Explaining Conflict and Cooperation: Tools and Techniques of the Trade

German chancellor Prince Otto von Bismarck (1815–1898)

KEY CONCEPTS

To make sense of something, you need an appropriate conceptual toolkit that includes a useful vocabulary, ways of drawing inferences that help you see how things work, and strategies for solving problems. Understanding global conflict and cooperation is no exception.

Unlike physicians, engineers, or natural scientists, people who study world politics have relatively little in the way of highly specialized vocabulary. We borrow words from other fields, or from common usage. The upside of this is that the barriers to entry are low; almost anyone can have a sensible discussion about world politics. How many people can have a casual dinnertime conversation about plasmapheresis or quantum tunneling? The downside is that there is an unusually high risk of ambiguity and confusion, because the same word can mean quite different things in different contexts, and many words have two or more possible meanings in the same context. Ambiguity is not something that we can purge from the English language, but we can learn to spot potentially confusing usages. Before we delve too deeply into the interplay of theory and history, therefore, it is useful to spend some time exploring key concepts. We will then go on to examine some useful tools and techniques for drawing inferences about world politics.

States, Nations, and Nation-States

Perhaps the single most important concept used in the study of world politics is the *sovereign state*. Unfortunately, it is also one of the most confusing—partly because it is two concepts bundled together, *sovereignty* and *state*. Most people would agree that the state is the most important actor in the international system (we will explore the terms "actor" and "system" more closely in a moment), although realists and liberals would disagree about the relative importance of other actors. Realists would insist that states are the only significant actors, while liberals would argue that states are only the most important among many. But what, exactly, *is* a "state"?

A state is a particular type of political unit that has two crucial characteristics: *territoriality* and *sovereignty*. Territoriality is straightforward: A state governs a specific, identifiable portion of the Earth's surface. Sovereignty is the absolute right to govern it. In most cases, when you encounter the word "state" in a discussion of world politics, the best single synonym would be "country." Britain, France, Argentina, and Japan are all states. Being sovereign means that they have no higher authority to which they must answer. Different countries have different political systems that locate sovereignty in

different places. In traditional monarchies, kings or queens are sovereign and enjoy supreme authority over the territories they govern. In democracies, the people hold sovereignty and delegate government to their elected representatives and other state officials. But whatever the ultimate source of sovereignty, all states have governments that pass laws, enforce order, and are supposed to defend the people who live within their borders.

The United States of America is a state in this sense as well. However, it is a federation of lower-level political units that rather inconveniently also happen to be called "states." The same is true for a number of other countries, such as Australia, India, and Mexico. This is one obvious possible source of confusion. Michigan, New South Wales, Uttar Pradesh, and Chihuahua are all states, but they are not countries. They are territorial, but they are not sovereign. While they have delegated areas of jurisdiction, they are answerable to their federal constitutions.

> "When concepts are used in more than one way, confusion is easy. A southern colleague of mine began her university teaching career in the upper Midwest. The first course she taught was a comparative politics course titled 'The State in Western Europe.' In it she explored the wide variety of structures and practices of various European political systems. After a few weeks, one student timidly approached her after class with a puzzled look on his face. 'Professor,' he said, 'I know you're from Georgia and this is Wisconsin; but when you talk about "the state," you do mean Wisconsin, don't you?'"
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> —Joseph S. Nye, Jr.

A third possible source of confusion is that the word "state" is often used to refer to the *government* of a country—or, more precisely, to the structure and practices of the institutions and offices that make up the government. This usage is common in the comparative politics subfield of political science, where you will often hear Singapore (for example) described as a "strong state" because its central government has a great deal of authority, and the United States as a "weak" state because of its system of checks and balances and a very generous set of constitutionally protected individual rights. Obviously, in terms of material power, the United States is much stronger than Singapore, so one must be very careful to interpret phrases such as "strong state" and "weak state" appropriately. Context is key.

Another word often used as a synonym for state is "nation." This is a particularly unfortunate practice, because the word "nation" is commonly used to denote a group of people who have some combination of common language, culture, religion, history, mythology, identity, or sense of destiny. A decent but imperfect synonym for this kind of "nation" is "ethnic group."[1] Kurds, Tamils, Québécois, and Navajo are all nations in this sense, but none of them is a state. Abraham Lincoln famously said in his Gettysburg Address, "Four score and seven years ago, our forefathers brought forth upon this continent a

▶ ARE EU MEMBERS "SOVEREIGN STATES"?

The European Union (EU) is a fascinating example of supranational integration. Its 27 member states have agreed to set up supranational institutions such as the European Parliament and Council of Ministers (which are responsible for legislation), a European Commission (the EU's executive arm), and the European Court of Justice and Court of First Instance (judicial arms). The EU is a single market and customs union with free movement of goods, services, capital, and people; it attempts to harmonize policies in a wide range of issue areas; and it strives to speak with one voice on the world stage. Sixteen EU members have embraced a common currency, the euro, which is second in importance only to the U.S. dollar in the world economy. At the same time, the members only loosely coordinate their common defense and foreign policies.

Does all of this mean that the members are no longer sovereign states? Technically, no; every member country retains the right to withdraw from the EU at any time it chooses. However, withdrawal would be very costly, and it is difficult to imagine anything other than very extreme circumstances prompting it. Indeed, no state is contemplating withdrawal at the moment, while several states, such as Turkey, are seeking entry.

The EU is the best, but not the only, example of supranational integration. Egypt and Syria formed the United Arab Republic (UAR) in 1958, but it fell apart after only three years. A more interesting and somewhat more successful experiment was the East African Community (EAC) in 1967, binding Kenya, Tanzania, and Uganda. The EAC fared quite well until torn apart by ideological differences and personality clashes among the three countries' leaders. In 2001, the EAC was reborn, and in 2007, Burundi and Rwanda joined as well. Yet the reincarnation of the EAC has a long way to go before it proves as effective as the EU in promoting the common and individual interests of its member states.

new nation, conceived in liberty, and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal." It would have been much better if he had said *state* rather than *nation*, because the United States of America is a multinational state.

It was common among eighteenth- and nineteenth-century liberal political philosophers to believe that every nation should have a state of its own, and groups such as the Kurds and Tamils struggled for this for years. A state whose citizens are overwhelmingly members of a single nation is a *nation-state*. There are few true nation-states in the world today. Japan and the two Koreas are notable exceptions; 98.5 percent of the inhabitants of Japan are ethnic Japanese, and an even higher proportion of the inhabitants of North and South Korea are ethnic Koreans. Most countries of the world today are far from being ethnically homogenous.

National groups within states often claim a right to *self-government* or *self-determination*. Self-determination is the ability to decide one's own political fate. This frequently includes a claim to a state of one's own. Québec separatists, for

example, claim a right to self-determination for the purpose of carving a new country out of Canada. Sometimes groups claiming a right to self-determination seek to detach the territories in which they live from one country and join it to another, as did ethnic Germans in Austria, Czechoslovakia, and Poland between the two world wars.[2] Groups that claim a right to self-government may be happy to live within the territory of an existing multinational state, but may seek extensive rights and prerogatives to look after their own affairs. Wales, for example, is not a sovereign state—it is part of the United Kingdom—but the Welsh enjoy quite a significant degree of self-government, which is exercised by the aptly named Welsh National Assembly.

The difficulty with the idea of the nation-state as a philosophical ideal is that nations are often intermingled and spread out in diasporas over vast distances. It would be impossible to draw borders in such a way as to give each nation a state of its own. Even if this were possible, a powerful norm against redrawing settled borders has emerged over the course of the last century, in part in reaction to the carnage caused by the partial, inconsistent, and unsuccessful attempt to realize the nation-state ideal in Europe after World War I. In another era, Kurds and Tamils might have been in luck: Their claims to self-determination might have been greeted with sympathy from powerful countries, and possibly even with active political support. Nowadays the international community is reluctant to recognize secession in all but the most severe cases of genocide, oppression, violent state collapse, or rare mutual agreements such as the Czech and Slovak "velvet divorce" in 1993.

For the sake of clarity, it is always important to pay careful attention to what people actually mean when they use terms such as *state, nation*, and *nation-state*. You will find them being used interchangeably a large proportion of the time. It does not help that the world's preeminent organization of sovereign states is called the United "Nations," or that we call what happens between states "inter*national*" politics!

How do states come to be? A group of people cannot simply mark out some turf, run up a flag, and call themselves a state (though one disgruntled Australian farmer and his family tried to do exactly this in 1970).[3] To be a state, one must be recognized *as* a state—by other states. In this sense, being a state is a bit like being a member of a club: Existing members must admit you.

What do other states look at to decide whether to recognize a new sovereign state? There is no generally agreed-upon checklist, but five issues tend to dominate their deliberations: first, whether there is a government with de facto control over a certain territory; second, whether other states claim the territory, and if so, how strong their claim is; third, whether the people seeking to establish a new state are historically oppressed; fourth, whether those people consider their government legitimate; and fifth, but not least important, whether recognizing the new state as sovereign would affect their own claims and interests. Countries such as China that face significant domestic secessionist movements are often reluctant to recognize new states out of fear of setting a precedent that could backfire, even if in other respects the case for statehood is sound. With some critical mass of recognition—being accepted as a member

of the United Nations is the gold standard—a new state takes its place among the countries of the world and shoulders the rights, privileges, and obligations of statehood. Its government comes to be accepted internationally—for the most part, at any rate—as the rightful spokesperson for the inhabitants of the territory and the ultimate authority within its borders. The two newest aspirants for sovereign statehood are Kosovo, which declared unilateral independence from Serbia in 2008, and Palestine, which made a push for recognition in 2011. Most observers believe that they will attain UN membership in the fullness of time. Somaliland has had less luck: Despite its unilateral declaration of independence from Somalia in 1991, it remains unrecognized by any UN member state.

The club-membership dimension of statehood is functional, but not perfect; it does generate occasional anomalies. Taiwan, for example, is for all practical purposes an independent country, but only 23 sovereign states recognize it as such. It does not have a seat at the UN. Since the People's Republic of China considers Taiwan a renegade province, Taiwanese officials must conduct most of their international business in a roundabout way. At the same time, there are many countries in the world—Somalia, Zimbabwe, and Afghanistan come to mind—that are recognized globally as sovereign states, but that fail to satisfy the most basic condition of sovereign statehood: namely, having a legitimate government that exercises effective control within its borders.

International Actors, Power, and Authority

Earlier we saw that realists and liberals disagree on whether the state is the only significant actor in world politics. An *actor* is any person or body whose decisions and actions have repercussions for international politics. When speaking about actors in general, we don't use proper nouns; when we speak of particular actors, we do. Of course, technically only people make decisions and take actions, so when we talk of "the state" as an actor, we are abstracting for the sake of simplicity. You will commonly hear or read (for example) that Germany attacked Poland in 1939, although it would be more accurate

◥ SYSTEMS AND WAR

After the last war, the international system developed two rigid camps. This bipolarity led to a loss of flexibility and heightened insecurity. One of the new alliances developed around an authoritarian land-based power, the other around a democratic power with an expansive commerce and culture that held naval supremacy. Each side feared that the other would achieve a decisive advantage in the conflict that both expected. Ironically, it was civil conflict in a small, weak state threatening a marginal change in the alliances that heightened the sense of threat in both alliances and actually triggered the war.

Which war does this describe: the Peloponnesian War, World War I, or the Cold War?

to say that Germans attacked Poles. This kind of anthropomorphizing is very standard. It is important to be aware of it, however, because when we anthropomorphize the state—or any other collective actor, such as a multinational corporation or an NGO—it can incline us to assume wrongly that these are *unitary* actors with interests, minds, and wills of their own. Very often, what happens in the world can only be understood if we pay attention to the disagreements, debates, and sometimes even struggles that take place inside states. As we shall see in Chapter 5, a major reason why President John F. Kennedy and Soviet Chairman Nikita Khrushchev cut an abrupt deal to end the Cuban missile crisis in 1962 was because both had become frightened of the unanticipated, inadvertent, and sometimes insubordinate actions of their own militaries, which threatened to drag the superpowers into nuclear war. This was a situation in which those who should really only have been *agents* of the state (soldiers, diplomats, and bureaucrats are only ever supposed to act in accordance with superiors' instructions) were behaving inappropriately as *actors*. Of course, not all actors are anthropomorphized collectivities. Individual human beings can be international actors as well. Osama bin Laden was an international actor, as is Bono—not to put them on the same moral plane, of course! Even movie actors can be actors.[4] Mia Farrow, for example, managed to influence China's policy on Darfur.

While liberals are more inclined than realists to believe that multinational corporations, NGOs, churches, diasporas, transnational criminal networks, drug cartels, terrorist groups, charitable foundations, celebrities, and any number of other types of actors can do things that have real consequences in international politics, both agree that states are the most important, for four main reasons. First, all but "failed" states (the Somalias, Zimbabwes, and Afghanistans of the world)[5] have the capacity in principle to control the flow of people, goods, and money across borders. No state controls this perfectly, but most states control it fairly effectively. Second, states normally are the only actors that wield significant armies. Some other actors are capable of organized violence on a small scale, but functioning states have an unusual capacity to wield organized violence on a massive scale. (In failed states or states that are experiencing civil war, substate actors occasionally have this capacity.) Third, only states have the power to tax and spend in significant amounts. The Mafia taxes by running protection rackets, and drug cartels raise significant funds by illegal business, but on a scale dwarfed by most states, and only as long as they manage to avoid or corrupt the law. Fourth, only states promulgate and enforce laws. States are answerable to no higher authority.

These four considerations demonstrate that, compared to other actors, the state typically wields more *power*. Power is another key concept in the study of global conflict and cooperation. However, like love, it is easier to experience than to define or measure.

Power is the ability to achieve one's purposes or goals. More specifically, it is the ability to affect others to get the outcomes one wants. Robert Dahl, a Yale political scientist, defines power as the ability to get others to do what they otherwise would not do. But when we measure power in terms of the

changed behavior of others, we have to know their preferences. Otherwise, we may be as mistaken about our power as was the fox who thought he was hurting Br'er Rabbit when he threw him into the briar patch. Knowing in advance how other people or states would behave in the absence of our efforts is often difficult.

The behavioral definition of power can be useful to analysts and historians who devote considerable time to reconstructing the past, but to practical politicians and leaders it may seem too ephemeral. Because the ability to influence others is usually associated with the possession of certain resources, political leaders commonly define power this way. These resources include population, territory, natural resources, economic size, military forces, and political stability, among others. The virtue of this definition is that it makes power appear more concrete, measurable, and predictable than the behavioral definition. Power in this sense means holding the high cards in the international poker game. A basic rule of poker is that if your opponent is showing cards that can beat anything you hold, fold. If you know you will lose a war, don't start it.

Some wars, however, have been started by the eventual losers, which suggests that political leaders sometimes take risks or make mistakes. Japan in 1941 and Iraq in 1990 are examples. Often the opponent's cards are not all showing in the game of international politics. As in poker, bluffing and deception can make a big difference. Even without deception, mistakes can be made about which power resources are most relevant in particular situations. For example, France and Britain had more tanks than did Nazi Germany in 1940, but Hitler's tanks were better engineered, and his generals used them more effectively.

Power conversion is a basic problem that arises when we think of power in terms of resources. Some countries are better than others at converting their resources into effective influence over other countries' behavior, just as some skilled card players win despite being dealt weak hands. Power conversion is the capacity to convert potential power, as measured by resources, to realized power, as measured by the changed behavior of others. To predict outcomes correctly, we need to know about a country's skill at power conversion as well as its possession of power resources.

Another problem is determining which resources provide the best basis for power in any particular context. Tanks are not much good in swamps; uranium was not a power resource in the nineteenth century. In earlier periods, power resources were easier to judge. For example, in the agrarian economies of eighteenth-century Europe, population was a critical power resource because it provided a base for taxes and recruitment of infantry. In terms of population, France dominated Western Europe. Thus at the end of the Napoleonic Wars (1799–1815), Prussia presented its fellow victors at the Congress of Vienna (1815) with a precise plan for its own reconstruction in order to maintain the balance of power. Its plan listed the territories and populations it had lost since 1805 and the territories and populations it would need to regain equivalent numbers. In the prenationalist period, it was not significant that many of the people in those provinces did not speak German

or feel themselves to be Prussian. However, within half a century, nationalist sentiments would matter very much.

Another change of context that occurred during the nineteenth century was the growing importance of industry and rail systems that made rapid mobilization possible. In the 1860s, Chancellor Otto von Bismarck's Germany pioneered the use of railways to transport armies in Europe for quick victories. Although Russia had always had greater population resources than the rest of Europe, they were difficult to mobilize. The growth of the rail system in western Russia at the beginning of the twentieth century was one of the reasons the Germans feared rising Russian power in 1914. Further, the spread of rail systems on the continent helped deprive Britain of the luxury of concentrating on naval power. There was no longer time, should it prove necessary, to insert an army to prevent another great power from dominating the continent.

The application of industrial technology to warfare has long had a powerful impact. Advanced science and technology have been particularly critical power resources since the beginning of the nuclear age in 1945. But the power derived from nuclear weapons has proven to be so awesome and destructive that its actual application is muscle-bound. Nuclear war is simply far too costly. Indeed, there are many situations where any use of force may be inappropriate or too costly.

Even if the direct use of force were banned among a group of countries, military force would still play an important background role. For example, the American military role in deterring threats to allies, or of assuring access to a crucial resource such as oil in the Persian Gulf, means that the provision of protective force can be used in bargaining situations. Sometimes the linkage may be direct; more often, as we will see in Chapter 7, it is a factor not mentioned openly but present in the back of leaders' minds.

Coercing other states to change is a direct or commanding method of exercising power. Such *hard power* can rest on payments ("carrots") or threats ("sticks"). But there is also a soft or indirect way to exercise power. A country may achieve its preferred outcomes in world politics because other countries want to emulate it or have agreed to a system that produces such effects. In this sense, it can be just as important to set the agenda and attract others in world politics as it is to force others to change in particular situations. This aspect of power—that is, getting others to want what you want—is called attractive or *soft power*. Soft power can rest on such resources as the appeal of one's ideas or on the ability to set the political agenda in a way that shapes the preferences others express. Parents of teenagers know that if they have structured their children's beliefs and preferences, their power will be greater and will last longer than if they had relied only on active control. Similarly, political leaders and constructivist theorists have long understood the power that comes from setting the agenda and determining the framework of a debate. The ability to establish preferences is often associated with intangible power resources such as culture, ideology, and institutions that constructivists emphasize.

Soft power is not automatically more effective or ethical than hard power. Twisting minds is not necessarily better than twisting arms. Moral judgments

depend on the purposes for which power is used. The terrorist leader Osama bin Laden, for example, had soft power in the eyes of his followers who carried out the 9/11 attacks. Nor is soft power necessarily more closely associated with liberal than realist theory. Neorealists such as Kenneth Waltz tend to be materialists who pay little attention to the role of ideas. In their efforts to be parsimonious they impoverished realist theory. Classical realists such as Machiavelli and Morgenthau never neglected ideas as a source of power.

Power is the ability to affect others to get the outcomes you want regardless of whether its sources are tangible or not. Soft power is often more difficult for governments to wield and slower to yield results. Sometimes it is completely ineffective. But analysts ignore it at their peril. For example, in 1762, when Frederick the Great of Prussia was about to be defeated by a coalition of France, Austria, and Russia, he was saved because the new Russian tsar, Peter III (1728–1762), idolized the Prussian monarch and pulled his troops out of the anti-Prussian coalition. In 1917, Great Britain had greater soft power than Germany over American opinion, and that affected the United States' entry on Britain's side in World War I. More recently, the election of Barack Obama in 2008 gave an immediate boost to American soft power because his image and his message held great appeal even in parts of the world that had become notably hostile to U.S. policy. But translating these enhanced soft power resources into tangible outcomes has been neither linear nor easy.

Hard and soft power are related, but they are not the same. Material success makes a culture and ideology attractive, and decreases in economic and military success lead to self-doubt and crises of identity. But soft power does not rest solely on hard power. The soft power of the Vatican did not wane as the size of the Papal States diminished in the nineteenth century. Canada, Sweden, and the Netherlands today tend to have more influence than some other states with equivalent economic or military capability. The Soviet Union had considerable soft power in Europe after World War II but squandered it after its invasions of Hungary in 1956 and Czechoslovakia in 1968. Many would argue that the United States enjoyed enormous soft power in the immediate wake of 9/11, but squandered much of it in the aftermath through artless, muscular unilateralism.

What resources are the most important sources of power today? A look at the five centuries since the birth of the sovereign state shows that different power resources played critical roles in different periods. The sources of power are never static, and they continue to change in today's world. Moreover, they vary in different parts of the world. Soft power is becoming more important in relations among the postindustrial societies in an information age in which the democratic peace prevails; hard power is often more important in industrializing and preindustrial parts of the world.

In an age of information-based economies and transnational interdependence, power is becoming less transferable, less tangible, and less coercive, as we shall see in more detail in Chapters 7 and 8. Traditional analysts would predict the outcome of conflict mainly on the basis of whose army wins. Today, in conflicts such as the struggle against transnational terrorism, it is

equally important whose story wins. Hard power is necessary against hard-core terrorists, but it is equally important to use soft power to win the hearts and minds of the mainstream population that might otherwise be won over by the terrorists.

> "The capacity to know when to use hard power, when to use soft power, and when to combine the two, I call *smart power*."
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> —Joseph S. Nye, Jr.

The transformation of power is not the same in all parts of the world. The twenty-first century will certainly see a greater role for informational and institutional power, but as events in the Middle East demonstrate, hard military power remains an important instrument. Economic scale, both in markets and in natural resources, will also remain important. The service sector grows within modern economies, and the distinction between services and manufacturing continues to blur. Information will become more plentiful, and the critical resource will be organizational capacity for rapid and flexible response. Political cohesion will remain important, as well as the nurturing of a universalistic, exportable popular culture.

Note the slightly complicated relationship between *power* and *authority*. Authority can be a power resource when others respect it, but you can have power without having authority. The United States had the power to oust the duly elected Guatemalan president, Jacobo Árbenz Guzmán, in a CIA-engineered coup in 1954, but it did not have the authority to do so. Guatemala was a sovereign state. Power is an empirical notion, whereas authority is a moral, normative, or juridical concept. Authority requires legitimacy. While the international system of sovereign states is anarchic in the legal distribution of authority, it is never truly anarchic in the distribution of power. In *unipolar* systems, one country enjoys a preponderance of power and can effectively set the terms of international cooperation and enforce or elicit compliance. In a *bipolar* system, two countries of similar power enjoy primacy within their particular sphere or among other states aligned with them (lesser powers or client states). In a *multipolar* system, three or more countries wield an unusual degree of power. We usually call the strongest country within a unipolar system a *hegemon* (from the Greek meaning "leader"); we call the strongest countries in a modern bipolar system *superpowers;* and we call the strongest countries within multipolar systems *great powers*.

International System and International Society

We have been using the word "system" frequently to this point. What do we mean by it? According to the dictionary, a *system* is a set of interrelated units. The units or components of systems interact in a regular way that may be more or less complicated. We use the terms *structure* to describe the configuration

of the units, and *process* to capture their interactions. The distinction between structure and process at any given time can be illustrated by the metaphor of a poker game. The *structure* of a poker game is in the distribution of power, that is, how many chips the players have and how many high cards they are dealt. The *process* is how the game is played and the types of interactions among the players. (How are the rules created and understood? Are the players good bluffers? Do they obey the rules? If players cheat, are they likely to get caught?) For example, allowing the players in Prisoner's Dilemma games to communicate with one another alters the nature of the game. So, too, when states communicate with one another and reach mutually beneficial agreements or create well-understood norms and institutions, they add to the repertoire of state strategies and can thus alter political outcomes.

The international system is an example of a particular kind of system, namely, a *political* system. In contrast to many domestic political systems, which are easy to identify because of their clear institutional referents (the presidency, Congress, Parliament, and so forth), the current international political system is less centralized and less tangible. Without the United Nations, an international system would still exist. Do not be misled, however, by the institutional concreteness of domestic political systems. They also include intangible aspects such as public attitudes, the role of the press, or some of the unwritten conventions of constitutions. Put another way, systems can be material, ideational, or both. Computers, human bodies, and the ecosphere are all material systems. Computers have power supplies, processors, memory chips, buses, keyboards, storage devices, and screens, all of which interact electromechanically according to the laws of physics. Languages are ideational systems; their components are words, and their processes of interaction are captured by rules of grammar and syntax. The international system is a combination of material things and ideas.

To some extent representing something as a "system" is an exercise in mental housekeeping, because at the end of the day everything is connected to everything else. We can more easily make sense of the world, for example, by distinguishing a computer from the electrical grid required to operate it, and by distinguishing the electrical grid from the hydrological processes that make it possible for dams to generate power on flowing rivers. But in fact these all interact. The international system is a mental construction as well. What happens in it is affected not only by state and nonstate actors, but also by other systems. Greenhouse gas emissions, for example, will result in climate change, altered sea levels, altered rainfall patterns, changes in vegetation, and large-scale migrations. These are likely to trigger intrastate conflicts, as has already happened in Darfur, and may trigger interstate conflicts as well. We might literally say that the solar system affects the international political system via the atmospheric system. But it is unwieldy and counterproductive to attempt to think of everything as part of one enormous system. Treating the international system as something discrete makes it possible to talk more sensibly of what happens in the world than would be possible otherwise, even if, in a technical sense, everything is connected to everything else.

While the ordering principle of the international system is anarchic, the system itself is not chaotic. Most global interactions are orderly in the sense that they follow regular, largely predictable patterns. In most respects, these interactions are rule-governed. As we saw in Chapter 1, international law is a weak cousin of domestic law, but in fact rates of compliance with international law are often not that different from those with domestic law. If anything, egregious violations of international law are comparatively rare, while most countries' domestic legal systems groan under a heavy caseload of both criminal and civil violations. The marks of an orderly social system (such as the international system of sovereign states) are that institutions and practices exist for handling disputes; that most conflicts are resolved peacefully; that there exists an authoritative body of rules (laws, regulations, guidelines, acceptable practices, etc.); that there is a good level of compliance with the rules; and that there are methods of dealing with noncompliance. How can we explain this?

The answer is that relatively few parts of the world can accurately be described as being in a Hobbesian state of nature. The international system is not a pool table on which states-as-billiard-balls careen off one another blindly in an endless series of conflicts. The international system is *social*. Just because there is no world government (i.e., the international system is anarchic in the distribution of authority) does not mean that there is no such thing as an *international society*. There are rules of conduct, an increasingly rich body of international law, well-specified rights and obligations, even rules of international etiquette—diplomatic practices, honors, and so on—in short, all of the features of "polite society." Slights can trigger international conflict, just as they can trigger interpersonal conflict in everyday life. Indeed, Bismarck deliberately engineered the Franco-Prussian War (1870–1871) by violating well-entrenched norms of diplomatic protocol: first by attempting to place a Prussian king on the throne of Spain without consulting France beforehand, and then by leaking confidential French diplomatic communications to the international press (the famous "Ems Telegram").[6] Realists on the one hand, and liberals and constructivists on the other, disagree on the degree to which the international system is genuinely social. Realists think it is social only in a thin, superficial sense, while liberals and constructivists think the social constraints on action are much thicker. But virtually all agree that the social dimensions of international politics promote orderly interaction.

System Stability and Crisis Stability

International systems are stable if they are able to absorb shocks without breaking down. Systems break down when they are no longer able to serve their intended purposes. A major purpose of the international system is to safeguard the sovereignty and security of its members. Minor wars are not necessarily evidence of system breakdown, since sometimes the only way to protect the sovereignty and security of certain states is to wage war against others. For this reason, the renowned Australian scholar Hedley Bull wrote at

length about war as an institution—in the sense of a recognized and regulated practice—for maintaining order.[7] But major wars jeopardize the sovereignty and security of most or all states and are evidence of system instability.

What makes a system stable? One important factor is the quality of the social fabric of international society. The stronger the normative and institutional threads binding states, and the denser the connections between them, the greater the stake states have in preventing system breakdown, and the more avenues they have available for resolving disagreements before they can get out of hand. The weaker the social context—the more the system resembles a Hobbesian state of nature, in other words—the more states depend upon self-help.

In a Hobbesian anarchy, according to systems theorists such as Kenneth Waltz, distributions of power are crucial to system stability. Unipolar systems tend to erode as states try to preserve their independence by balancing against the hegemon, or a rising state eventually challenges the leader. In multipolar or dispersed-power systems, states form alliances to balance power, but alliances are flexible. Wars may occur, but they will be relatively limited in scope. In bipolar systems, alliances become more rigid, which in turn contributes to the probability of a large conflict, perhaps even a global war. Some analysts say that "bipolar systems either erode or explode." This happened in the Peloponnesian War when Athens and Sparta tightened their grips on their respective alliances. It was also true before 1914, when the multipolar European balance of power gradually consolidated into two strong alliance systems that lost their flexibility. But predictions about war based on multipolarity versus bipolarity encountered a major anomaly after 1945. During the Cold War the world was bipolar with two big players, the United States and its allies and the Soviet Union and its allies, yet no overall central war occurred for more than four decades before the system eroded with the decline of the Soviet Union. Some people say nuclear weapons made the prospect of global war too awful. Thus the structure of the international system offers a rough explanation for system stability, but does not explain enough all by itself.

Arguably, the Cold War system was stable because it also exhibited *crisis stability*. In a crisis-unstable situation, if two or more countries find themselves in an acute international crisis, they will feel enormous pressure to strike the first blow. To use a simple metaphor, imagine you and an adversary are standing in the open, each armed with a gun. Neither of you is quite sure of the other's intentions. If either of you thinks there is a chance that shots might be fired, then you both have a powerful incentive to shoot first. Whoever shoots first is more likely to survive. A situation such as this is very likely to escalate quickly to violence.

Now imagine that you and your adversary are locked in a room, knee-deep in gasoline, armed only with a match. In this situation, neither of you has a strong incentive to strike the first match. If you did, your adversary would surely be killed or badly injured, but so would you. You both have a powerful incentive to try to find a peaceful way out. Such a situation is highly crisis-stable.

To a very significant degree, crisis stability is a function of technology—or, perhaps more accurately, prevailing beliefs about technology, as reflected in military doctrine. When the prevailing military technology is believed to favor the offense, decision makers feel pressure to strike the first blow. When it is believed to favor the defense, they do not. As we shall see in the next chapter, at the beginning of World War I, European leaders believed that there was a great advantage in taking the offensive, and the July crisis of 1914 escalated very quickly. (In this belief they were tragically mistaken. As the carnage of the following four years would demonstrate, well-entrenched infantry armed with machine guns and backed by mass artillery cut attacking armies to pieces.) During the Cold War, prevailing beliefs about military technology were almost certainly correct: Neither the United States nor the Soviet Union could defend against a nuclear attack, but there was little doubt that they could count upon being able to launch a devastating retaliatory blow. This situation, aptly called "Mutual Assured Destruction" (or MAD), was highly crisis-stable.

The "National Interest"

The final key concept that needs clarification before we proceed further is the *national interest*. Leaders and analysts alike assert that "states act in their national interest." That statement is normally true, but it does not tell us much unless we know how states define their national interests.

Realists say that states have little choice in defining their national interest because of the international system. They must define their interest in terms of power or they will not survive, just as a company in a perfect market that wants to be altruistic rather than maximize profits will not survive. So for the realists, a state's position in the international system determines its national interests and predicts its foreign policies.

Liberals and constructivists argue that national interests are defined by much more than the state's position in the international system, and they have a richer account of how state preferences and national interests are formed. The definition of the national interest depends in large part on the type of domestic society and culture a state has. For example, a domestic society that values economic welfare and places heavy emphasis on trade, or that views wars against other democracies as illegitimate, defines its national interests very differently from a despotic state that is similarly positioned in the international system. Liberals argue that this is particularly true if international institutions and channels of communication enable states to build trust; this helps them escape from the Prisoner's Dilemma.

Because nonpower incentives can help shape how states define their interests, it is important to know how closely a particular situation approximates a Hobbesian state of nature. In a Hobbesian system, you may be killed by your neighbor tomorrow, and limited opportunities exist for democracy or trade preferences to influence foreign policy. Survival comes first. But if institutions and stable expectations of peace moderate the Hobbesian anarchy, then some of these other factors related to domestic society and culture are likely to play

a larger role. Realist predictions are more likely to be accurate in the Middle East, for example, and liberal predictions in Western Europe. Knowing the context helps us gauge the likely predictive value of different theories.

It is important to bear in mind that the national interest is almost always contested. People who would agree at an abstract level that power and security are important national interests very often disagree about the concrete policies that would promote them. Sometimes policy preferences are completely opposite and incompatible. During the period between the two World Wars, there was a vibrant debate in the United States between those who believed that the best way to promote American security was to avoid becoming entangled in the thorny power politics of Europe and East Asia, and those who believed that American security depended upon actively working with others to check the rising power and imperial ambitions of Germany and Japan. There is also a historically important debate between those who see morality and the pursuit of the national interest as separate and incompatible, and those who think that a country's conception of what is right and just is a fundamental part of its national interest. What is not open for debate is the fact that anyone seeking to promote a particular foreign policy will inevitable try to wrap it in the mantle of the national interest. The concept, in other words, is not merely a shorthand for vital state goals—it is also a playing field on which policy makers and policy entrepreneurs contend.

Follow Up
- Barry Buzan, "From International System to International Society: Structural Realism and Regime Theory Meet the English School," *International Organization*, Vol. 47, No. 3 (Summer 1993), pp. 327–352.
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LEVELS OF ANALYSIS

A system is greater than the sum of its parts. Systems can create consequences not intended by any of their components. Think of the market system in economics. Every firm in a perfect market tries to maximize its profits, but the market system produces competition that reduces profits to the break-even point, thereby benefiting the consumer. The businessperson does not set out to benefit the consumer, but individual firms' pattern of behavior in a perfect market leads to that effect. In other words, the system produces the consequences, which may be quite different from the intention of the actors in the system.

The international political system can similarly lead to effects the actors did not originally intend. For example, in 1917 when the Bolsheviks came to power in Russia, they regarded the whole system of interstate diplomacy that had preceded World War I as bourgeois nonsense. They intended to sweep away the interstate system and hoped that revolutions would unite all the workers of the world and abolish borders. Transnational proletarian solidarity would replace the interstate

system. Indeed, when Leon Trotsky took charge of the Russian Foreign Ministry, he said his intent was to issue some revolutionary proclamations to the peoples of the world and then "close up the joint." But the Bolsheviks found that their actions were soon affected by the nature of the interstate system. In 1922, the new communist state signed the Treaty of Rapallo with Germany. It was an alliance of the outcasts, the countries that were not accepted in the post–World War I diplomatic world. In 1939, Josef Stalin entered a pact with his ideological archenemy, Adolf Hitler, in order to turn Hitler westward. Soviet behavior, despite Trotsky's initial proclamations and illusions, soon became similar to that of other actors in the international system.

The distribution of power among states in an international system helps us make predictions about certain aspects of states' behavior. The tradition of *geopolitics* holds that location and proximity will tell a great deal about how states will behave. Because neighbors have more contact and points of potential friction, it is not surprising that half of the military conflicts between 1816 and 1992 began between neighbors.[8] A state that feels threatened by its neighbor is likely to act in accord with the old adage that "the enemy of my enemy is my friend." This pattern has always been found in anarchic systems. For example, the Indian writer Kautilya pointed out in the third century BCE that the states of the Indian subcontinent tended to ally with distant states to protect themselves against their neighbors, thus producing a checkerboard pattern of alliances. Machiavelli noted the same behavior among the city-states in fifteenth-century Italy. In the early 1960s, as West African states emerged from colonial rule, there was a great deal of talk about African solidarity, but the new states soon began to produce a checkerboard pattern of alliances similar to what Kautilya described in ancient India. Ghana, Guinea, and Mali were ideologically radical, while Senegal, Ivory Coast, and Nigeria were relatively conservative, but they were also balancing against the strength of their neighbors. Another example was the pattern that developed in East Asia after the Vietnam War. If the Soviet Union were colored black, China would be red, Vietnam black, and Cambodia red. A perfect checkerboard pattern developed. Ironically, the United States entered the Vietnam War because policy makers believed in the "domino theory," according to which one state would fall to communism, leading another state to fall, and so forth. With more foresight, the United States should have realized that the game in East Asia was more like checkers than dominoes, and the United States might have stayed out. The checkerboard pattern based on "the enemy of my enemy is my friend" is an old tradition of geopolitics that helps us make useful predictions in an anarchic situation.

How can we make sense of a pattern or tendency such as this? World politics is not something one can manipulate the way a physicist or a chemist can manipulate the conditions of an experiment in the lab. What happens, happens, and we must try to make sense of it without the benefit of controlled experiments. This almost always means that we must be more guarded in our conclusions, because certain valuable strategies for identifying and ruling out spurious explanations are simply not available. Yet we do make judgments

about why things happen in world politics, and we never do so without reason. What tips and tricks can we use? How reliable are they?

Systems are not the only way of explaining what happens in international politics. In *Man, the State, and War,* Kenneth Waltz distinguishes three levels of causation for war, which he calls "images": the *individual,* the *state,* and the *international system.* The checkerboard pattern that so frequently develops as a result of "the enemy of my enemy is my friend" could be a function of dynamics at any one (or more) of these levels of analysis. So a good place to start, when attempting to determine why things happen in world politics, is to see whether we get the most explanatory power by looking at the reasons why people (such as leaders) do what they do (the individual level of analysis), by looking at what happens within individual states (the state level), or by looking at the interactions between actors (the system level).

The Individual Level

Explanations at the level of the individual are useful when it genuinely matters who is making decisions. Most analysts believe that the United States would have attacked al Qaeda training camps in Afghanistan after 9/11 and toppled the Taliban regime if it failed to cooperate no matter who was president. If Al Gore rather than George W. Bush had won the 2000 presidential election, we probably still would have seen Operation Enduring Freedom, or something very much like it. But few analysts think that a President Gore would have attacked Iraq in 2003. Neither domestic political nor systemic imperatives made that likely, the way they made Afghanistan likely. The Iraq War was very much a war of choice, and to explain it we have to look at the specific reasons why President Bush and his senior advisors chose it.

There is little doubt that individuals sometimes matter. Pericles made a difference in the Peloponnesian War. In 1991, Saddam Hussein was a critical factor in the Gulf War. Sometimes individuals matter, but not in isolation from other considerations. In the 1962 Cuban missile crisis, Kennedy and Khrushchev faced the possibility of nuclear war and the ultimate decision was in their hands. But why they found themselves in that position cannot be explained at the level of individuals. Something in the structure of the situation brought them to that point. Similarly, knowing something about the personality of Kaiser Wilhelm II or Hitler is necessary to an understanding of the causes of World War I and World War II, but it is not a sufficient explanation. As we see in the next chapter, it made a difference that Kaiser Wilhelm fired his chancellor, Otto von Bismarck, in 1890; but that does not mean World War I was brought about primarily by Kaiser Wilhelm.

While one way of using the individual level of analysis is to focus on features specific to individual people (their personalities, their life histories, and so forth), another way is to look for explanations in people's common characteristics—in the "human nature" common to all individuals. For example, we could take a Calvinist view of international politics and assign the ultimate cause of war to the evil that lies within each of us. That would explain war

as the result of an imperfection in human nature. But such an explanation overpredicts: It does not tell us why some evil leaders go to war and others do not, or why some good leaders go to war and others do not. Sometimes generalizations about human nature lead to unfalsifiable explanations. Some realists locate the ultimate source of conflict in a relentless drive for power. The Australian historian Geoffrey Blainey, for example, argues: "One generalization about war aims can be offered with confidence. The aims are simply varieties of power. The vanity of nationalism, the will to spread an ideology, the protection of kinsmen in an adjacent land, the desire for more territory or commerce, the avenging of a defeat or insult, the craving for greater national strength or independence, the wish to impress or cement alliances—all these represent power in different wrappings. The conflicting aims of rival nations are always conflicts of power."[9] If every goal counts as a quest for power, then the statement "the quest for power causes wars" is an unfalsifiable tautology. Something that explains everything explains nothing.

More fruitful are explanations that leverage psychological tendencies. Many students of international politics assume that psychological considerations do not matter: Leaders of states either are, or can be assumed to be, "rational" actors. If they are rational, then all we need to know in order to understand or predict the choices they make are the costs and benefits of each. Any rational actor facing a situation reminiscent of the Prisoner's Dilemma, according to this view, can be expected to defect rather than cooperate. But while some people do make decisions on the basis of good-quality cost-benefit analysis, there are many situations in which this is simply not possible, owing to a lack of information. In any case, we know that many people do not, or cannot, make decisions in this way even when it is possible to do so. Using psychological considerations to explain apparent deviations from "rational" actions can be very helpful.

This is precisely how the field of political psychology examines global conflict and cooperation. There are four main approaches. One is *cognitive psychology*. Cognitive psychology examines the processes by which people seek to make sense of raw information about the world. Cognitive psychologists have shown that people do this by looking for commonalities between what they are trying to make sense of and things they already know or believe—between the unfamiliar, in other words, and the familiar. Shocked by the horrors inflicted upon the world by dictators such as Adolf Hitler and Benito Mussolini, for instance, Western leaders after World War II tended to think that any dictator claiming to have suffered some injustice at the hands of other countries was, in fact, an opportunistic aggressor. Sometimes they were right. But sometimes they were wrong. A case in which they were wrong was 1956, when Egyptian president Gamal Abdel Nasser asserted Egypt's right to control the Suez Canal because it cut through Egyptian territory. When Nasser nationalized the canal, French and British leaders leapt to the conclusion that Nasser was "just like Hitler" and had to be resisted. The result was an unnecessary war that greatly complicated Middle Eastern politics, divided NATO allies, distracted the world's attention from the Soviet crackdown in Hungary, and severely damaged Britain's power and prestige.

A second approach is *motivational psychology*. Motivational psychologists explain human behavior in terms of deep-seated psychological fears, desires, and needs. These needs include self-esteem, social approval, and a sense of efficacy. Motivational psychology helps us understand, for example, why almost all German diplomats before World War I gave false or misleading reports on the likely reactions of European countries to Austrian and German military moves. They were simply frightened of the consequences of not telling the notoriously intolerant German foreign ministry what it wanted to hear. The one German diplomat who accurately reported the likely response of Britain to a German violation of Belgian neutrality, Ambassador Prince Karl Lichnowsky in London, was dismissed in Berlin as having "gone native"—a judgmental error that itself can be explained in terms of a well-documented motivational-psychological tendency: namely, the desire to avoid the psychological pain of admitting one's own error. Since Germany's entire strategy for swift victory in 1914 depended upon Britain staying out of the war, Lichnowsky's reports would have been extremely unsettling if they had been accepted.

A third approach, and a more recent one, is to apply insights from *behavioral economics*, and particularly from *prospect theory*. Prospect theory explains deviations from rational action by noting that people make decisions very differently depending upon whether they face prospects of gain or prospects of loss. Most notably, people take much greater risks to avoid losses than they would be willing to take to achieve gains. Identifying how leaders frame their choices can help us understand and even anticipate how willing they will be to take risks. Indeed, since many choice situations can be described equally well in the language of losses or gains (ten lives out of a hundred lost is the same as ninety lives saved), strategically reframing choices can induce people to make different choices. The general tendency people exhibit toward loss-aversion helps us understand, for example, why people escalate commitments to losing courses of action. The more a gambler loses at the slot machines in Las Vegas, the less willing he or she will be to stop playing, because the desire to recoup the loss gets stronger and stronger. Similarly, the more lives the United States lost in the Vietnam War, the less willing it was to throw in the towel. Unlucky gamblers and leaders who fight losing battles often quit only when they exhaust their resources.

Finally, the fourth approach, *psychobiography*, explains leaders' choices in terms of their psychodynamics. This approach locates idiosyncratic personality traits in generally recognized neuroses and psychoses. A fascinating example of this is Alexander and Juliette George's psychobiography of Woodrow Wilson and Colonel House, which seeks to explain America's heavy hand at the Paris peace talks of 1919 and its subsequent failure to join the League of Nations—President Wilson's pet project—in terms of Wilson's need for control, his unwillingness to compromise, and his intolerance of opposition, all of which, the Georges argue, can be traced to traumatic childhood experiences at the hands of an overbearing father.[10] Equally fascinating are the many psychobiographies of Adolf Hitler, which stress the importance of his desire to compensate for self-loathing and sexual frustration.[11] It is now routine for the U.S. intelligence community to compile

psychological profiles of foreign leaders, with an eye toward better predicting their behavior. But while psychobiography is always fascinating, it shares many of the weaknesses of the Freudian tradition out of which it springs, the most important of which are unfalsifiability and the difficulty of independent corroboration. When explanations for international political events rest upon the subconscious fears, needs, and desires of world leaders—many of whom are dead or otherwise unavailable for close examination—it is difficult to know how to have high confidence in them.

The State Level

When we seek to explain things at the state level of analysis, we ask whether what happens in world politics is a function of domestic politics, various features of domestic society, or the machinery of government. Domestic considerations clearly sometimes matter. After all, the Peloponnesian War began with a domestic conflict between the oligarchs and the democrats in Epidamnus. The domestic politics of Germany and the Austro-Hungarian Empire played significant roles in the onset of World War I. To understand the end of the Cold War, we must look inside the Soviet Union at the failure of its centrally planned economy. It is easy to find examples in which domestic considerations mattered, but can we generalize about them? After we have said that they are important, is there anything else to say?

Marxism and liberalism both put a great deal of emphasis on the state level of analysis. Both hold that states will act similarly in the international system if they are similar domestically. Marxists argue that the source of war is capitalism. In Lenin's view, monopoly capital requires war: "Inter-imperialist alliances are inevitably nothing more than a truce in the periods between wars."[12] War can be explained by the nature of capitalist society, whose inequitable distribution of wealth leads to underconsumption, stagnation, and lack of domestic investment. As a consequence, capitalism leads to imperialist expansionism abroad, which helps sell surplus production in foreign markets, creates foreign investment opportunities, and promises access to natural resources. Such imperialism also fuels the domestic economy through higher military spending. Thus, Marxism predicts arms races and conflict between capitalist states. As we will see later, the theory did not do a very good job of explaining the onset of World War I. Moreover, it does not fit the experience of the second half of the twentieth century. Communist states, such as the Soviet Union, China, and Vietnam, were involved in military clashes with each other, while the major capitalist states in Europe, North America, and Japan maintained peaceful relations. The arguments that capitalism causes war do not stand up in historical experience.

Classical liberalism, the philosophy that dominated much of British and American thought in the nineteenth century, came to the opposite conclusion: According to liberal thinkers, capitalist states tend to be peaceful because war is bad for business. One strand of classical liberalism was represented by free traders such as Richard Cobden (1804–1865), who led the successful fight

to repeal England's Corn Laws, protectionist measures that had regulated Britain's international grain trade for 500 years. Like others of the Manchester School of British economists, he believed that it was better to trade and to prosper than to go to war. If we are interested in getting richer and improving the welfare of citizens, asserted Cobden, then peace is best. In 1840 he expressed the classical view, saying "We can keep the world from actual war, and I trust that the world will do that through trade."[13]

The liberal view was very powerful on the eve of World War I. A number of books, including a classic by Norman Angell, *The Great Illusion* (1910), said that war had become too expensive. To illustrate the optimism of classical liberalism on the eve of World War I, we can look at the philanthropists of that era. Andrew Carnegie, the steel magnate, established the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace in 1910. Carnegie worried about what would happen to the money he had given to this foundation after lasting peace broke out, so he put a provision in his will to cover this possibility. Edward Ginn, a Boston publisher, did not want Carnegie to get all the credit for the forthcoming permanent peace, so he set up the World Peace Foundation devoted to the same cause. Ginn also worried about what to do with the rest of the money after peace was firmly established, so he designated it for low-cost housing for young working women.

This liberal outlook was severely discredited by World War I. Even though bankers and aristocrats had frequent contact across borders, and labor also had transnational contacts, none of this helped stop the European states from going to war with each other. Statistical analysis has found no strong correlation between states' involvement in war and whether they are capitalist or democratic. The classical Marxist and liberal views are opposites in their understandings of the relationship between war and capitalism, but they are similar in locating the causes of war in domestic politics, and especially in the nature of the economic system.

State-level explanations of this kind suffer from some of the same difficulties as human-nature explanations. If certain types of societies cause war, then why do some "bad" societies or "bad" states not go to war? And why do some "good" societies or "good" states go to war? Insert your favorite description for "good" and "bad"—"democratic," "communist," "capitalist," or whatever. For example, after World War I there was a great deal of enthusiasm for the belief that the victory of the democracies would mean less danger of war. But clearly democracies can go to war and often do. After all, Athens was a democracy. Marxist theorists argued that war would be abolished when all states were communist, but obviously there have been military clashes among communist countries—witness China versus the Soviet Union or Vietnam versus Cambodia. Thus the nature of the society, democratic or capitalist or communist, is not a predictor of whether it will go to war.

One proposition (which we discuss later) is that if *all* countries were democratic, there would be less war. In fact, cases in which liberal democracies have fought against other liberal democracies are difficult to find, although democracies have fought against authoritarian states in many situations. The

reasons for this empirical finding and whether it will continue to hold in the future are not clear, but it suggests something interesting to investigate at this second level of analysis.

A relatively recent state-level line of inquiry is the *bureaucratic politics* approach. Bureaucratic politics explanations look not to the domestic political or economic arrangements of states, but to the interplay of governmental agencies and officials. One strand focuses on organizational dynamics, and in particular the routines and standard operating procedures upon which all complex organizations depend in order to function. Arguably, an important reason why World I War broke out was because European armies in general and the German army in particular had crafted rigid military plans that limited leaders' choices in the heat of crisis. This, coupled with the "cult of the offensive," which glorified the cavalry and tactics of maneuver, made the situation in July and August 1914 highly crisis-unstable. A second strand stresses the role of parochial bureaucratic interests. It is possible, for example, to explain some arms races by noting how competition for resources between branches of the military leads to escalating budgets, adversaries feeling less secure, adversaries spending more on defense, and ultimately a classic security dilemma. Perhaps the most famous insight from bureaucratic politics is captured by Miles's Law: "Where you stand depends on where you sit." If Miles's Law were correct, then decision makers engaged in policy debates would seek to promote not national interests, but the interests of the departments, agencies, or branches of government that they represent. Evidence for Miles's Law is mixed. There are cases that fit the pattern. When he was the state of California's director of finance under Governor Ronald Reagan, Caspar Weinberger was known as "Cap the Knife" for the gusto with which he slashed budgets. Later, as President Reagan's secretary of defense, his enthusiastic advocacy for ever higher military spending prompted one Republican senator to call him "a draft dodger in the war on the federal deficit."[14] Yet other studies show at most a weak link between bureaucratic position and policy preferences, or no link at all. In any case, while it is possible to imagine that bureaucratic considerations can help us understand specific policy choices states make, it is harder to imagine how they might be harnessed to explanations of general patterns in world politics.

The System Level

Interesting explanations often involve interplay between two or more levels of analysis. As we shall see in the next chapter, a satisfying explanation of the outbreak of World War I might invoke a combination of three factors: rigid bipolarity (a structural feature of the international system); crisis-unstable military plans and doctrines (a result of military cultures within states, particularly Germany); and serious motivated errors of judgment by key leaders (a psychological consideration). But how do we know which is most important? And where do we start when we want to explain the outbreak of war? Do we start from the outside in? This would mean starting with system-level analysis,

looking at the way the overall system constrains state action. Or do we start from the inside out? This would mean starting with the individual or state level.

Because we often need information about more than one level of analysis, a good rule of thumb is to start with the simplest approach. If a simple explanation is adequate, it is preferable to a more complicated one. This is called the *rule of parsimony* or *Occam's razor,* after the philosopher William of Occam (c. 1287–1347), who argued that good explanations shave away unnecessary detail. *Parsimony*—the ability to explain a lot with a little—is only one of the criteria by which we judge the adequacy of theories. We are also interested in the *range* of a theory (how much behavior it covers) and its *explanatory fit* (how many loose ends or anomalies it accounts for). Nonetheless, parsimony suggests a place to start. Because systemic explanations tend to be the simplest, they provide a good starting point. If they prove to be inadequate, then we can look at the units of the system or at individual decision makers, adding complexity until a reasonable fit is obtained.

How simple or complicated should a systemic explanation be? Some neorealists, such as Kenneth Waltz, argue for extreme parsimony and focus only on structure. Liberals and constructivists argue that Waltz's concept of system is so spare that it explains very little.

Economists characterize the structure of markets by the concentration of sellers' power. A monopoly has one big seller, a duopoly two big sellers, and an oligopoly several big sellers. In a perfect market, selling power is widely dispersed. Firms that maximize profits in a perfect market benefit the consumer. But the result would be different for a monopoly or oligopoly. In these systems, large firms can increase profits by restricting production in order to raise prices. Thus when the structure of the system is known, economists are better able to predict behavior and who will benefit. So it is that the structure of the international system can help us understand behavior within it. Note that in a perfect market, we do not need to look inside firms or at the personalities of CEOs in order to understand or predict the behavior of the market as a whole. We can assume that firms are rational, unitary actors, because over time those who do not make business decisions *as if* they were rational, unitary actors (or very close to the ideal) will fail. They will be selected out of the system, to use a Darwinian metaphor. Over the long run, only firms that respond well to the incentives of the marketplace will survive. This is not necessarily true of firms in monopolistic or oligopolistic markets. If we want to understand those markets, sometimes we must understand something about the firms and personalities that dominate them.

Does the international system resemble a perfectly competitive market? Not exactly. There are many states in the world, certainly, but they rarely get "selected out of the system," so it is more difficult to justify the assumption that they can be treated "as if" they were unitary, rational actors. Still, in a Hobbesian world, states would face powerful incentives to be on their guard, make adequate provision for their security, and take advantage of opportunities to increase their wealth and power. States that could not provide for their own security—owing, perhaps, to having much bigger and much more powerful neighbors—would face strong incentives to find allies. They might seek to

▶ DEMOCRACY AND PEACE

A coalition for democracy—it's good for America. Democracies, after all, are more likely to be stable, less likely to wage war. They strengthen civil society. They can provide people with the economic opportunities to build their own homes, not to flee their borders. Our efforts to help build democracies will make us all more secure, more prosperous, and more successful as we try to make this era of terrific change our friend and not our enemy.

—President William J. Clinton, remarks to the 49th Session of the UN General Assembly, September 26, 1994

The survival of liberty in our land increasingly depends on the success of liberty in other lands. The best hope for peace in our world is the expansion of freedom in all the world. America's vital interests and our deepest beliefs are now one. . . . So it is the policy of the United States to seek and support the growth of democratic movements and institutions in every nation and culture, with the ultimate goal of ending tyranny in our world.

—President George W. Bush, second inaugural address, Washington, DC, January 20, 2005

balance the power of the strongest states. This logic has given rise to the most extensive body of systemic theory in the study of international politics—realist balance-of-power theory—about which we will have more to say later in this chapter and in the next.

Non-Hobbesian systems behave very differently. The more social the system, the less the logic of self-help applies. Liberalism and constructivism are better suited to the study of highly social systems, because the interactions of the units are more reliably governed by laws, rules, norms, expectations, and taboos. Liberalism and constructivism pay a great deal of attention to the origin and evolution of these social constraints on state action. Since explaining them often requires examining the role of domestic political considerations or of individual norm entrepreneurs, liberal and constructivist theories tend to cross levels of analysis.

Follow Up

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PARADIGMS AND THEORIES

To study something systematically, you need a way of organizing the tools and techniques that you use. The conceptual toolkit and the "handbook" (as it were) for using the tools is called a "paradigm." As Columbia University sociologist Robert Merton put it, a paradigm is "a systematic statement of the basic assumptions, concepts, and propositions employed by a school of analysis." Paradigms, according to Merton, serve a "notational function," keeping concepts in order; they specify assumptions and the logical connections between them; they promote the cumulation of useful theories that explain things we observe in the world; they help us identify new puzzles; and they promote rigorous analysis instead of mere description.[15] Paradigms can be thought of as the foundations on which we build ever-taller (and narrower) structures of knowledge.

The structures themselves are theories. Theories are provisional statements about how the world works. We derive theories from paradigms.

We use *hypotheses* to test theories. A hypothesis is a statement about what we should expect to observe in the world if our theories were true. If our expectations are dashed, we reject the hypothesis and rework (or discard) the theory. If our expectations are met, we consider the theory confirmed and go on to expand it, refine it, or build other theories compatible with it, gradually building up a body of propositions about the world in which we can have confidence. From time to time we abandon one paradigm in favor of another if it cannot perform as well. The Newtonian paradigm dominated physics for almost 300 years, and it did an excellent job of helping us explain how the physical world worked under most conditions (indeed, it is still useful for many practical applications). But Newtonian physics could not help us explain how things behaved at extremely small time and distance scales, or at speeds approaching the speed of light. A later paradigm—Einstein's relativity—performed much better.

We have already met the four dominant paradigms in the study of world politics: realism, liberalism, Marxism, and constructivism. Each begins with certain unquestioned assumptions called "axioms" (axioms are always necessary; it is impossible to question everything, because one would never actually get around to explaining anything). Each employs a particular set of concepts, though in the case of these four paradigms they often employ many of the same ones. Each generates particular bodies of theory. Table 2.1 provides a snapshot comparison.

Realism

By now the contours of realism as a paradigm should be familiar. It is worth recalling, though, that despite the apparent simplicity of realism as reflected in Table 2.1, realism is actually a fairly large tent. Realists of all stripes agree that states are the most important actors in the international system, that anarchy has a powerful effect on state behavior, and that at the end of the day all politics is power politics. But classical realism differs quite significantly from neorealism (sometimes called "structural realism"). As we have seen, classical realists such as Machiavelli and Morgenthau paid attention to ideas as well as material power. They saw foreign policy as something that could spring

TABLE 2.1

Key Features of Paradigms

	REALISM	LIBERALISM	MARXISM	CONSTRUCTIVISM
Key actors	States	States, nonstate actors	Economic classes	States, nonstate actors
Dominant human drive(s)	Fear, desire to dominate	Fear, desire to live well	Greed	Need for orderly, meaningful social life
Actors' primary goals	All states seek power or security	Actors seek welfare and justice in addition to security	The capital-owning class seeks to maximize profit; the working class seeks fair wages and working conditions	Actors' interests are socially constructed through interaction
Actors' dominant instrument	Military power	Military power, trade, investment, negotiation, persuasion	Wealth (capital-owning class); labor (working class)	Depends upon historical period and social context
Dominant processes of interaction	Competition	Competition and cooperation	Exploitation	Depends upon historical period and social context
Dominant structural feature of international system	Hobbesian anarchy	Non-Hobbesian anarchy	Economic inequality	Social constraints (e.g., laws, rules, norms, taboos)
Dominant bodies of theory	Balance-of-power theory; theories of hegemonic transition and hegemonic war	Neoliberal institutionalism; "Democratic Peace."	Dependency theory; theories of revolution	Structuration; theories of norm evolution

Key Axioms

from domestic sources as well as from systemic pressures. They even noted the important role considerations of ethics would play in shaping foreign policy, though they tended to bemoan this as insufficiently hard-nosed and practical. Classical realists had more of a humanistic approach to world politics than a scientific one. Many of them were prominent historians or philosophers. In contrast, neorealists seek to emulate the natural sciences and are much more concerned with generating purely systemic theories.

There are other distinctions to make within realism as well. "Defensive realists" tend to stress security as the dominant state goal, whereas "offensive" realists tended to stress power. These are both varieties of what Cambridge University political scientist James Mayall calls "hard realists," in contrast to "soft realists," who would include the maintenance of international order among state goals. Many of the so-called English School writers on international relations, such as Hedley Bull, fall broadly within this category.

So realism is a bit like Baskin-Robbins: There may be 31 flavors, but they are all ice cream. What realists of all kinds share is a commitment to the view that there is an immutable logic to world politics that is perhaps best summed up by the aphorism inspired by an 1848 statement Lord Palmerston made in the British House of Commons: namely, that states have no permanent friends or permanent enemies, merely permanent interests. But there is ample room for debate within realism, and vibrant ongoing research programs that attempt to help us answer questions such as: Do states balance power, or do they balance threat? When do they balance, and when do they bandwagon? What is the fate of American leadership in the world? How will world politics change as countries such as China and India rise?

Liberalism

We have not yet had as much chance to explore liberalism as we have realism, so it would be helpful here to unpack it in somewhat more detail, particularly since it is enjoying a recent resurgence. The two world wars and the failure of collective security in the interwar period had discredited liberal theories. Most writing about international politics in the United States after World War II was strongly realist. However, as transnational economic interdependence increased, the late 1960s and 1970s saw a revival of interest in liberal theories.

There are three strands of liberal thinking: *economic, social*, and *political*. The political strand has two parts, one relating to institutions and the other to democracy.

The economic strand of liberalism focuses heavily on trade. Liberals argue that trade is important, not because it prevents states from going to war, but because it may lead states to define their interests in a way that makes war less important to them. Trade offers states a way to transform their position through economic growth rather than through military conquest. Richard Rosecrance points to the example of Japan.[16] In the 1930s, Japan thought the only way to gain access to markets was to create a "Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere," which in turn required conquering its neighbors and

The Berlin wall coming down

requiring them to trade preferentially with Japan. Already in 1939, Eugene Staley, a Chicago economist, argued that part of Japan's behavior in the 1930s could be explained by economic protectionism. Staley believed that when economic walls are erected along political boundaries, possession of territory is made to coincide with economic opportunity. A better solution for avoiding war is to pursue economic growth in an open trading system without military conquest. In the postwar period, Japan successfully transformed its position in the world through trade. It is now the world's third largest national economy, measured in purchasing power parity terms—behind only the United States and China.

Realists reply that Japan was able to accomplish this amazing economic growth because somebody else was providing for its security. Specifically, Japan relied on the United States for security against its large nuclear neighbors, the Soviet Union and China. Some realists predicted that, with the Soviet Union gone, the United States would withdraw its security presence in East Asia and raise barriers against Japanese trade. Japan would remilitarize, and eventually there would be conflict between Japan and the United States. But liberals replied that modern Japan is a very different domestic society from the Japan of the 1930s. It is among the least militaristic in the world, partly because the most attractive career opportunities in Japan are in business, not in the military. Liberals argue that the realists do not pay enough attention to domestic politics and the way that Japan has changed as a result of economic opportunities. Trade may not prevent war, but it does change incentives, which in turn may lead to a social structure less inclined to war.

The second form of liberalism is social. It argues that person-to-person contacts reduce conflict by promoting understanding. Such transnational contacts occur at many levels, including through students, businesspeople, and tourists. Such contacts make others seem less foreign and less hateful. That, in turn, leads to a lower likelihood of conflict. The evidence for this view is mixed. After all, bankers, aristocrats, and labor union officials had broad contacts in 1914, but that did not stop them from killing one another once they put on military uniforms. Obviously, the idea that social contact breeds understanding and prevents war is far too simple. Nonetheless, it may make a modest contribution to understanding. Western Europe today is very different from 1914. There are constant contacts across international borders in Europe, and textbook editors try to treat other nationalities fairly. The images of the other peoples of Europe are very different from the images of 1914. Public opinion polls show that a sense of European identity coexists with a sense of national identity. The Erasmus Program of the European Union encourages students to study in the universities of other European countries. Transnational society affects what people in a democracy want from their foreign policy. It is worth noting how France responded to the reunification of Germany in 1990. A residue of uncertainty and anxiety remained among the foreign policy experts, but public opinion polls showed that most French people welcomed German unification. Such attitudes were a sharp contrast to those when Germany first unified in 1871.

The first version of the third form of liberalism emphasizes the role of institutions; this strand is often labeled "neoliberalism." Why do international institutions matter? According to Princeton political scientist Robert O. Keohane, they provide information and a framework that shapes expectations. They allow people to believe there is not going to be a conflict. They lengthen the shadow of the future and reduce the acuteness of the security dilemma. Institutions mitigate the negative effects of anarchy (uncertainty and an inability to cultivate trust). Hobbes saw international politics as a state of war. He was careful to say that a state of war does not mean constant fighting, but a propensity to war, just as cloudy weather means a likelihood of rain. In the same sense, a state of peace means a propensity toward peace: people can develop peaceful expectations when anarchy is stabilized by international institutions.

Institutions stabilize expectations in four ways. First, they provide a sense of continuity; for example, most Western Europeans expect the European Union to last. It is likely to be there tomorrow. At the end of the Cold War, many Eastern European governments agreed and made plans to join the European Union. That affected their behavior even before they eventually joined in 2004. Second, institutions provide an opportunity for reciprocity. If the French get a little bit more today, the Italians might get a little more tomorrow. There is less need to worry about each transaction because over time it will likely balance out. Third, institutions provide a flow of information. Who is doing what? Are the Italians actually obeying the rules passed by the European Union? Is the flow of trade roughly equal? The institutions of the union provide information on how it is all working out. Finally, institutions provide ways to resolve conflicts. In the European

Union, bargaining goes on within the Council of Ministers and in the European Commission, and there is also a European court of justice. Thus institutions create a climate in which expectations of stable peace develop.

Classical liberals also expect to see islands of peace where institutions and stable expectations have developed. The political scientist Karl Deutsch called such areas "pluralistic security communities" in which war between countries becomes so unthinkable that stable expectations of peace develop. Institutions helped reinforce such expectations. The Scandinavian countries, for example, once fought each other bitterly, and the United States fought Britain and Mexico. Today such actions are unthinkable. The advanced industrial countries seem to have a propensity for peace, and institutions such as the European Union, the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), and the Organization of American States create a culture in which peace is expected and provide forums for negotiation. Expectations of stability can provide a way to escape the Prisoner's Dilemma.

Some realists expect the security dilemma to reemerge in Europe despite the liberal institutions of the European Union. After the high hopes that greeted European integration in 1992, some opposition arose to further unity, particularly in disputes over the single European currency, the euro, which entered circulation in 2002. Countries such as Great Britain feared that ceding further power to the European Union would jeopardize the autonomy and prosperity of the individual states. Efforts in 2003 and 2004 to develop a new European constitution proved difficult, and in 2005, voters in France and the Netherlands refused to ratify it. At the same time, Britain and others worried that if they opted out of the European Union entirely, countries such as Germany, France, and Italy that opted in would gain a competitive edge. Despite such obstacles to further integration, the former communist countries of central Europe were attracted to joining. While the European Union is far from being a true superstate, its institutions helped transform relations between European states.

Liberals also argue that realists pay insufficient attention to democratic values. Germany today is a different country from the Germany of 1870, 1914, or 1939. It has experienced a half century of democracy, with parties and governments changing peacefully. Public opinion polls show that the German people do not seek an expansive international role. Thus liberals are skeptical of realist predictions that fail to account for the effects of democracy.

Is there a relationship between domestic democracy and a state's propensity to go to war? Current evidence suggests that the answer is yes, but with qualifications, and for reasons that are not yet entirely clear. The Prussian philosopher Immanuel Kant (1724–1804) was among the first to suggest that democracies are less warlike than authoritarian states. Absolute rulers can easily commit their states to war, as did Frederick the Great when he wanted Silesia in 1740 or Saddam Hussein when he invaded Kuwait in 1990. But Kant and other classical liberals pointed out that in a democracy the people can vote against war. Moreover, it is the people, rather than the rulers, who bear the heaviest costs of war. It stood to reason, Kant believed, that the people would be less inclined to

war than would their leaders. But the fact that a country is democratic does not mean its people will always vote against war. As we have seen, democracies are likely to be involved in wars as often as other countries, and democratic electorates often vote for war. In ancient Greece, Pericles roused the people of Athens to go to war; in 1898, the American electorate dragged a reluctant President McKinley into the Spanish-American War. In 2003, opinion polls and a congressional vote supported President Bush's calls for war against Iraq, though public opinion later soured as the conflict dragged on.

Michael Doyle, a political scientist at Columbia, has pointed to a more limited proposition that can be derived from Kant and classical liberalism, namely, the idea that liberal democracies do not fight *other liberal democracies*. The fact that two democratic states do not fight each other is a correlation, and some correlations are spurious. Fires and the presence of fire engines are highly correlated, but we do not suspect fire engines of causing fires. One possible source of spurious causation is that democratic countries tend to be rich countries, rich countries tend to be involved with trade, and according to trade liberalism, they are not likely to fight each other. But that dismissal does not fit with the fact that rich countries have often fought each other—witness the two world wars. Liberals suggest that the cause behind the correlation is a question of legitimacy. Maybe people in democracies think it is wrong to fight other democracies because there is something wrong with solving disputes through killing when the other people have the right of consent. In addition, constitutional checks and balances on making war may work better when there is widespread public debate about the legitimacy of a battle. It is harder to rouse democratic peoples when there is no authoritarian demon like Hitler or Saddam Hussein.

Although "democratic peace" theory requires further exploration and elaboration, it is striking how difficult it is to find cases of liberal democracies waging war against other liberal democracies. Whatever the reason—whether liberal democracies share and respect a common set of principles of peaceful dispute resolution, whether they identify with each other, or whether because of something else (perhaps different explanations work best in different cases)—democratic peace theory suggests that if the number of democracies in the world grows, interstate war should decline. The past two decades have been somewhat encouraging. According to Freedom House, the number of "free countries"—truly liberal democracies—has risen since the end of the Cold War from 65 to 87 (i.e., from 40 percent to 45 percent).[17] But caution is in order. The democratic peace theory may be less true in the early stages of transition to democracy, and may not fit states whose democratic transition is unfinished. Some of the new democracies may be plebiscitary democracies without a liberal domestic process of free press, checks on executive power, and regular elections. The warring governments of Croatia, Serbia, and Bosnia were elected, though they were far from liberal democracies. The same was true of Ecuador and Peru, which fought a border skirmish in 1995. The character of a democracy matters a great deal.

Keeping these qualifications in mind, we should be cautious about making foreign policy recommendations on the basis of the democratic peace theory alone. Elections do not guarantee peace. International democracy promotion,

as advocated by presidents Clinton and Bush, may help promote peace and security in the long term, but democratic transitions may increase the proclivity for war in the early stages of transition.

Marxism

A third major paradigm of International Relations is Marxism. As we have seen, it was clear enough in its predictions about the world that we are in a fairly good position to assess it. Marxists clearly but inaccurately predicted the death of capitalism as a result of imperialism, major war, socialist revolution, and the rise of communism. Instead we have seen changes in the nature of capitalism, an end to imperialism, the decline of major interstate war, a slowing of the rate of socialist revolution (and even the transformation of some revolutionary socialist states into liberal capitalist ones), and the collapse of communism.

Marxism appears to have suffered from three main weaknesses. First, it attempted to reduce politics to economics. People care about economics, of course, but they care about many other things as well. People's primarily loyalties rarely lie with their economic class. Second, it erred in conceiving of the state as a simple tool of a particular class. While wealthy capitalists are often very influential in the politics of their country, their narrow, self-serving interests rarely drive foreign policy, and never for terribly long. (The best examples, perhaps, would be the ability of certain U.S. multinational corporations to persuade policy makers in Washington to try to overthrow Latin American governments that had nationalized their properties, or seemed likely to do so, during the Cold War. Certainly corporate interests played a role in shaping various unsuccessful attempts to overthrow Cuban president Fidel Castro and successful attempts to overthrow socialist governments in Guatemala in 1954 and Chile in 1973.) Third, Marxism had an overly rigid understanding of the progress of history. Marx and his followers spoke at length about the inevitable collapse of capitalism and the inevitable triumph of communism, but they seem to have underestimated the role of both chance and human choice. Arguably, nothing in life is inevitable, except for death and taxes.

Still, as we saw in Chapter 1, Marxism has contributed something valuable, via dependency theory, to our understanding of patterns of development and underdevelopment, and also to the problem of growing global inequality. Marx did not err when he saw the potential of capitalism to concentrate wealth, and he was certainly correct to draw our attention to the dangers of gross economic inequality—one of the most significant drivers of substate conflict in the world today. Smart people are rarely wrong about everything, just as no one is ever right about everything.

Constructivism

Constructivism is a relatively new paradigm for the study of world politics that draws heavily from the field of sociology. Constructivism makes use of a "thicker" understanding of "structure" than do earlier paradigms. For constructivists, structures include not just the number or configuration of

units, but also the "intersubjective meanings"—the shared discourses, ideas, practices, norms, rules, and logics of appropriateness—that help make them who they are and enable them to interact in an intelligible way. Social structures thus understood shape both identities and interests. Someone who grows up in rural Afghanistan will be a dramatically different person, with rather different goals, from someone who grows up in Los Angeles.

At the same time, when people interact in a social context, they alter it, if only marginally. Accordingly, social structures change over time. The concept of agent-structure interaction is a bit like the "karma" score in the popular *Fallout* series of video games: whether your character does nice things or nasty things, thus gaining or losing karma, affects how nonplayer characters interact with you and can even affect the ending of the game.

The crucial insights of constructivism, therefore, are (1) that "agents" and structures interact in a cyclical and reciprocal way; (2) that the identities and interests of agents are not given, but are instead the product of social interaction; and (3) that over time, intersubjective meanings change as a result of social interaction, resulting in changes in rules, norms, legitimate expectations, and even, eventually, in the very character of the international system itself.

Compared to realism, liberalism, and Marxism, constructivism is relatively new—so new that there remain fundamental differences among constructivists as to its status as a paradigm. One view, championed by Ohio State political scientist Alexander Wendt, is that constructivism is a purely formal approach to international politics, not a substantive one. As such, it is not directly comparable to realism, liberalism, or Marxism. Unlike these other paradigms, constructivism makes no strong assumptions about human nature, and cannot therefore generate substantive claims or expectations about how actors behave. In this sense it is a bit like *game theory*, which is a purely formal mathematical technique for representing interactions. Another view, however, is that constructivism merely qualifies the ways in which human nature expresses itself by noting the importance of social and cultural context. On this view, constructivism is a bit like the "nurture" view in the nature vs. nurture debate. Realism, liberalism, and Marxism all tend to cluster closer to the "nature" end of the spectrum (with neorealism arguably furthest along)—but since all four perspectives lie on a single spectrum, they are all essentially comparable.

The differences between these two views of constructivism are important to people whose primary interest is ironing out the wrinkles in International Relations theory, but for someone interested primarily in explaining why things happen in the world—and, if possible, anticipating how things will unfold in the future—they have a common practical implication: namely, that there is no way of avoiding hard work! We cannot simply assume that people will behave in such-and-such a way. We need to know who they are, what they want, and how they see the world in order to understand what they do, and to know these things, we have to understand the social and cultural contexts in which they are embedded. We have to "reconstruct" the world in order to explain it, and this requires a great deal of information—and a correspondingly great deal of time and energy. But constructivist scholars willing to invest

the effort have succeeded in explaining things that are difficult to explain from realist, liberal, or Marxist perspectives: for example, the rise of antimilitarism in Japan; the spread of powerful international norms against slavery, territorial revision, and weapons of mass destruction; the rapid evolution of the global human rights regime; the spread of feminism and environmentalism; and the development of pluralistic security communities.[18]

Since realism packs a lot of punch into assumptions, it has a much easier time than constructivism in generating predictions. Realist predictions are not always right—the end of the Cold War did not, in fact, weaken Western solidarity, contrary to the prognostications of many prominent realists—but at least realism gives us ready tools for making predictions. One of the crucial axioms of constructivism is that international politics is "path-dependent": What will happen tomorrow is less a function of immutable mechanisms such as the balance of power than of the historical background against which leaders must choose today. Prediction, on this view, requires being able to tease out plausible future paths and identifying those that are most likely. Not only is this task inherently harder, it means that our confidence in our predictions must rapidly decline the further we project into the future.

Constructivist explanations are not always incompatible with realist, liberal, or Marxist ones. The liberal story about postwar antimilitarism in Japan, for instance—the story that appeals to economic opportunity—is fully compatible with a constructivist story that stresses the reaction of the Japanese people to the shame, betrayal, and suffering they experienced at the hands of earlier militaristic leaders. We do not have to choose between them; both stories can be true in their own way. Moreover, in some circumstances it may be possible to "nest" other paradigms' explanations within a constructivist one. There is reason to believe, for example, that realism works best when explaining periods of history in which key practitioners of diplomacy were themselves believers in realism. U.S. foreign policy was never more "realist" than when Henry Kissinger was secretary of state. Liberalism performs best when explaining periods of history in which key players were devout liberals, such as Woodrow Wilson. From a constructivist perspective, this strong interaction of agents and structures is hardly surprising.

Follow Up

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- Andrew Moravcsik, "Taking Preferences Seriously: A Liberal Theory of International Politics," *International Organization,* Vol. 51, No. 4 (Autumn 1997), pp. 513–553.
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COUNTERFACTUALS AND "VIRTUAL HISTORY"

In 1990, President Václav Havel of Czechoslovakia spoke before the U.S. Congress. Six months earlier he had been a political prisoner. "As a play-wright," Havel said, "I'm used to the fantastic. I dream up all sorts of implausible things and put them in my plays. So this jolting experience of going from prison to standing before you today, I can adjust to this. But pity the poor political scientists who are trying to deal with what's probable."[19] Few people, including Soviets and Eastern Europeans, predicted the collapse of the Soviet Empire in Eastern Europe in 1989. Humans sometimes make surprising choices, and human history is full of uncertainties. How can we sort out the importance of different causes at different levels of analysis?

International politics is not like a laboratory science. We cannot do controlled experiments because it is impossible to hold other things constant while looking at one thing that changes. Aristotle said one should be as precise in any science as the subject matter allows: Do not try to be too precise if the precision will be spurious. International politics involves so many variables, so many changes occurring at the same time, that events are often overdetermined. But as analysts, we still want to sort out causes to get some idea of which ones are more important than others. As you will see when we look at World War I in the next chapter, mental experiments called counterfactuals can be useful tools in helping us determine this.

Counterfactuals are *contrary-to-fact conditionals,* but it is simpler to think of them as thought experiments to explore causal claims. Because there is no actual, physical laboratory for international politics, we imagine situations in which one thing changes while other things are held constant and then construct a picture of how the world would look. In fact, we use counterfactuals every day. Many students might say, "If I had not eaten so much dinner, I could concentrate better on this reading."

Though often without admitting it, historians use a more elaborate version of the same procedure to weigh causes. For example, imagine that the kaiser had not fired Bismarck in 1890. Would that have made World War I less likely? Would Bismarck's policies have continued to lower the sense of threat that other countries felt from Germany and thus curbed the growing rigidity of the two alliance systems? In this instance, the use of a counterfactual examines how important a particular personality was in comparison to structural factors. Here is another counterfactual related to World War I: Suppose Franz Ferdinand's driver in Sarajevo had not mistakenly turned down the wrong street, unexpectedly presenting Gavrilo Princip with a target of opportunity. Would war have still started? This counterfactual illuminates the role of the assassination (as well as the role of accident). How important was the assassination? Given the overall tensions inherent in the alliance structure, might some other spark have ignited the flame had this one not occurred? Did the assassination affect anything other than the timing of the outbreak of war?

Contrary-to-fact conditional statements provide a way to explore whether a cause is significant, but there are also pitfalls in such "iffy history." Poorly handled counterfactuals may mislead by destroying the meaning of history.

The fact is that once something has happened, other things are not equal, because events are path-dependent: Once something happens, the probabilities of possible futures change. Some events become more likely, others less.

We can use four criteria to test whether our counterfactual thought experiments are good or useful: plausibility, proximity, theory, and facts.

Plausibility

A useful counterfactual has to be within the reasonable array of options. This is sometimes called *cotenability*. It must be plausible to imagine two conditions existing at the same time. Suppose someone said that if Napoleon had had stealth bombers, he would have won the Battle of Waterloo (1815). She may say that such a counterfactual is designed to test the importance of military technology, but it makes little sense to imagine twentieth-century technology in a nineteenth-century setting. The two are not cotenable. Although it might be good for laughs, it is not a fruitful use of counterfactual thinking because of the anachronism involved. In real life, there never was a possibility of such a conjunction.

Proximity in Time

Each major event exists in a long chain of causation, and most events have multiple causes. The further back in time we go, the more causes that must be held constant. The closer in time the questioned event is to the subject event (did A cause B?), the more likely the answer is yes. Consider Pascal's (1623–1662) famous counterfactual statement that if Cleopatra's nose had been shorter, she would have been less attractive to Marc Antony, and the history of the Roman Empire would have been different. If the history of the Roman Empire had been different, the history of Western European civilization would have been different. Thus the length of Cleopatra's nose was one of the causes of World War I. In some trivial sense, that may be true, but millions of events and causes channeled down to August 1914. The contribution of Cleopatra's nose to the outbreak of World War I is so small and so remote that the counterfactual is more amusing than interesting when we try to ascertain why the war broke out. Proximity in time means that the closeness of two events in the chain of causation allows us to better control other causes and thereby obtain a truer weighing of factors.

Relation to Theory

Good counterfactual reasoning should rely on an existing body of theory that represents a distillation of what we think we know about things that have happened before. We should ask whether a counterfactual is plausible considering what we know about all the cases that have given rise to these theories. Theories provide coherence and organization to our thoughts about the myriad causes and help us to avoid random guessing. For example, there is no theory behind the counterfactual that if Napoleon had had stealth aircraft he would have won the Battle of Waterloo. The very randomness of the example helps explain why it is amusing, but also limits what we can learn from the mental exercise.

But suppose we were considering the causes of the Cold War and asked, what if the United States had been a socialist country in 1945; would there have been a Cold War? Or suppose the Soviet Union had come out of World War II with a capitalist government; would there have been a Cold War? These counterfactual questions explore the theory that the Cold War was caused primarily by ideology. An alternative hypothesis is that the bipolar international structure caused the Cold War—that some sort of tension was likely even if the United States had been socialist, as balance-of-power theory would predict. Counterfactual inferences can be bolstered by looking at *factual* patterns invoking factual comparisons. After the Cold War, we did not witness a wholesale reconfiguration of alliances designed to balance the now unchallenged supremacy of the United States, suggesting that ideological affinity trumps balance of power considerations at least among liberal states. But during the Cold War, at least in certain parts of the world, we did see communist states balancing against each other, and since the Cold War both Russia and China have been wary of the United States. So we are on fairly firm ground concluding that both ideology and balance of power were relevant, but that they were not equally relevant to all players. In general, counterfactuals related to theory are more interesting and more useful because the mental exercise ties into a broader body of knowledge, and by focusing our attention on theoretically informed counterfactuals, we can often come up with something new and interesting to say about the theories themselves.

Facts

It is not enough to imagine fruitful hypotheses. They must be carefully examined in relation to the known facts. Counterfactuals require accurate facts and careful history. In examining the plausibility of a mental experiment, we must ask whether what is held constant is faithful to what actually happened. We must be wary of piling one counterfactual on top of another in the same thought experiment. Such multiple counterfactuals are confusing because too many things are being changed at once, and we are unable to judge the accuracy of the exercise by a careful examination of its real historical parts.

A particularly good way of disciplining a counterfactual is *virtual history*, a term coined by Harvard historian Niall Ferguson. Done properly, it limits the dangers of implausibility and remoteness in time by answering questions about what *might* have happened strictly in terms of what *did* happen. In the 2008 film *Virtual JFK*, Koji Masutani explores the question of whether President Kennedy would have committed U.S. troops heavily to the Vietnam War, as his successor did, had he lived to win reelection in 1964. He answers the question by looking carefully at what Kennedy did whenever he faced a decision about committing American troops to battle overseas. Six times in his presidency, Kennedy confronted just such a decision; all six times he avoided it. Not only did Kennedy demonstrate a powerful aversion to militarizing disputes, he also displayed deep skepticism about the advice he was receiving from his military and intelligence officials who were urging him to do so. By extrapolating from Kennedy's actual

behavior and known disposition, it is possible to discipline the counterfactual in a way that increases our confidence in the judgment that Kennedy would not have committed large numbers of American troops to Vietnam.

Some historians are purists who say counterfactuals that ask what might have been are not real history. Real history is what actually happened. Imagining what might have happened is not important. But such purists miss the point that we try to understand not just *what* happened, but *why* it happened. To do that, we need to know what else *might* have happened, and that brings us back to counterfactuals. So while some historians interpret history as simply the writing down of what happened, many historians believe that good counterfactual analysis is essential to good historical analysis. The purists help warn us against poorly disciplined counterfactuals such as Napoleon's stealth bombers. But, as we see in the next chapter, there is a distinction between saying that some counterfactual analysis is trivial and saying that good counterfactual analysis is essential to clear thinking about causation.

Follow Up

- Philip E. Tetlock and Aaron Belkin, eds., *Counterfactual Thought Experiments in World Politics: Logical, Methodological, and Psychological Perspectives* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996).
- James G. Blight, Janet M. Lang, and David A. Welch, *Virtual JFK: Vietnam If Kennedy Had Lived* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2010).

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. What are the relationships among the concepts "state," "nation," and "nation-state"?
2. How might authority be a source of power? Would it be a source of hard power or soft power?
3. What is the relationship between system stability and crisis stability?
4. What are Waltz's three images? Can they be combined? If so, how?
5. Why do liberals think democracy can prevent war? What are the limits to their view?
6. What is the difference between the structure and process of an international system? Is constructivism useful for understanding how processes change?
7. What is counterfactual history? Can you use it to explain the causes of the war in Afghanistan?

NOTES

1. A nation is an "imagined community," in the words of Benedict Anderson, and so it is often difficult to define objectively; to some extent a nation is a self-defined entity. Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1991).

2. A claim by one state to the territory of another state on grounds of self-determination of the inhabitants is called *irredentism*, from the Italian *irredenta*, meaning "unredeemed."

3. See http://www.huttriver.net/.

4. Andrew F. Cooper, *Celebrity Diplomacy* (Boulder, CO: Paradigm Publishers, 2008).

5. See http://www.fundforpeace.org/web/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=99&Itemid=140.

6. David A. Welch, *Justice and the Genesis of War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), pp. 76–94.

7. Hedley Bull, *The Anarchical Society: A Study of Order in World Politics* (London: Macmillan, 1977).

8. Paul R. Hensel, "Territory: Theory and Evidence on Geography and Conflict," in John A. Vazquez, ed., *What Do We Know About War?* (New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 2000), p. 62.

9. Geoffrey Blainey, *The Causes of War* (New York: Free Press, 1973), p. 150.

10. Alexander L. George and Juliette L. George, *Woodrow Wilson and Colonel House* (New York: John Day Co., 1956).

11. Perhaps the best is Fritz Redlick, *Hitler: Diagnosis of a Destructive Prophet* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999).

12. V. I. Lenin, *Imperialism: The Highest Stage of Capitalism* (New York: International Publishers, 1977), p. 119.

13. Richard Cobden, quoted in Kenneth N. Waltz, *Man, the State, and War: A Theoretical Analysis* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1959), p. 104.

14. Barry M. Blechman, *The Politics of National Security: Congress and U.S. Defense Policy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), pp. 36–37.

15. Robert K. Merton, *Social Theory and Social Structure*, rev. and enl. ed. (New York: Free Press, 1965), pp. 12–16.

16. Richard Rosecrance, *The Rise of the Trading State: Commerce and Conquest in the Modern World* (New York: Basic, 1986), p. ix.

17. *Freedom in the World 2011: The Authoritarian Challenge to Democracy* (Freedom House, January 2011), p. 25.

18. Peter J. Katzenstein, *Rethinking Japanese Security: Internal and External Dimensions* (New York: Routledge, 2008); Margaret E. Keck and Kathryn Sikkink, *Activists Beyond Borders: Advocacy Networks in International Politics* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1998); Martha Finnemore, *The Purpose of Intervention: Changing Beliefs About the Use of Force* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2003); Matthew J. Hoffmann, *Ozone Depletion and Climate Change: Constructing a Global Response* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2005); Emanuel Adler and Michael Barnett, *Security Communities* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

19. Václav Havel, "Address to U.S. Congress," *Congressional Record,* February 21, 1990, pp. S1313–1315.