacerbate international conflict. A well-known case is that of American decision making during the early months of the Korean War. General MacArthur was such a formidable figure in American politics that even his military superiors were reluctant to challenge his judgment in marching toward the Yalu River in the fall of 1950; yet this maneuver was so questionable that, if it had not been for the domestic political games taking place, serious reservations would have been expressed in the Pentagon and the White House.25

Another type of domestic-international linkage is discussed by Conybeare in this collection. During the 15th century, the Hanseatic League responded to naval setbacks at the hands of Britain by financing and equipping Edward IV, who, upon defeating the Lancastrians in the War of the Roses, signed a treaty that was one-sidedly favorable to the Hanse’s trading interests. By intervening in British domestic politics, the Hanse was thus able to triumph despite military weakness. This technique—intervening in a domestic political game as compensation for weakness at the international level—has recently been employed in more subtle ways by small powers with strong interests in American foreign policy.26

Compatibilities and incompatibilities among games. Many different games take place in world politics, involving different but overlapping sets of actors. Sometimes the existence of more than one game makes it easier to attain cooperation, but related games may also create difficulties for one another. That is, games in world politics can be compatible or incompatible with each other.

One example of a set of compatible games is provided by cooperation in international economic negotiations among the major industrialized countries. After World War II, such cooperation was facilitated by the fact that these countries were military allies. In contrast to Britain’s situation in the 19th century, America’s ability to persuade other major trading states to accept the rules that it preferred was greatly enhanced by the fact that in the military-political game the United States was a

senior partner, rather than an adversary, of the other major actors in
the world economy. To take another example: Lipson's analysis of debt
negotiations suggests that the negotiating game among large banks was
rendered compatible with games between large and small banks by
structuring the situation so that small banks could not coordinate with
each other. That is, two sets of negotiations were made compatible by
precluding a third one.

The case of 1914 illustrates the problem of incompatibility among
games. In non-crisis periods, loyalty within an alliance was compatible
with friendly relations across alliances. But when the 1914 crisis occurred,
loyalty within an alliance—such as Germany's support for Austria, Rus-
sia's for Serbia, and France's for Russia—implied defection across al-
liances. The increased cooperativeness of intra-alliance games destroyed
broader patterns of cooperation.

In the contemporary international political economy, problems of
incompatibility may also arise. For instance, negotiations on questions
such as tariffs or energy policies are most likely to yield positive results
for the advanced industrialized countries when only a few major players
are involved in the initial negotiation. Friction with others, however,
especially the less developed countries, may produce conflict on a larger
scale. Or, to take a different example from the politics of international
debt, close and explicit collaboration among debtor countries could, some
fear, disrupt relations between debtor governments and banks in the
richer countries.

The contrast between the fate of Soviet-American arms control in
the 1970s and the Tokyo Round of trade negotiations illustrates the
importance of multilevel games. In the face of linkages to other con-
tentious issues, complex domestic political games, and a lack of rein-
forcement between political-economic and military-security games, even
shared interests, a long shadow of the future, and bilateralism may be
insufficient to promote cooperation. If the interaction happens to be an
iterated game of Chicken, the problem is even worse because each player
has a strong incentive to avoid cooperation in the short run in order to
develop a reputation for firmness in the long run. Conversely, even when
there are quite severe conflicts of interest, these may be overshadowed
by more important mutual interests, perhaps institutionalized in organ-
izations such as NATO. Once again, it is not sufficient to analyze a
particular situation in isolation from its political context. We must also
analyze the patterns of expectations, and the institutions created by
human beings, within which particular negotiations are located and in
the light of which they are interpreted by participants.
B. RECIPROCITY AS A STRATEGY IN MULTILEVEL GAMES

Robert Axelrod has employed computer tournaments and theoretical analysis of the iterated, two-player Prisoners' Dilemma to show that a strategy based on reciprocity—such as Tit-for-Tat—can be remarkably effective in promoting cooperation.\(^{27}\) Even among pure egoists, cooperation can "emerge" if a small initial cluster of potential cooperators exists.

This argument suggests that governments may have incentives to practice reciprocity in a variety of situations that are characterized by mixtures of conflicting and complementary interests—that is, in certain non-zero-sum games. Evidence for this proposition is established best for the particular case of Prisoners' Dilemma. Axelrod's theory suggests that in this game a strategy based on reciprocity can yield relatively high payoffs against a variety of other strategies. Furthermore, such a strategy helps the whole community by punishing players who use uncooperative strategies. When payoff structures are those of Prisoners' Dilemma, therefore, we can expect practitioners of reciprocity to attempt to institutionalize it as a general practice, so that they will benefit from others' use of the strategy as well as their own.

As we have noted above, not every situation in which conflict or cooperation may occur can be categorized as Prisoners' Dilemma. Games such as Chicken and Stag Hunt are also significant. Evidence on these cases is not as extensive as on Prisoners' Dilemma. Yet, as Oye's introduction points out, there are good reasons to believe that reciprocity is an attractive strategy in a variety of non-zero-sum situations. The key conditions for the successful operation of reciprocity are that mutual cooperation can yield better results than mutual defection, but that temptations for defection also exist. In such situations, reciprocity may permit extensive cooperation without making cooperative participants inordinately vulnerable to exploitation by others. Furthermore, it may deter uncooperative actions.\(^{28}\)

\(^{27}\) Axelrod (fn. 6).

\(^{28}\) Consider the example of Stag Hunt, defined by the preference ordering of both players as CC > DC > DD > CD. If Player A is credibly committed to a strategy of reciprocity, beginning with cooperation, B's incentives to cooperate are enhanced. A's commitment to cooperate ensures that B will not be double-crossed (which would leave B with the worst payoff). Furthermore, A's commitment to retaliate against defection ensures that any defection by B would lead, after the first move, not to B's second-best outcome (DC), but to its third-best outcome (DD). The game of Chicken provides another appropriate case in point. In Chicken, mutual cooperation is only the second-best outcome for both players, but mutual defection is worst for both. Thus, DC > CC > CD > DD. A credible strategy of reciprocity by Player A in Chicken ensures B of its second-best outcome if it cooperates, and guarantees that continual defection will in the long run provide it with its worst payoff. Assuming that B's shadow of the future is sufficiently long, it should respond to A's strategy of reciprocity by cooperating.
It is not surprising, therefore, that reciprocity is a popular strategy for practical negotiators as well as for analysts in the laboratory. Oye's analysis of monetary politics in the 1930s reveals that Britain developed such a strategy in its relations with the Scandinavian countries. Contemporary discussions of international trade provide another case in point. U.S. officials have frequently defended reciprocity in trade relations on the grounds that pursuit of this strategy would deter discrimination against American products by other countries, and that relaxation of reciprocity would invite retaliation by others. Even observers skeptical about reciprocity often agree. In a policy-oriented article critical of current proposals that the United States should practice "aggressive reciprocity" in trade negotiations, William Cline argues that such action is rendered less effective by a high probability of foreign counter-retaliation.\(^29\) In Axelrod's terms, Tit-for-Tat (which begins by cooperating and then retaliates once for each defection by the other player) discourages exploitative strategies—"aggressive reciprocity."

Thus, the applicability of Tit-for-Tat does not seem to be limited to Prisoners' Dilemma. Yet it is not a perfect strategy. In the first place, it can perpetuate conflict through an "echo effect": "if the other player defects once, Tit-for-Tat will respond with a defection, and then if the other player does the same in response, the result would be an unending echo of alternating defections."\(^30\) In real-world politics as well as in the laboratory, reciprocity can lead to feuds as well as to cooperation, particularly when players have different perceptions of past outcomes.\(^31\) Soviet-American détente collapsed partly because each side concluded that the other was not practicing reciprocity, but was, on the contrary, taking unilateral advantage of its own restraint.\(^32\) Second, even when many shared interests exist and judgments of equivalence are not distorted, reciprocity may lead to deadlock. John W. Evans has pointed out that in tariff negotiations conducted according to the principle of reciprocity, potential concessions may become "bargaining chips" to be hoarded: "Tariffs that have no intrinsic economic value for a country that maintains them have acquired value because of the insistence of other countries on reciprocity in the bargaining process." As a result, "tariff levels may be maintained in spite of the fact that a lower level


\(^{30}\) Axelrod (fn. 6), 176.


\(^{32}\) See references cited in fn. 22.
would raise the country’s real income.” Third, when several actors negotiate separately and sequentially over issues that are substantively interdependent, subsequent bargains may call previous agreements into question by altering the value of concessions that have been made. This “issue interdependence problem” bedeviled trade negotiations under the conditional most-favored-nation clause prior to the institution of multilateral trade negotiations after World War II. Conditional most-favored-nation treatment permitted discrimination among suppliers. Later agreements between an importer and other suppliers therefore eroded the value of earlier concessions. This led to complex, acrimonious, and frustrating patterns of bargaining.

Despite these difficulties, reciprocity remains a valuable strategy for decentralized enforcement of cooperative agreements. Players who are aware of the problems of echo effects, bargaining deadlocks, and issue interdependence can compensate for these pitfalls. Axelrod observes that a better strategy than Tit-for-Tat “might be to return only nine-tenths of a tit for a tat.” The Tokyo Round dealt with the deadlock problem by beginning negotiations not on the basis of current tariff rates, but rather on the basis of a formula for hypothetical large across-the-board tariff cuts, with provisions for withdrawing offers on sensitive products, or if adequate compensation was not received. The problem of issue interdependence was dealt with in the trade area through multilateralization of tariff negotiations and adoption of unconditional most-favored-nation treatment.

These difficulties in applying reciprocity, and the responses of players to them, illustrate the significance of the institutions within which reciprocity is practiced. As noted above, multilateral trade negotiations are a case in point. In the military-security area, reciprocity has also been institutionalized. For example, stationing of American troops in Europe is linked to purchases of American military equipment by European governments. NATO as an institution has helped member governments achieve a variety of such reciprocal arrangements.

The debt negotiations discussed by Lipson also illustrate how reciprocity can be institutionalized in an N-person game. First, the major actors are identified, and bilateral negotiations take place between them or their agents. The I.M.F. and committees of banks negotiate with debtor countries. At a second stage, smaller banks are given the oppor-

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35 Axelrod (fn. 6), 138.
tunity to adhere to these bargains, but not to influence their terms. At this stage, emphasis is placed on reciprocity at a different level: although the smaller actors have the potential to act as free-riders, efforts are made to ensure that they have incentives not to do so for fear that they may suffer in a larger game. Small banks face the threat of being excluded from crucial relationships with big banks, and from future lending consortia, if they fail to provide funds for rescheduling loans. As in the other cases described above, strategies of reciprocity for debt rescheduling are adapted creatively to avoid the problems of issue-interdependence that arise when there are many actors.

III. Conclusion

A. THE IMPORTANCE OF PERCEPTION

The contributors to *Cooperation under Anarchy* did not specifically set out to explore the role of perception in decision making, but the importance of perception has kept asserting itself. The significance of perception, including beliefs and cognition, will come as no surprise to students of international politics. Yet it is worth pointing out once again that decision making in ambiguous settings is heavily influenced by the ways in which the actors think about their problem.

While this point has been made in laboratory studies many times, there is an important twist in international politics that does not get sufficient attention from the psychologists who study decision making in the laboratory. Leaders of one state live far away from the leaders of other states. They are far away not only in space, but also in their cognitive framework: their tacit assumptions differ about what is important, what needs to be done, and who bears the responsibility for change. Put simply, those acting on behalf of states often do not appreciate how their own actions will affect others and how they will be interpreted by others. As Van Evera concludes from his study of World War I, preventing that war would have required dispelling extensive misperceptions that were prevalent in Europe before 1914.

Other striking examples of the importance of perception also come from the security area. For example, Downs, Rocke, and Siverson have found that even when nations in arms races built defensive rather than

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36 Jervis (fn. 31).

offensive weapons, it was usually done not to defuse the arms race, but simply because they believed that such weapons offered the greatest amount of security per dollar. Even more to the point is that many arms races were started or accelerated without serious appreciation of the consequences. For example, when the Soviet leaders deliberately exaggerated their bomber strength in 1955 and their ICBM capabilities several years later, they did so for short-term political advantages; there is no evidence that they fully appreciated the long-term consequences that would follow when the United States geared up to take the threat seriously. In general, Downs, Rocke, and Siverson find that arms races are not often perceived as the result of actions chosen by others. In the events leading to the outbreak of war, national leaders may completely misunderstand the consequences of their acts. Van Evera notes, for example, that in 1914 the Russian government did not realize that Russia's mobilization would lead directly to Germany's mobilization, and to war. Another example of the impact of biased interpretations of events is provided by Jervis in his discussion of the decay of great-power concerts, which were undermined by divergent views of which side had made greater concessions to maintain cooperation.

While security issues provide the most dramatic examples, governments may be no better at understanding how their actions in the realm of political economy will be seen by others. Conybeare's study shows that trade wars have sometimes begun when states held mistaken beliefs that other countries would be reluctant to raise tariffs on imported food in retaliation for new tariffs placed on their exported manufactured goods. Trade wars have begun when states had exaggerated expectations about the tolerance of others for attempts at minor exploitation in widely accepted terms of trade.

B. GROPPING TOWARD NEW INSTITUTIONS AND NORMS

Our project began with a set of hypotheses about how specific features of an international setting would affect the chances for the development of cooperation. Factors included were mutuality of interests, the shadow of the future, and the number of actors. These hypotheses have been supported by a broad set of cases that began in the 14th century, and covered trade disputes, monetary policy, and debt rescheduling as well as arms races, the outbreak of war, and diplomatic concerts. The three factors did, in fact, help to account for both cooperation and conflict.

We also discovered something else: over and over again we observed that the actors were not satisfied with simply selecting strategies based upon the situation in which they found themselves. In many cases we
saw deliberate efforts to change the very structure of the situation by changing the context in which each of them would be acting. Decision makers themselves perceived (more or less consciously) that some aspects of the situations they faced tended to make cooperation difficult. So they worked to alter these background conditions. Among the problems they encountered were the following:

1. how to provide incentives for cooperation so that cooperation would be rewarded over the long run, and defection punished;
2. how to monitor behavior so that cooperators and defectors could be identified;
3. how to focus rewards on cooperators and retaliation on defectors;
4. how to link issues with one another in productive rather than self-defeating ways and, more generally, how to play multilevel games without tripping over their own strategies.

A fundamental strategic concept in attaining these objectives is that of reciprocity. Cooperation in world politics seems to be attained best not by providing benefits unilaterally to others, but by conditional cooperation. Yet reciprocity encounters many problems in practice. As Axelrod has demonstrated, and as Van Evera's discussion of 1914 illustrates, payoff structures in the strategic setting may be so malign that Tit-for-Tat cannot work. Reciprocity requires the ability to recognize and retaliate against a defection. And retaliation can spread acrimoniously.

Actors in world politics seek to deal with problems of reciprocity in part through the exercise of power. Powerful actors structure relationships so that countries committed to a given order can deal effectively with those that have lower levels of commitment. This is done by establishing hierarchies, as one would expect from Herbert Simon's assertion that complex systems will be hierarchic in character. In the present symposium, the construction of hierarchy for the sake of cooperation is best illustrated by Lipson's discussion of inter-bank networks to facilitate rescheduling of Third World debts; but it is also evident in Jervis's discussion of great-power concerts.

Another way to facilitate cooperation is to establish international regimes. Regimes can be defined as “sets of implicit or explicit principles, norms, rules, and decision-making procedures around which actors' expectations converge in a given area of international relations.” International regimes have been extensive in the post-1945 international

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39 Krasner (fn. 8), 3.
political economy, as illustrated by the international trade regime (centered on the GATT) and the international monetary regime (including the I.M.F. as well as other organizations and networks). Since the use of power can facilitate the construction of regimes, this approach should be seen as complementary to, rather than in contradiction with, an emphasis on hierarchical authority. Regimes do not enforce rules in a hierarchical sense, but they do change patterns of transaction costs and provide information to participants, so that uncertainty is reduced. Jervis argues that the Concert of Europe helped to facilitate cooperation by making it easier for governments to understand one another. Lipson shows how, in the regime for debt rescheduling, the control of information is used to facilitate cooperation on terms favored by the big banks. He also indicates that one weapon in the hands of those banks is their ability to structure transaction costs: the costs of negotiations involving major money-center banks are reduced while the costs of coordinating resistance by small banks are not. Conybeare's analysis implies that if England and the Hanseatic League had been able to form an international trade regime, they might have been able to make mutually advantageous bargains and to discipline some of their more unruly constituents.

International regimes do not substitute for reciprocity; rather, they reinforce and institutionalize it. Regimes incorporating the norm of reciprocity delegitimize defection and thereby make it more costly. Insofar as they specify precisely what reciprocity means in the relevant issue-area, they make it easier to establish a reputation for practicing reciprocity consistently. Such reputations may become important assets, precisely because others will be more willing to make agreements with governments that can be expected to respond to cooperation with cooperation. Of course, compliance is difficult to assure; and international regimes almost never have the power to enforce rules. Nevertheless, since governments with good reputations can more easily make agreements than governments with bad ones, international regimes can help to facilitate cooperation by making it both easier and more desirable to acquire a good reputation.

International regimes may also help to develop new norms, as Ruggie has argued. Yet few such examples are evident in the cases discussed in this volume. The great-power concerts discussed by Jervis embodied new norms, but these did not last long; and the new norms of the 1930s

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40 Keohane (fn. 8), chaps. 8-9.
41 Ibid., esp. chaps. 5-7.
42 Ruggie (fn. 15).
monetary system described by Oye were largely uncooperative and connected with the breakdown rather than the institutionalization of a regime. Major banks today are trying mightily to strengthen norms of repayment (for debtors) and of relending (for banks), but it is not at all clear that this will be successful. Better examples of creating norms may be provided by the evolution of thinking on chemical and biological warfare, and by the development, under GATT, of norms of non-discrimination—which are now, as we have seen, under pressure. Evidently, it is difficult to develop new norms, and they often decay in reaction to conspicuous violations.

Establishing hierarchies, setting up international regimes, and attempting to gain acceptance for new norms are all attempts to change the context within which actors operate by changing the very structure of their interaction. It is important to notice that these efforts have usually not been examples of forward-looking rationality. Rather, they have been experimental, trial-and-error efforts to improve the current situation based upon recent experience. Like other forms of trial-and-error experimentation, they have not always worked. Indeed, it is instructive to enumerate the variety of ways in which such experiments can fail.

1. The most important source of failure is that efforts to restructure the relationships may never get off the ground. As Downs, Rocke, and Siverson note, there was an active peace movement in the years before 1914, and World War I was preceded by a series of conferences designed to secure arms control and strengthen international law; but these efforts did not significantly affect the nature of world politics. Similarly, the shakiness of monetary arrangements in the 1920s was perceived by many of the participants, but conferences to deal with these weaknesses, such as that at Genoa in 1922, failed to cope with them effectively. The great-power concerts discussed by Jervis seemed to get somewhat farther, but were never sufficiently institutionalized to have much prospect of longevity.

2. Some agreements are instituted, but turn out to be self-contradictory. We have noted that sequential bilateral negotiations under conditional most-favored-nation treatment may lead to a problem of infinite regress: each bargain tends to require the renegotiation of many others. Bilateral arms control agreements, whose restraints could encourage third parties to increase their armaments in order to catch up with the major powers, face a similar difficulty.

3. Even successful arrangements are subject to decay. Decay can result
from actors' attempts to find loopholes in established rules. The very success of GATT in reducing tariff rates contributed to an expansion of nontariff barriers; and efforts to evade those barriers led to their progressive extension and tightening. Likewise, successful cooperation in the area of security may lead governments to believe that their partners' cooperation is not based on reciprocity but is unconditional. Insofar as this belief is incorrect, discord may ensue.

4. In some cases, changes that have nothing to do with the arrangements make them obsolete. Thus the international debt regime in place before the crisis of August 1982 was manifestly ill-equipped to handle a situation in which most Third World debts had to be rescheduled. In this instance, the old regime was adapted to meet new needs. The Depression of the 1930s made the monetary orthodoxy of the gold exchange standard obsolete. Indeed, Oye argues that the cooperative international monetary arrangements of the 1920s hindered attempts at monetary cooperation during the 1930s. The collapse of the old regime was a necessary condition for creation of a new one.

Eventually, any institution is likely to become obsolete. The question is under what conditions international institutions—broadly defined as "recognized patterns of practice around which expectations converge"—facilitate significant amounts of cooperation for a period of time. Clearly, such institutions can change the incentives for countries affected by them, and can in turn affect the strategic choices governments make in their own self-interest.

This interaction between incentives and institutions suggests the importance of linking the upward-looking theory of strategy with the downward-looking theory of regimes. The strategic approach is upward-looking in that it examines what individual actors will choose to do, and derives consequences for the entire system based on these choices. Most of the analysis in this volume has followed this upward-looking approach. On the other hand, much regime analysis has been downward-looking in that it examines the implications, for actors, of the way the entire system is organized. Some recent work has attempted to combine

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44 Oran R. Young, "Regime Dynamics: The Rise and Fall of International Regimes," International Organization 36 (Spring 1982), 277-98; reprinted in Krasner (fn. 8), 93-114.
ACHIEVING COOPERATION UNDER ANARCHY 253

these two approaches, but it has not yet been done in either a formally rigorous or an empirically comprehensive way.

The experimental groping by policy makers does not necessarily lead to stronger and ever more complex ways of achieving cooperation. The process proceeds by fits and starts. The success of each step is uncertain, and there is always danger that prior achievements will come unstuck. New experiments are often tried only under obvious pressure of events (as in debt rescheduling). And they are often dependent upon the active leadership of a few individuals or states who feel a serious need for change and who have the greatest resources.

The essays in this collection show that we are beginning to understand the structural conditions that affect strategic choices leading to cooperation or discord. These factors are mutuality of interest, the shadow of the future, and the number of actors. Over a wide range of historical cases, these three dimensions of situations do help account for the emergence, or nonemergence, of cooperation under anarchy.

But in the course of this collective research we have also found that states are often dissatisfied with the structure of their own environment. We have seen that governments have often tried to transform the structures within which they operate so as to make it possible for the countries involved to work together productively. Some of these experiments have been successful, others have been stillborn, and still others have collapsed before fully realizing the dreams of their founders. We understand the functions performed by international regimes, and how they affect strategies pursued by governments, better than we did a number of years ago. What we need now are theories that account for (1) when experiments to restructure the international environment are tried, and (2) whether a particular experiment is likely to succeed. Even within a world of independent states that are jealously guarding their sovereignty and protecting their power, room exists for new and better arrangements to achieve mutually satisfactory outcomes, in terms both of economic welfare and military security.

This does not mean that all endeavors to promote international cooperation will yield good results. Cooperation can be designed to help a few at the expense of the rest; and it can accentuate as well as alleviate injustice in an imperfect world. Yet the consequences of failure to co-

45 In After Hegemony (fn. 8), Robert Keohane has sought to show how game theory (which is "upward-looking") can be combined fruitfully with the "downward-looking" theories of public goods and market failure to develop a functional theory of international regimes. But he has not formalized his theory, and has applied it only to the post-World War II international political economy.
operate—from warfare to the intensification of depressions—make us believe that more cooperation is often better than less. If governments are prepared to grope their way toward a better-coordinated future, scholars should be prepared to study the process. And, in a world where states have often been dissatisfied with international anarchy, scholars should be prepared to advance the learning process—so that despite the reality of anarchy, beneficial forms of international cooperation can be promoted.