


CHAPTER 2

Realist Theories

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Realism

No single theory reliably explains the wide range of international interactions, but one theoretical framework has historically held a central position in the study of IR. This approach, called realism, is favored by some IR scholars and vigorously contested by others, but almost all take it into account.

Realism (or *political realism*) is a school of thought that explains international relations in terms of power. The exercise of power by states toward each other is sometimes called *realpolitik*, or just *power politics*.

Modern realist theory developed in reaction to a liberal tradition that realists called **idealism** (of course, idealists themselves do not consider their approach unrealistic). Idealism emphasizes international law, morality, and international organizations, rather than power alone, as key influences on international events.¹ Idealists think that human nature is basically good. They see the international system as one based on a community of states that have the potential to work together to overcome mutual problems (see Chapter 3). For idealists, the principles of IR must flow from morality. Idealists were particularly active between World War I and World War II, following the painful experience of World War I. U.S. president Woodrow Wilson and other idealists placed their hopes for peace in the League of Nations as a formal structure for the community of nations.

Those hopes were dashed when that structure proved helpless to stop German, Italian, and Japanese aggression in the 1930s. Since World War II, realists have blamed idealists for looking too much at how the world *ought* to be instead of how it *really* is. Sobered by the experiences of World War II, realists set out to understand the principles of power politics without succumbing to wishful thinking. Realism provided a theoretical foundation for the Cold War policy of containment and the determination of U.S. policy makers not to appease the Soviet Union and China as the West had appeased Hitler at Munich in 1938.

Realists ground themselves in a long tradition. The Chinese strategist *Sun Tzu*, who lived 2,000 years ago, advised the rulers of states how to survive in an era when war had become a systematic instrument of power for the first time (the “warring states” period). Sun Tzu argued that moral reasoning was not very useful to the state rulers of the day, faced with armed and dangerous neighbors. He showed rulers how to use power to advance their interests and protect their survival.²

At roughly the same time, in Greece, *Thucydides* wrote an account of the Peloponnesian War (431–404 B.C.) focusing on relative power among the Greek city-states. He stated that “the strong do what they have the power to do and the weak accept what they have to accept.”³ Much later, in Renaissance Italy (around 1500), *Niccolò Machiavelli* urged princes to concentrate on expedient actions to stay in power, including the manipulation of the public and military alliances. Today the adjective *Machiavellian* refers to excessively manipulative power maneuvers.⁴

The English philosopher *Thomas Hobbes* in the 17th century discussed the free-for-all that exists when government is absent and people seek their own self-interests.

Realism

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¹Nardin, Terry, and David R. Mapel, eds. *Traditions of International Ethics*. Cambridge, 1992. Long, David, and Peter Wilson, eds. *Thinkers of the Twenty Years’ Crisis: Inter-War Idealism Reassessed*. Oxford, 1995.

²Sun Tzu. *The Art of War*. Translated by Samuel B. Griffith. Oxford, 1963.

³Thucydides. *History of the Peloponnesian War*. Translated by R. Warner. Penguin, 1972, p. 402.

⁴Machiavelli, Niccolò. *The Prince, and the Discourses*. Translated by Luigi Ricci. Revised by E. R. P. Vincent. NY: Modern Library, 1950. Meinecke, Friedrich. *Machiavellism: The Doctrine of Raison d’État and Its Place in Modern History*. Translated by D. Scott. Yale, 1957.



He called it the “state of nature” or “state of war”—what we would now call the “law of the jungle” in contrast to the rule of law. Hobbes favored a strong monarchy (which he labeled a *Leviathan*) to tame this condition—essentially advocating a dominance approach to solve the collective goods problem in domestic societies. Realists see in these historical figures evidence that the importance of power politics is timeless and cross-cultural.

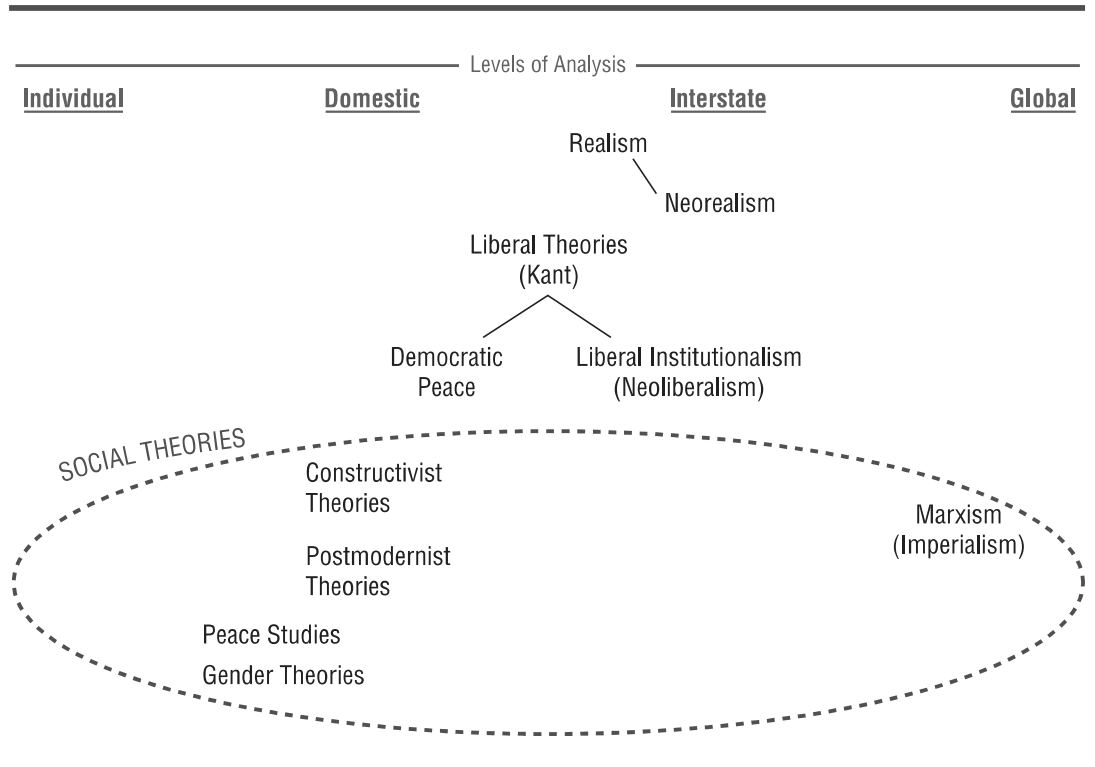
After World War II, scholar *Hans Morgenthau* argued that international politics is governed by objective, universal laws based on national interests defined in terms of power (not psychological motives of decision makers). He reasoned that no nation had “God on its side” (a universal morality) and that all nations had to base their actions on prudence and practicality. He opposed the Vietnam War, arguing in 1965 that a communist Vietnam would not harm U.S. national interests.

Similarly, in 2002, before the U.S. invasion of Iraq, leading realists figured prominently among the 33 IR scholars signing a *New York Times* advertisement warning that “war with Iraq is *not* in America’s national interest.”⁵ Thus, realists do not always favor using military power, although they recognize the necessity of doing so at times. The target of the IR scholars’ ad was the group of foreign policy makers in the Bush administration known as *neoconservatives*, who advocated more energetic use of American power, especially military force, to accomplish ambitious and moralistic goals such as democratizing the Middle East.

Thus, realism’s foundation is the principle of dominance; alternatives based on reciprocity and identity will be reviewed in Chapter 3. Figure 2.1 lays out the various theoretical approaches to the study of IR we discuss here and in Chapter 3.

Realists tend to treat political power as separate from, and predominant over, morality, ideology, and other social and economic aspects of life. For realists, ideologies do not

FIGURE 2.1 Theories of IR



⁵Morgenthau, Hans. We Are Deluding Ourselves in Vietnam. *New York Times Magazine*, April 18, 1965. Advertisement, *New York Times*, September 26, 2002.

TABLE 2.1 Assumptions of Realism and Idealism

| Issue | Realism | Idealism |
|--------------------------------|-----------------------------------|--|
| Human Nature | Selfish | Altruistic |
| Most Important Actors | States | States and others including individuals |
| Causes of State Behavior | Rational pursuit of self-interest | Psychological motives of decision makers |
| Nature of International System | Anarchy | Community |

matter much, nor do religions or other cultural factors with which states may justify their actions. Realists see states with very different religions, ideologies, or economic systems as quite similar in their actions with regard to national power.⁶ Thus, realists assume that IR can be best (although not exclusively) explained by the choices of states operating as autonomous actors rationally pursuing their own interests in an international system of sovereign states without a central authority.⁷

Table 2.1 summarizes some major differences between the assumptions of realism and idealism.

Power

Power is a central concept in international relations—the central one for realists—but it is surprisingly difficult to define or measure.⁸

Defining Power

Power is often defined as the ability to get another actor to do what it would not otherwise have done (or not to do what it would have done). A variation on this idea is that actors are powerful to the extent that they affect others more than others affect them. These definitions treat power as influence. If actors get their way a lot, they must be powerful.

One problem with this definition is that we seldom know what a second actor would have done in the absence of the first actor's power. There is a danger of circular logic: power explains influence, and influence measures power.

Power is not influence itself, however, but the ability or potential to influence others. Many IR scholars believe that such potential is based on specific (tangible and intangible) characteristics or possessions of states—such as their sizes, levels of income, and armed forces. This is power as *capability*. Capabilities are easier to measure than influence and are less circular in logic.

Measuring capabilities to explain how one state influences another is not simple, however. It requires summing up various kinds of potentials. States possess varying amounts of population, territory, military forces, and so forth. *The best single indicator of a*

⁶Morgenthau, Hans J., and Kenneth W. Thompson. *Politics among Nations: The Struggle for Power and Peace*. 6th ed. Knopf, 1985. Carr, Edward Hallett. *The Twenty Years' Crisis, 1919–1939: An Introduction to the Study of International Relations*. Macmillan, 1974 [1939]. Aron, Raymond. *Peace and War: A Theory of International Relations*. Translated by R. Howard and A. B. Fox. Doubleday, 1966.

⁷Waltz, Kenneth. *Theory of International Politics*. Addison-Wesley, 1979.

⁸Barnett, Michael, and Raymond Duvall. Power in International Politics. *International Organization* 59 (1), 2005: 1–37. Baldwin, David. Power in International Relations. In Carlsnaes, Walter, Thomas Risse, and Beth Simmons, eds. *Handbook of International Relations*. Sage, 2002, pp. 177–91.

POWER AS INFLUENCE



Power is the ability to influence the behavior of others. Military force and economic sanctions are among the various means that states and nonstate actors use to try to influence each other. Russia's position as a major energy supplier to Europe has increased its power in recent years even though its military threat to Europe has decreased. In 2009, Russia shut off natural gas supplies during a price dispute with Ukraine, a dispute shadowed by Russian anger at Ukraine's efforts to join NATO. The shutoff, visible here in a pressure gauge reading zero, left customers across Europe without heat. In 2010, Ukrainians elected a new president more friendly toward Russia.

state's power may be its total GDP, which combines overall size, technological level, and wealth. But even GDP is at best a rough indicator, and economists do not even agree how to measure it. The method followed in this book adjusts for price differences among countries, but an alternative method gives GDP estimates that are, on average, about 50 percent higher for countries in the global North and about 50 percent lower for the global South including China (see footnote 9 on p. 14). So GDP is a useful estimator of material capabilities but not a precise one.

Power also depends on nonmaterial elements. Capabilities give a state the potential to influence others only to the extent that political leaders can mobilize and deploy these capabilities effectively and strategically. This depends on national will, diplomatic skill, popular support for the government (its legitimacy), and so forth. Some scholars emphasize the *power of ideas*—the ability to maximize the influence of capabilities through a psychological process. This process includes the domestic mobilization of capabilities—often through religion, ideology, or (especially) nationalism. International influ-

ence is also gained by forming the rules of behavior to change how others see their own national interests. If a state's own values become widely shared among other states, it will easily influence others. This has been called *soft power*.⁹ For example, the United States has influenced many other states to accept the value of free markets and free trade.

As the concept of soft power illustrates, dominance is not the only way to exert power (influence others). The core principles of reciprocity and (in the case of soft power) identity can also work. For example, a father who wants his toddler to stop screaming in a supermarket might threaten or actually administer a spanking (dominance); he might promise a candy bar at the checkout as a reward for good behavior (reciprocity); or he could invoke such themes as "Be a big boy/girl!" or "You want to help Daddy, don't you?" (identity). Although realists emphasize dominance approaches, they acknowledge that

⁹Nye, Joseph S., Jr. *Bound to Lead: The Changing Nature of American Power*. Basic Books, 1990.

states often achieve their interests in other ways. Furthermore, even realists recognize that power provides only a general understanding of outcomes. Real-world outcomes depend on many other elements, including accidents or luck.

Because power is a relational concept, a state can have power only relative to other states' power. *Relative power* is the ratio of the power that two states can bring to bear against each other. It matters little to realists whether a state's capabilities are rising or declining in absolute terms, only whether they are falling behind or overtaking the capabilities of rival states.

Estimating Power

The logic of power suggests that in wars, the more powerful state will generally prevail. Thus, estimates of the relative power of the two antagonists should help explain outcomes. These estimates could take into account the nations' relative military capabilities and the popular support for each one's government, among other factors. But most important is the total size of each nation's economy—the GDP—which reflects both population size and income per person. With a healthy enough economy, a state can buy a large army, popular support (by providing consumer goods), and even allies.

For example, the Libyan revolutionaries fighting against dictator Muammar Gaddafi in 2011 had passion and determination but could not defeat the government with its heavy weaponry. Then, with the government poised to crush the rebels with tanks, the United States and NATO allies began an air campaign that decisively turned the tide. The rebels made gains and, several months later, claimed victory. The power disparity was striking. In GDP, NATO held an advantage of about 300:1, and NATO forces were much more capable technologically. They also enjoyed the legitimacy conferred by the UN Security Council. In the end, Gaddafi lay dead, his supporters routed, and NATO had not suffered a single casualty.

Despite the decisive outcome of this lopsided conflict, the exercise of power always carries risks of unintended consequences. In 2012, an armed Islamic faction that Gaddafi had previously kept in check attacked a U.S. consulate in Libya and killed the U.S. ambassador. Other ethnic fighters and Islamic militants who had fought for Gaddafi took large quantities of weapons and crossed the desert to northern Mali, where they seized control of half the country. In early 2013, France had to intervene militarily in Mali to stop them, and the Islamist militants crossed into Algeria, where they seized hundreds of foreign hostages at a gas facility and killed dozens of them when the Algerian army attacked. Thus, a big GDP may help a country win a war, but does not eliminate the elements of complexity and luck as situations evolve over the longer term.

Elements of Power

State power is a mix of many ingredients. Elements that an actor can draw on over the *long term* include total GDP, population, territory, geography, and natural resources. These attributes change only slowly. Less tangible long-term power resources include political culture, patriotism, education of the population, and strength of the scientific and technological base. The credibility of its commitments (reputation for keeping its word) is also a long-term power base for a state. So is the ability of one state's culture and values to consistently shape the thinking of other states (the power of ideas).

The importance of long-term power resources was illustrated after the Japanese surprise attack on the U.S. fleet at Pearl Harbor in 1941, which decimated U.S. naval

THE ECONOMICS OF POWER


Military power such as tanks rests on economic strength, roughly measured by GDP. The large U.S. economy supports U.S. military predominance. In the 2003 U.S. invasion of Iraq, the United States could afford to send a large and technologically advanced military force to the Middle East. Here, U.S. forces enter Iraq, March 2003.

capabilities in the Pacific. In the short term, Japan had superior military power and was able to occupy territories in Southeast Asia while driving U.S. forces from the region. In the longer term, the United States had greater power resources due to its underlying economic potential. It built up military capabilities over the next few years that gradually matched and then overwhelmed those of Japan.

Other capabilities allow actors to exercise influence in the *short term*. Military forces are such a capability—perhaps the most important kind. The size, composition, and preparedness of two states' military forces matter more in a short-term military confrontation than their respective economies or natural resources. Another capability is the military-industrial capacity to quickly produce weapons. The quality of a state's bureaucracy is another type of capability, allowing the state to gather information, regulate international trade, or participate in international conferences. Less tangibly, the *support* and *legitimacy* that an actor commands in the short term from constituents and

allies are capabilities that the actor can use to gain influence. So is the *loyalty* of a nation's army and politicians to their leader.

Given the limited resources that any actor commands, trade-offs among possible capabilities always exist. Building up military forces diverts resources that might be put into foreign aid, for instance. Or buying a population's loyalty with consumer goods reduces resources available for building up military capabilities. To the extent that one element of power can be converted into another, it is *fungible*. Generally, money is the most fungible capability because it can buy other capabilities.

Realists tend to see *military force* as the most important element of national power in the short term, and other elements such as economic strength, diplomatic skill, or moral legitimacy as being important to the extent that they are fungible into military power. Yet, depending on the nature of the conflict in question, military power may be only one of many elements of power. Robert Gates, as U.S. secretary of defense, called for a "dramatic increase" in spending on diplomacy and economic aid, noting that despite very high military spending, these "other elements of national power" have lagged behind in an era of asymmetric warfare (for example, counterterrorism) in which conflicts are "fundamentally political in nature" and not simply military. Secretary Gates went on to point out that the United States has more members of military marching bands than foreign service officers. In 2009, the top U.S. military officer added that although U.S. leaders had "reached for the military hammer in the toolbox of foreign policy fairly often" in recent years, "armed forces may not always be the best choice" to achieve foreign policy goals.¹⁰ Consistent with this thinking, U.S. spending on foreign

¹⁰Sanger, David. A Handpicked Team for a Sweeping Shift in Foreign Policy. *New York Times*, December 1, 2008. Shanker, Thom. Top Officer Urges Limit on Mission of Military. *New York Times*, January 13, 2009: A9.

aid has increased dramatically (along with military spending) since the attacks of 9/11 (see pp. 35–36).

Morality can contribute to power by increasing the will to use power and by attracting allies. States have long clothed their actions, however aggressive, in rhetoric about their peaceful and defensive intentions. For instance, the 1989 U.S. invasion of Panama was named “Operation Just Cause.” Of course, if a state uses moralistic rhetoric to cloak self-interest too often, it loses credibility even with its own population.

The use of geography as an element of power is called **geopolitics**. It is often tied to the logistical requirements of military forces. In geopolitics, as in real estate, the three most important considerations are location, location, location. States increase their power to the extent they can use geography to enhance their military capabilities, such as by securing allies and bases close to a rival power or along strategic trade routes, or by controlling key natural resources. Today, control of oil pipeline routes, especially in Central Asia, is a major geopolitical issue. Military strategists have also pointed out that the melting of the continental ice shelf (see Chapter 11) has opened new shipping routes for military purposes, creating new a geopolitical issue for Russia and the United States.

The International System

States interact within a set of long-established “rules of the game” governing what is considered a state and how states treat each other. Together these rules shape the international system.¹¹

Anarchy and Sovereignty

Realists believe that the international system exists in a state of **anarchy**—a term that implies not complete chaos or absence of structure and rules, but rather the lack of a central government that can enforce rules.¹² In domestic society within states, governments can enforce contracts, deter citizens from breaking rules, and use their monopoly on legally sanctioned violence to enforce a system of law. Both democracies and dictatorships provide central government enforcement of a system of rules. Realists contend that no such central authority exists to enforce rules and ensure compliance with norms of conduct. This makes collective goods problems especially acute in IR. The power of one state is countered only by the power of other states. States must therefore rely on *self-help*, which they supplement with allies and the (sometimes) constraining power of international norms.

Some people think that only a world government can solve this problem. Others think that adequate order, short of world government, can be provided by international organizations and agreements (see Chapter 7). But most realists think that IR cannot

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¹¹Dehio, Ludwig. *The Precarious Balance: Four Centuries of the European Power Struggle*. Translated by Charles Fullman. Vintage Books, 1962 [from the German version of 1948]. Luard, Evan. *Conflict and Peace in the Modern International System: A Study of the Principles of International Order*. Macmillan, 1988. Wight, Martin. *Systems of States*. Leicester, 1977.

¹²Bull, Hedley. *The Anarchical Society: A Study of Order in World Politics*. Columbia, 2002 [1977]. Taylor, Michael. *Anarchy and Cooperation*. Wiley, 1976. Starr, Harvey. *Anarchy, Order, and Integration: How to Manage Interdependence?* Michigan, 1997.

escape from a state of anarchy and will continue to be dangerous as a result.¹³ In this anarchic world, realists emphasize prudence as a great virtue in foreign policy. Thus states should pay attention not to the *intentions* of other states but rather to their *capabilities*.

Despite its anarchy, the international system is far from chaotic. The great majority of state interactions closely adhere to **norms** of behavior—shared expectations about what behavior is considered proper.¹⁴ Norms change over time, slowly, but the most basic norms of the international system have changed little in recent centuries.

Sovereignty—traditionally the most important norm—means that a government has the right, in principle, to do whatever it wants in its own territory. States are separate and autonomous and answer to no higher authority. In principle, all states are equal in status, if not in power. Sovereignty also means that states are not supposed to interfere in the internal affairs of other states. Although states do try to influence each other (exert power) on matters of trade, alliances, war, and so on, they are not supposed to meddle in the internal politics and decision processes of other states. More controversially, some states claim that sovereignty gives them the right to treat their own people in any fashion, including behavior that other states call genocide.

The lack of a “world police” to punish states if they break an agreement makes enforcement of international agreements difficult. For example, in the 1990s, North Korea announced it would no longer allow inspections of its nuclear facilities by other states, which put it in violation of the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT). The international community used a mix of positive incentives and threats to persuade North Korea to stop producing nuclear material. But in 2002 North Korea withdrew from the NPT and built perhaps a half-dozen nuclear bombs, one of which it exploded in 2006 (the world’s first nuclear test in a decade). After reaching an agreement with the United States to stop producing nuclear weapons in 2008, North Korea refused to allow physical inspection of some of its nuclear facilities, noting that “it is an act of infringing upon sovereignty.”¹⁵ These examples show the difficulty of enforcing international norms in the sovereignty-based international system.

In practice, most states have a harder and harder time warding off interference in their affairs. Such “internal” matters as human rights or self-determination are, increasingly, concerns for the international community. For example, election monitors increasingly watch internal elections for fraud, while international organizations monitor ethnic conflicts for genocide.¹⁶ Also, the integration of global economic markets and telecommunications (such as the Internet) makes it easier than ever for ideas to penetrate state borders.¹⁷

States are based on territory. Respect for the territorial integrity of all states, within recognized borders, is an important principle of IR. Many of today’s borders are the result of past wars (in which winners took territory from losers) or were imposed arbitrarily by colonizers.

¹³Mearsheimer, John J. *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics*. Norton, 2001.

¹⁴Franck, Thomas M. *The Power of Legitimacy among Nations*. Oxford, 1990.

¹⁵BBC News Online. North Korea Rejects Nuclear Sampling. November 2, 2008.

¹⁶Alvarez, R. Michael, Thad E. Hall, and Susan D. Hyde. *Election Fraud: Detecting and Deterring Electoral Manipulation*. Brookings, 2008.

¹⁷Krasner, Stephen D. *Sovereignty: Organized Hypocrisy*. Princeton, 1999.

The territorial nature of the interstate system developed long ago when agrarian societies relied on agriculture to generate wealth. In today's world, in which trade and technology rather than land create wealth, the territorial state may be less important. Information-based economies are linked across borders instantly, and the idea that the state has a hard shell seems archaic. The accelerating revolution in information technologies may dramatically affect the territorial state system in the coming years.

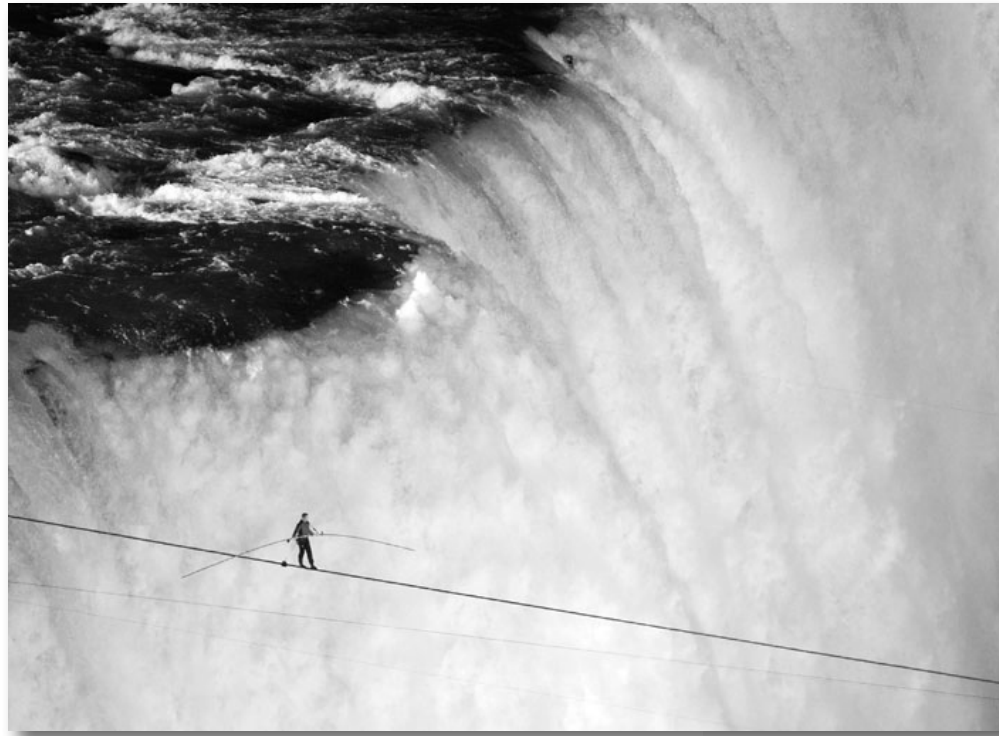
States have developed norms of diplomacy to facilitate their interactions. An embassy is treated as though it were the territory of the home state, not the country where it is located (see pp. 261–263). For instance, in 2012–2013, when Ecuador's embassy in Britain harbored the founder of Wikileaks, who had been ordered extradited to Sweden, British authorities did not simply come in and take him away. To do so would have violated Ecuador's territorial integrity. Yet in 1979, Iranian students took over the U.S. embassy in Iran, holding many of its diplomats hostage for 444 days—an episode that has soured U.S.-Iranian relations ever since.

Diplomatic norms recognize that states try to spy on each other. Each state is responsible for keeping other states from spying on it. In 2002, China discovered that its new presidential aircraft—a Boeing 767 refurbished in Texas—was riddled with sophisticated listening devices. But China did not make an issue of it (the plane had not gone into service), and a U.S.-China summit the next month went forward. In the post-Cold War era, spying continues, even between friendly states.

Realists acknowledge that the rules of IR often create a **security dilemma**—a situation in which states' actions taken to ensure their own security (such as deploying more military forces) threaten the security of other states.¹⁸ The responses of those other states, such as deploying more of their own military forces, in turn threaten the first state. The dilemma is a prime cause of arms races in which states spend large sums of money on mutually threatening weapons that do not ultimately provide security.

The security dilemma is a negative consequence of anarchy in the international system. If a world government could reliably detect and punish aggressors who arm

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Sovereignty and territorial integrity are central norms governing the behavior of states. Terrorism and secessionist movements present two challenges to these norms, but the world's mostly stable borders uphold them. Every day, millions of people cross international borders, mostly legally and peacefully, respecting states' territorial integrity. Here, tightrope walker Nik Wallenda crosses the U.S.-Canadian border at Niagara Falls, 2012.

¹⁸Herz, John. Idealist Internationalism and the Security Dilemma. *World Politics* 2 (2), 1950: 157–80. Jervis, Robert. Cooperation under the Security Dilemma. *World Politics* 30 (2), 1978: 167–214.

themselves, states would not need to guard against this possibility. Yet the self-help system requires that states prepare for the worst. Realists tend to see the dilemma as unsolvable, whereas liberals think it can be solved through the development of institutions (see Chapters 3 and 7).

As we shall see in later chapters, changes in technology and in norms are undermining the traditional principles of territorial integrity and state autonomy in IR. Some IR scholars find states practically obsolete as the main actors in world politics, as some integrate into larger entities and others fragment into smaller units.¹⁹ Other scholars find the international system quite enduring in its structure and state units.²⁰ One of its most enduring features is the balance of power.

Balance of Power

In the anarchy of the international system, the most reliable brake on the power of one state is the power of other states. The term **balance of power** refers to the general concept of one or more states' power being used to balance that of another state or group of states. Balance of power can refer to any ratio of power capabilities between states or alliances, or it can mean only a relatively equal ratio. Alternatively, balance of power can refer to the *process* by which counterbalancing coalitions have repeatedly formed in history to prevent one state from conquering an entire region.²¹

The theory of balance of power argues that such counterbalancing occurs regularly and maintains the stability of the international system. The system is stable in that its rules and principles stay the same: state sovereignty does not collapse into a universal empire. This stability does not, however, imply peace; it is rather a stability maintained by means of recurring wars that adjust power relations.

Alliances (to be discussed shortly) play a key role in the balance of power. Building up one's own capabilities against a rival is a form of power balancing, but forming an alliance against a threatening state is often quicker, cheaper, and more effective. In the Cold War, the United States encircled the Soviet Union with military and political alliances to prevent Soviet territorial expansion. Sometimes a particular state deliberately becomes a balancer (in its region or the world), shifting its support to oppose whatever state or alliance is strongest at the moment. Britain played this role on the European continent for centuries, and China played it in the Cold War.

But states do not always balance against the strongest actor. Sometimes smaller states "jump on the bandwagon" of the most powerful state; this has been called *bandwagoning* as opposed to balancing. For instance, after World War II, a broad coalition did not form to contain U.S. power; rather, most major states joined the U.S. bloc. States may seek to balance threats rather than raw power; U.S. power was greater than Soviet power but was less threatening to Europe and Japan (and later to China as well).²² Furthermore, small states create variations on power-balancing themes when they play off rival great powers

¹⁹ Aydinli, Ersel, and James N. Rosenau, eds. *Globalization, Security, and the Nation State: Paradigms in Transition*. SUNY, 2005. Rosenau, James N. *Distant Proximities: Dynamics beyond Globalization*. Princeton, 2003.

²⁰ Weiss, Linda. *The Myth of the Powerless State*. Cornell, 1998.

²¹ Gulick, Edward V. *Europe's Classical Balance of Power*. Cornell, 1955. Niou, Emerson M. S., Peter C. Ordeshook, and Gregory F. Rose. *The Balance of Power: Stability and Instability in International Systems*. Cambridge, 1989. Vasquez, John, and Colin Elman, eds. *Realism and the Balance of Power: A New Debate*. Prentice Hall, 2002.

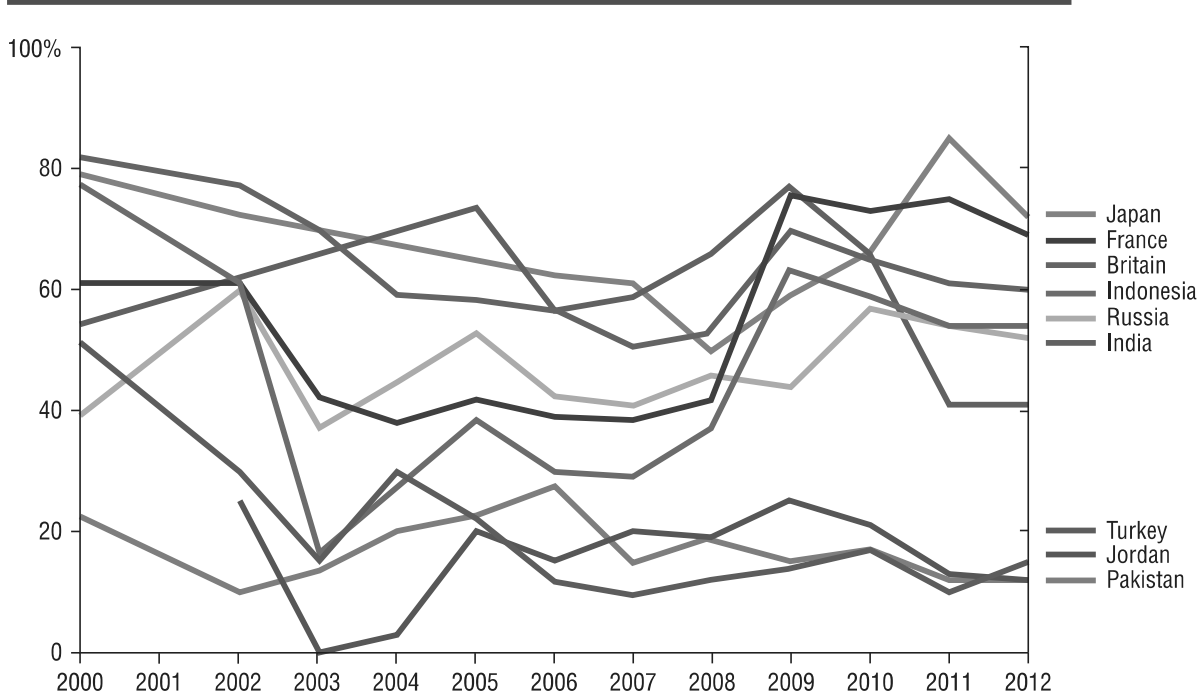
²² Walt, Stephen M. *The Origins of Alliances*. Cornell, 1987.

against each other. For instance, Cuba during the Cold War received massive Soviet subsidies by putting itself in the middle of the U.S.-Soviet rivalry. Other small states may, for domestic reasons, fail to mobilize to balance against threats.²³

In the post-Cold War era of U.S. dominance, balance-of-power theory would predict closer relations among Russia, China, and even Europe to balance U.S. power. And indeed, Russian-Chinese relations improved dramatically in such areas as arms trade and demilitarization of the border. French leaders have even criticized U.S. “hyperpower.” But in recent years, with U.S. power seemingly stretched thin in Afghanistan and Iraq, its economy also weak, and Chinese power on the rise, more countries are balancing against China and fewer against the United States. In 2012–2013, Japan struck military agreements with former enemies South Korea and the Philippines and reaffirmed its U.S. ties, in response to China’s growing power.

World public opinion also reflects shifts in the balance of power. In 2003, as the Iraq war began, widespread anti-American sentiment revealed itself in Muslim countries. In Indonesia, Pakistan, Turkey, and Nigeria—containing half of the world’s Muslims—more than 70 percent worried that the United States could become a threat to their own countries, a worry shared by 71 percent of Russians. A survey of 38,000 people in 44 nations showed a dramatic drop in support for the United States from 2002 to 2003. As Figure 2.2

FIGURE 2.2 Views of the United States in Nine Countries, 2000–2012 (Percent favorable view in public opinion polls)



Source: *New York Times* from data of Pew Global Attitudes Project. 2000 data from State Department surveys.

²³ Schweller, Randall L. *Unanswered Threats: Political Constraints on the Balance of Power*. Princeton, 2006.

illustrates, this decline in favorable views of the United States worldwide continued through 2007. Then after 2008, with the United States seeking to exit its wars and exert its power less forcefully around the world, opinions turned upward. These shifts in public opinion make the governments in those countries more or less likely to cooperate with, or oppose, the United States on the world stage.²⁴

Great Powers and Middle Powers

The most powerful states in the world exert most of the influence on international events and therefore get the most attention from IR scholars. By almost any measure of power, a handful of states possess the majority of the world's power resources. At most a few dozen states have any real influence beyond their immediate locality. These are called the great powers and middle powers in the international system.

Although there is no firm dividing line, **great powers** are generally considered the half-dozen or so most powerful states. Until the past century, the great power club was exclusively European. Sometimes great powers' status is formally recognized in an international structure such as the 19th-century Concert of Europe or today's UN Security Council. In general, great powers are often defined as states that can be defeated militarily only by another great power. Great powers also tend to share a global outlook based on national interests far from their home territories.

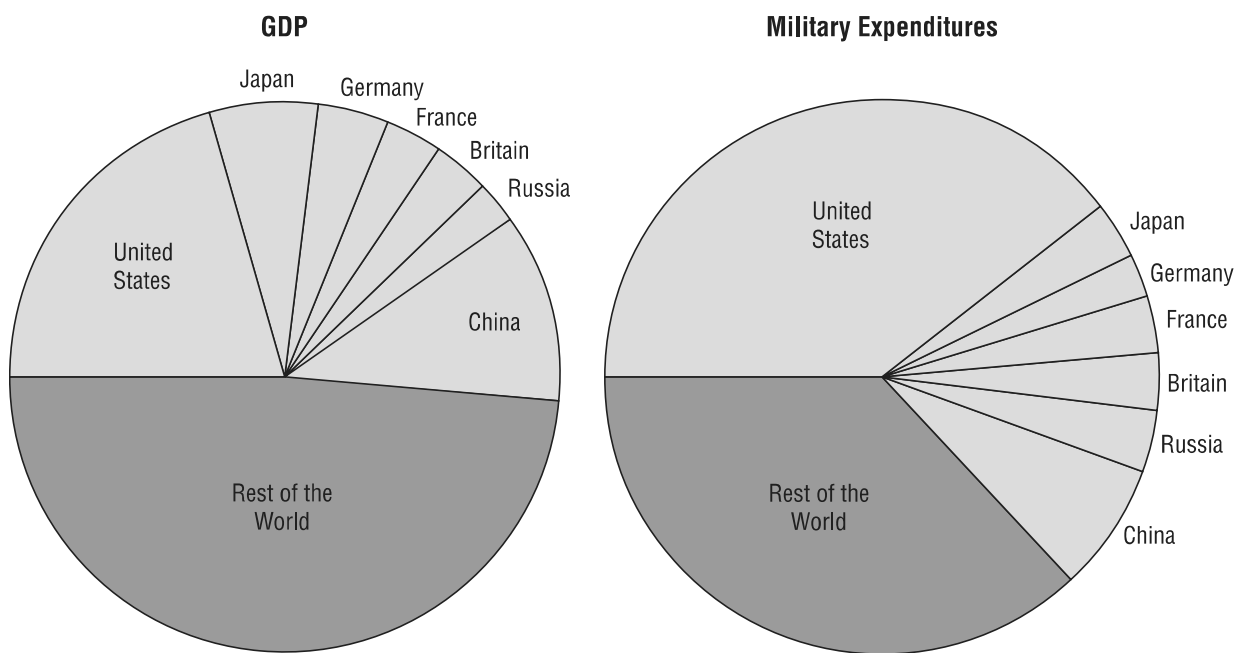
The great powers generally have the world's strongest military forces—and the strongest economies to pay for them—and other power capabilities. These large economies in turn rest on some combination of large populations, plentiful natural resources, advanced technology, and educated labor forces. Because power is based on these underlying resources, membership in the great power system changes slowly. Only rarely does a great power—even one defeated in a massive war—lose its status as a great power, because its size and long-term economic potential change slowly. Thus Germany and Japan, decimated in World War II, are powerful today, and Russia, after gaining and then losing the rest of the Soviet Union, is still considered a great power.²⁵

What states are great powers today? Although definitions vary, seven states appear to meet the criteria: the United States, China, Russia, Japan, Germany, France, and Britain. Together they account for more than half of the world's total GDP and two-thirds of its military spending (see Figure 2.3). They include the five permanent members of the UN Security Council, which are also the members of the “club” openly possessing large nuclear weapons arsenals.

Notable on this list are the United States and China. The United States is considered the world's only superpower because of its historical role of world leadership (especially in and after World War II) and its predominant military might. China has the world's largest population, rapid economic growth (8–10 percent annually over 30 years), and a large and modernizing military, including a credible nuclear arsenal. Indeed, in 2008, the U.S. National Intelligence Council's long-range planning report noted that China is poised to have a profound effect on the world over the next

²⁴Walt, Stephen M. *Taming American Power: The Global Response to U.S. Primacy*. Norton, 2005. Sweig, Julia E. *Friendly Fire: Losing Friends and Making Enemies in the Anti-American Century*. Public Affairs, 2006. Katzenstein, Peter J., and Robert O. Keohane, eds. *Anti-Americanisms in World Politics*. Cornell, 2008.

²⁵Levy, Jack S. *War in the Modern Great Power System, 1495–1975*. Kentucky, 1983.

FIGURE 2.3 Great Power Shares of World GDP and Military Expenditures, 2011

Note: GDP calculated by purchasing-power method. China's GDP using alternate method would be about half as large.

Source: World Bank Development Indicators, 2009; SIPRI Yearbook, 2009.

20 years—perhaps more than any other state.²⁶ Japan and Germany are economically great powers, but both countries have played constrained roles in international security affairs since World War II. Nonetheless, both have large and capable military forces, which they have begun to deploy abroad, especially in peacekeeping operations. Russia, France, and Britain were winners in World War II and have been active military powers since then. Although much reduced in stature from their colonial heydays, they still qualify as great powers.

Middle powers rank somewhat below the great powers in terms of their influence on world affairs. Some are large but not highly industrialized; others have specialized capabilities but are small. Some aspire to regional dominance, and many have considerable influence in their regions.

A list of middle powers (not everyone would agree on it) might include mid-sized countries of the global North such as Canada, Italy, Spain, the Netherlands, Poland, Ukraine, South Korea, and Australia. It could also include large or influential countries in the global South such as India, Indonesia, Brazil, Argentina, Mexico, Nigeria, South Africa, Israel, Turkey, Iran, and Pakistan. Middle powers have not received as much attention in IR as have great powers.²⁷

²⁶Shane, Scott. Global Forecast by American Intelligence Expects al Qaeda's Appeal to Falter. *New York Times*, November 21, 2008: A1. Rosecrance, Richard. Power and International Relations: The Rise of China and Its Effects. *International Studies Perspectives* 7 (1), 2006: 31–35.

²⁷Cohen, Stephen P. *India: Emerging Power*. Brookings, 2001.

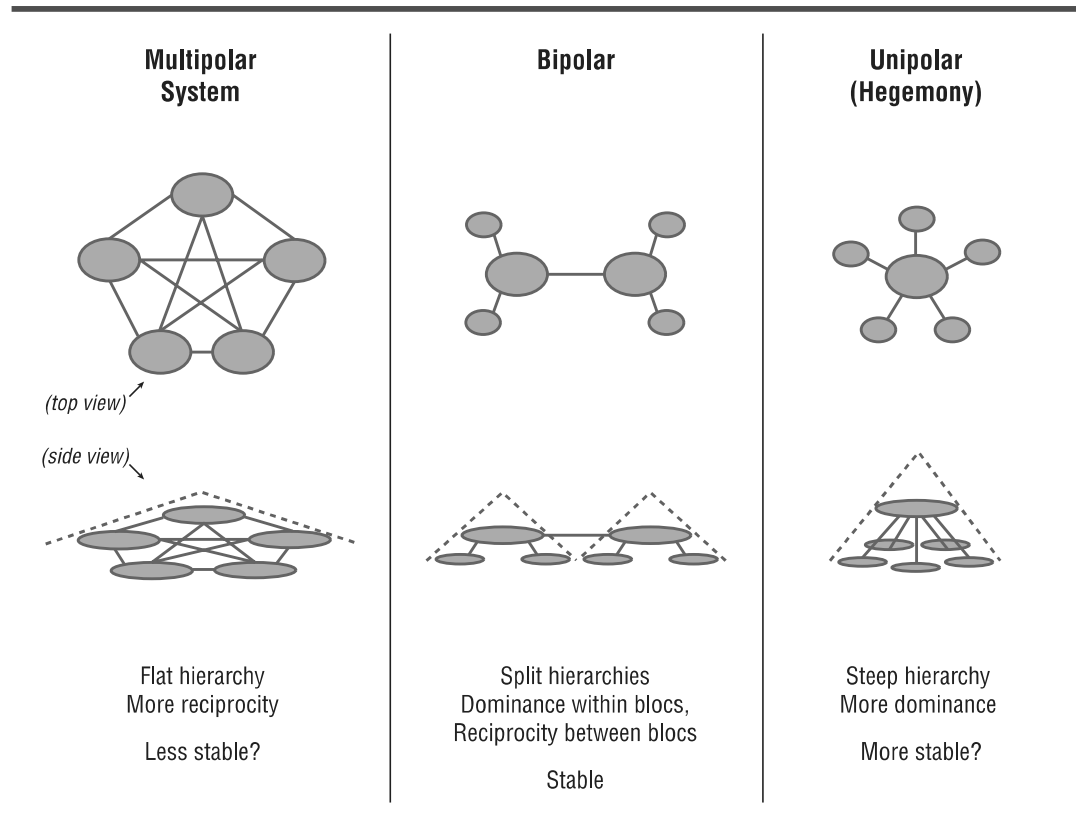
Power Distribution

With each state's power balanced by other states, the most important characteristic of the international system in the view of some realists is the *distribution* of power among states. Power distribution as a concept can apply to all the states in the world or just the states in one region, but most often it refers to the great power system.

Neorealism, sometimes called *structural realism*, is a 1990s adaptation of realism. It explains patterns of international events in terms of the system structure—the international distribution of power—rather than in terms of the internal makeup of individual states.²⁸ Compared to traditional realism, neorealism is more “scientific” in the sense of proposing general laws to explain events, but neorealism has lost some of the richness of traditional realism, which took account of many complex elements (geography, political will, diplomacy, etc.).²⁹ Recently, *neoclassical realists* have sought to restore some of these lost aspects.³⁰

The *polarity* of an international power distribution (world or regional) refers to the number of independent power centers in the system. This concept encompasses both the underlying power of various participants and their alliance groupings. Figure 2.4 illustrates several potential configurations of great powers.

FIGURE 2.4 Power Distribution in the International System



²⁸Waltz, *Theory of International Politics* (see footnote 7 in this chapter).

²⁹Keohane, Robert O., ed. *Neorealism and Its Critics*. Columbia, 1986. Buzan, Barry, Charles Jones, and Richard Little. *The Logic of Anarchy: Neorealism to Structural Realism*. Columbia, 1993.

³⁰Vasquez, John A. *The Power of Power Politics: From Classical Realism to Neotraditionalism*. Cambridge, 1999.

A **multipolar system** typically has five or six centers of power, which are not grouped into alliances. Each state participates independently and on relatively equal terms with the others. In the classical multipolar balance of power, the great power system itself was stable but wars occurred frequently to adjust power relations.

Tripolar systems, with three great centers of power, are fairly rare, owing to the tendency for a two-against-one alliance to form. Aspects of tripolarity colored the “strategic triangle” of the United States, the Soviet Union, and China during the 1960s and 1970s. Some scholars imagine a future tripolar world with rival power centers in North America, Europe, and East Asia. A *bipolar* system has two predominant states or two great rival alliance blocs. IR scholars do not agree about whether bipolar systems are relatively peaceful or warlike. The U.S.-Soviet standoff seemed to provide stability and peace to great power relations, but rival blocs in Europe before World War I did not. At the far extreme, a *unipolar* system has a single center of power around which all others revolve. This is called *hegemony*, and will be discussed shortly.

Some might argue that peace is best preserved by a relatively equal power distribution (multipolarity) because then no country has an opportunity to win easily. The empirical evidence for this theory, however, is not strong. In fact, the opposite proposition has more support: peace is best preserved by hegemony (unipolarity), and next best by bipolarity.

Power transition theory holds that the largest wars result from challenges to the top position in the status hierarchy, when a rising power is surpassing (or threatening to surpass) the most powerful state.³¹ At such times, power is relatively equally distributed, and these are the most dangerous times for major wars. Status quo powers that are doing well under the old rules will try to maintain them, whereas challengers that feel locked out by the old rules may try to change them. If a challenger does not start a war to displace the top power, the latter may provoke a “preventive” war to stop the rise of the challenger before it becomes too great a threat.³²

When a rising power’s status (formal position in the hierarchy) diverges from its actual power, the rising power may suffer from relative deprivation: its people may feel they are not doing as well as others or as they deserve, even though their position may be improving in absolute terms. Germany’s rise in the 19th century gave it great power capabilities even though it was left out of colonial territories and other signs of status; this tension may have contributed to the two world wars.

It is possible China and the United States may face a similar dynamic in the future. China may increasingly bristle at international rules and norms that it feels serves the interests of the United States. For its part, the United States may fear that growing Chinese economic and military power will be used to challenge U.S. power. In 2010, the U.S. military’s strategic review questioned China’s “long-term intentions,” raising new questions about future power transitions (see “Let’s Debate the Issue” at the end of this chapter).

According to power transition theory, then, peace among great powers results when one state is firmly in the top position and the positions of the others in the hierarchy are clearly defined and correspond with their actual underlying power.

Hegemony

Hegemony is one state’s holding a preponderance of power in the international system, allowing it to single-handedly dominate the rules and arrangements by which

³¹Organski, A. F. K. *World Politics*. Knopf, 1958. Kugler, Jacek, and Douglas Lemke, eds. *Parity and War: Evaluations and Extensions of the War Ledger*. Michigan, 1996.

³²Levy, Jack S. Declining Power and the Preventive Motivation for War. *World Politics* 40 (1), 1987: 82–107.

CHINA RISING


Realists emphasize relative power as an explanation of war and peace. The modernization of China's military—in conjunction with China's rapidly growing economy—will increase China's power over the coming decades. Some observers fear instability in Asia if the overall balance of power among states in the region shifts rapidly. Here, a nuclear-powered submarine sails near China's coast, 2009.

international political and economic relations are conducted.³³ Such a state is called a *hegemon*. (Usually, *hegemony* means domination of the world, but sometimes it refers to regional domination.) The Italian Marxist theorist Antonio Gramsci used the term hegemony to refer to the complex of *ideas* that rulers use to gain consent for their legitimacy and keep subjects in line, reducing the need to use force to accomplish the same goal.³⁴ By extension, such a meaning in IR refers to the hegemony of ideas such as democracy and capitalism, and to the global predominance of U.S. culture (see pp. 379–380).

Most studies of hegemony point to two examples: Britain in the 19th century and the United States after World War II. Britain's predominance followed the defeat of its archrival France in the Napoleonic Wars. Both world trade and naval capabilities were firmly in British hands, as "Britannia ruled the waves." U.S. predominance followed the defeat of Germany and Japan (and the exhaustion of the Soviet Union, France, Britain, and China in the

effort). In the late 1940s, the U.S. GDP was more than half the world's total; U.S. vessels carried the majority of the world's shipping; the U.S. military could single-handedly defeat any other state or combination of states; and only the United States had nuclear weapons. U.S. industry led the world in technology and productivity, and U.S. citizens enjoyed the world's highest standard of living.

As the extreme power disparities resulting from major wars slowly diminish (states rebuild over years and decades), hegemonic decline may occur, particularly when hegemons have overextended themselves with costly military commitments. IR scholars do not agree about how far or fast U.S. hegemonic decline has proceeded, if at all, and whether international instability will result from such a decline.³⁵

³³Kapstein, Ethan B., and Michael Mastanduno. *Unipolar Politics*. Columbia, 1999. Rupert, Mark. *Producing Hegemony: The Politics of Mass Production and American Global Power*. Cambridge, 1995. Nye, Joseph S. *Paradox of American Power: Why the World's Only Superpower Can't Go It Alone*. Oxford, 2002.

³⁴Gramsci, Antonio. *The Modern Prince and Other Writings*. International Publishers, 1959. Gill, Stephen, ed. *Gramsci, Historical Materialism and International Relations*. Cambridge, 1993. Cox, Robert W. *Production, Power, and World Order: Social Forces in the Making of History*. Columbia, 1987.

³⁵Kennedy, Paul. *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers: Economic Change and Military Conflict from 1500–2000*. Random House, 1987. Posen, Barry R. Command of the Commons: The Military Foundations of U.S. Hegemony. *International Security* 28 (1), 2003: 5–46. Ikenberry, G. John, ed. *America Unrivaled: The Future of the Balance of Power*. Cornell, 2002.

Hegemonic stability theory holds that hegemony provides some order similar to a central government in the international system: reducing anarchy, deterring aggression, promoting free trade, and providing a hard currency that can be used as a world standard. Hegemons can help resolve or at least keep in check conflicts among middle powers or small states.³⁶ When one state's power dominates the world, that state can enforce rules and norms unilaterally, avoiding the collective goods problem. In particular, hegemons can maintain global free trade and promote world economic growth, in this view.

This theory attributes the peace and prosperity of the decades after World War II to U.S. hegemony, which created and maintained a global framework of economic relations supporting relatively stable and free international trade, as well as a security framework that prevented great power wars. By contrast, the Great Depression of the 1930s and the outbreak of World War II have been attributed to the power vacuum in the international system at that time—Britain was no longer able to act as hegemon, and the United States was unwilling to begin doing so.³⁷

Why should a hegemon care about enforcing rules for the international economy that are in the common good? According to hegemonic stability theory, hegemons as the largest international traders have an inherent interest in the promotion of integrated world markets (where the hegemons will tend to dominate). As the most advanced state in productivity and technology, a hegemon does not fear competition from industries in other states; it fears only that its own superior goods will be excluded from competing in other states. Thus, hegemons use their power to achieve free trade and the political stability that supports free trade. Hegemony, then, provides both the ability and the motivation to provide a stable political framework for free international trade, according to hegemonic stability theory. This theory is not, however, accepted by all IR scholars.³⁸

From the perspective of less powerful states, of course, hegemony may seem an infringement of state sovereignty, and the order it creates may seem unjust or illegitimate. For instance, China chafed under U.S.-imposed economic sanctions for 20 years after 1949, at the height of U.S. power, when China was encircled by U.S. military bases and hostile alliances led by the United States. To this day, Chinese leaders use the term *hegemony* as an insult, and the theory of hegemonic stability does not impress them.

Even in the United States there is considerable ambivalence about U.S. hegemony. U.S. foreign policy has historically alternated between *internationalist* and *isolationist* moods.³⁹ It was founded as a breakaway from the European-based international system, and its growth in the 19th century was based on industrialization and expansion within North America. The United States acquired overseas colonies in the Philippines and Puerto Rico but did not relish a role as an imperial power. In World War I, the country waited three years to weigh in and refused to join the League of Nations afterward. U.S. isolationism peaked in the late 1930s when polls showed 95 percent of the public opposed to participation in a future European war, and about 70 percent against joining the League of Nations or joining with other nations to stop aggression.⁴⁰

³⁶Keohane, Robert O. The Theory of Hegemonic Stability and Change in International Economic Regimes, 1967–1977. In Holsti, Ole R., R. M. Siverson, and A. L. George, eds. *Change in the International System*. Westview, 1980.

³⁷Kindleberger, Charles P. *The World in Depression, 1929–1939*. California, 1973. Lake, David A. *Power, Protection, and Free Trade: International Sources of U.S. Commercial Strategy, 1887–1939*. Cornell, 1988.

³⁸Snidal, Duncan. The Limits of Hegemonic Stability Theory. *International Organization* 39 (4), 1985: 579–614.

Gruber, Lloyd. *Ruling the World: Power Politics and the Rise of Supranational Institutions*. Princeton, 2000.

³⁹Zakaria, Fareed. *From Wealth to Power: The Unusual Origins of America's World Role*. Princeton, 1998.

⁴⁰Free, Lloyd A., and Hadley Cantril. *The Political Beliefs of Americans*. Rutgers, 1967.

PRICE OF HEGEMONY


The United States is the world's most powerful single actor. Its ability and willingness to resume a role as hegemon—as after World War II—are important factors that will shape world order, but the U.S. role is still uncertain. America's willingness to absorb casualties will affect its role. Here, soldiers return from Afghanistan, 2009.

Internationalists, such as Presidents Theodore Roosevelt and Woodrow Wilson, favored U.S. leadership and activism in world affairs. These views seemed vindicated by the failure of isolationism to prevent or avoid World War II. U.S. leaders after that war feared Soviet (and then Chinese) communism and pushed U.S. public opinion toward a strong internationalism during the Cold War. The United States became an activist, global superpower. In the post-Cold War era, U.S. internationalism was tempered by a new cost consciousness, and by the emergence of a new isolationist camp born in reaction to the displacements caused by globalization and free trade.⁴¹ However, the terrorist attacks of September 2001 renewed public support for U.S. interventionism in distant conflicts that no longer seemed so distant. Recently, though, opposition to the Iraq War, a protracted conflict in Afghanistan, and difficult economic times at home have spurred a new isolationist trend in the United States.

A second area of U.S. ambivalence is *unilateralism* versus *multilateralism*

when the United States does engage internationally. Multilateral approaches—working through international institutions—augment U.S. power and reduce costs, but limit U.S. freedom of action. For example, the United States cannot always get the UN to do what it wants. Polls show that a majority of U.S. citizens support working through the UN and other multilateral institutions, as did the first Bush administration.⁴² However, members of the U.S. Congress since the 1990s, and the second Bush administration, expressed skepticism of the UN and of international agencies, generally favoring a more unilateralist approach.⁴³

In the 1990s, the United States slipped more than \$1 billion behind in its dues to the UN, and since 2001 it has declined to participate in such international efforts as a treaty on global warming (see pp. 390–394), a conference on racism, and an International Criminal Court (see p. 275). The 2003 U.S.-led war in Iraq, with few allies and no UN stamp of approval, marked a peak of U.S. unilateralism. Since then the NATO alliance has assumed new importance, in Afghanistan and in the 2011 Libya campaign, and UN dues have been repaid.

⁴¹ Haass, Richard N. *The Reluctant Sheriff: The United States after the Cold War*. Brookings, 1997. Lieber, Robert J. *Eagle Rules? Foreign Policy and American Primacy in the 21st Century*. Prentice Hall, 2002.

⁴² Kull, Steven, and I. M. Destler. *Misreading the Public: The Myth of a New Isolationism*. Brookings, 1999.

⁴³ Ferguson, Niall. *Colossus: The Price of America's Empire*. Penguin, 2004. Daalder, Ivo H., and James M. Lindsay. *America Unbound: The Bush Revolution in Foreign Policy*. Wiley, 2005.

The Great Power System, 1500–2000

To illustrate how these concepts such as the balance of power, power transition, and hegemony have operated historically, we briefly review the origins of the modern international system. Noted by the presence of great powers, sovereignty, balance of power, and periods of hegemony, the modern great power system is often dated from the *Treaty of Westphalia* in 1648, which established the principles of independent, sovereign states that continue to shape the international system today (see Figure 2.5). These rules of state relations did not, however, originate at Westphalia; they took form in Europe in the 16th century. Key to this system was the ability of one state, or a coalition, to balance the power of another state so that it could not gobble up smaller units and create a universal empire.

This power-balancing system placed special importance on the handful of great powers with strong military capabilities, global interests and outlooks, and intense interactions with each other. (Great powers are defined and discussed on pp. 54–55.) A system of great power relations has existed since around A.D. 1500, and the structure and rules of that system have remained fairly stable through time, although the particular members change. The structure is a balance of power among the six or so most powerful states, which form and break alliances, fight wars, and make peace, letting no single state conquer the others.

The most powerful states in 16th-century Europe were Britain (England), France, Austria-Hungary, and Spain. The Ottoman Empire (Turkey) recurrently fought with the European powers, especially with Austria-Hungary. Today, that historic conflict between the (Islamic) Ottoman Empire and (Christian) Austria-Hungary is a source of ethnic conflict in the former Yugoslavia (the edge of the old Ottoman Empire).

Within Europe, Austria-Hungary and Spain were allied under the control of the Hapsburg family, which also owned the territory of the Netherlands. The Hapsburg countries (which were Catholic) were defeated by mostly Protestant countries in northern Europe—France, Britain, Sweden, and the newly independent Netherlands—in the *Thirty Years' War* of 1618–1648.⁴⁴ The 1648 Treaty of Westphalia established the basic rules that have defined the international system ever since—the sovereignty and territorial integrity of states as equal and independent members of an international system. Since then, states defeated in war might have been stripped of some territories but were generally allowed to continue as independent states rather than being subsumed into the victorious state.

In the 18th century, the power of Britain increased as it industrialized, and Britain's great rival was France. Sweden, the Netherlands, and the Ottoman Empire all declined in power, but Russia and later Prussia (the forerunner of modern Germany) emerged as major players. In the *Napoleonic Wars* (1803–1815), which followed the French Revolution, France was defeated by a coalition of Britain, the Netherlands, Austria-Hungary, Spain, Russia, and Prussia. The *Congress of Vienna* (1815) ending that war reasserted the principles of state sovereignty in reaction to the challenges of the French Revolution and Napoleon's empire.⁴⁵ In the *Concert of Europe* that dominated the following decades, the five most powerful states tried, with some success, to cooperate on major issues to prevent war—a possible precedent for today's UN Security Council. In this period, Britain became a balancer, joining alliances against whatever state emerged as the most powerful in Europe.

By the outset of the 20th century, three new rising powers had appeared on the scene: the United States (which had become the world's largest economy), Japan, and Italy. The great power system became globalized instead of European. Powerful states were industrializing, extending the scope of their world activities and the might of their militaries. After Prussia defeated Austria and France in wars, a larger Germany emerged to challenge

⁴⁴Rabb, Theodore K., ed. *The Thirty Years' War*. University Press of America, 1981.

⁴⁵Kissinger, Henry A. *A World Restored*. Houghton Mifflin, 1973 [1957].

FIGURE 2.5 The Great Power System, 1500–2000

| | | | | | | | | |
|------------------|--|--|---|--|---------------------------------|---|---|---------------------------------|
| Wars | Spain conquers Portugal | 30 Years' War | War of the Spanish Succession | 7 Years' War | Napoleonic Wars | World War I | World War II | Cold War |
| Major Alliances | Turkey (Muslim) vs. Europe (Christian) | Hapsburgs (Austria-Spain) vs. France, Britain, Netherlands, Sweden | France vs. Britain, Spain | France vs. Britain, Netherlands | France vs. Britain, Netherlands | Germany (& Japan) vs. Britain, France, Russia, United States, China | Germany (& Japan) vs. Britain, France, Russia, United States, China | Russia vs. U.S., W. Eur., Japan |
| Rules & Norms | Nation-states (France, Austria) | Dutch independence | Treaty of Utrecht 1713 | Kant on peace | Congress of Vienna 1815 | League of Nations | UN Security Council 1945- | Human rights |
| Rising Powers | Britain France | Netherlands | Prussia | United States Germany Japan Italy | Concert of Europe | U.S. hegemony | U.S. hegemony | China |
| Declining Powers | Venice | Netherlands hegemony | Netherlands Sweden Ottoman Empire | British hegemony | British hegemony | Britain France Austria Italy | Britain France Austria Italy | Russia |
| | 1500 | 1600 | 1700 | 1800 | 1900 | 2000 | | |

POLICY PERSPECTIVES

Prime Minister of India, Manmohan Singh

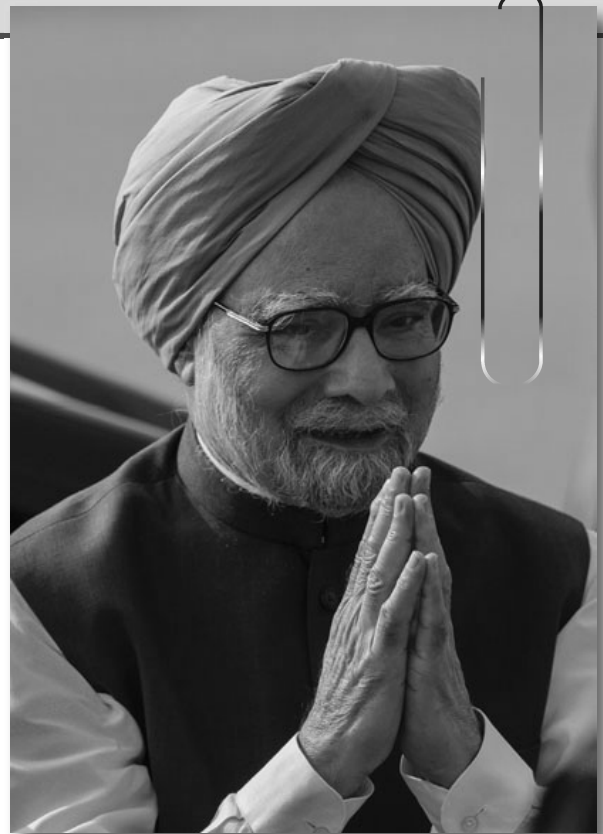
PROBLEM *How do you confront a fluid security environment by managing current and formal rivals?*

BACKGROUND As the world's largest democracy, your country faces many challenges both at home and abroad. In particular, in the past 50 years, you have fought wars against your two largest neighbors, China and Pakistan. Both states possess nuclear weapons, as do you. China and Pakistan have cooperated with each other in the past, including on sales of high technology military goods such as missiles.

Your generally hostile relationship with Pakistan grows from a territorial dispute over half of the region of Kashmir, which both of you claim, but India maintains control over. The territory is coveted not only by your respective governments but by the publics in each country as well. While there has been some cooperation between each country, tensions still run high over Kashmir. In the aftermath of the November 2008 terrorist attacks in Mumbai, many in your country blamed Pakistan since it is home to Islamic militant groups.

Your hostilities with China have cooled over the years, but China remains a major rival in the region and you still maintain competing claims over territory. Like your own country, China is large economically as well as militarily, and it attempts to exert strong leadership in your region. In the past two years, however, you have increased ties with China and you personally visited China at the beginning of 2008 to open discussions on future trade and military cooperation. In December 2007, your armies (the two largest in the world) held joint training exercises.

DOMESTIC CONSIDERATIONS Within your country, neither Pakistan nor China is a popular choice for allies. Your population is still angered by the Chinese victory in the 1962 Sino-Indian war and the disputed border territory that gave rise to the conflict. Yet your largely Hindu population is also angry at repeated attempts by Muslim Pakistan to gain control of Kashmir. Your advisors also remind you



that China still has a healthy relationship with Pakistan, selling large numbers of weapons and giving military assistance to Pakistan. Indeed the main political opposition parties argue that you have been too "soft" on both Pakistan and China in your time as Prime Minister. Any public backlash against your foreign policy on these issues could be widespread and bring calls for new elections that could unseat your government.

SCENARIO Imagine the government of Pakistan begins to suffer from large-scale instability. Islamist militants are close to overthrowing the government there, giving them control of Pakistan's nuclear weapons. They are also calling for Muslims in Kashmir to rise up against Indian control, promising to openly assist a rebellion in that province by providing weapons and intelligence. Your own intelligence service considers the collapse of the current Pakistani government "likely."

CHOOSE YOUR POLICY Do you push for closer relations with China as a result of instability in Pakistan? Can you trust China to support you in a dispute with Pakistan, given those countries' close relationship? Do you ask China to help mediate between your government and Pakistan in the event of hostilities? Or do you continue your course as independently as possible, not trusting Chinese intentions toward your country?



Statecraft

Classical realists emphasize *statecraft*—the art of managing state affairs and effectively maneuvering in a world of power politics among sovereign states. Power strategies are plans actors use to develop and deploy power capabilities to achieve their goals.

A key aspect of strategy is choosing the kinds of capabilities to develop, given limited resources, in order to maximize international influence. This requires foresight because the capabilities required to manage a situation may need to be developed years before that situation presents itself. Yet the capabilities chosen often will not be fungible in the short term. Central to this dilemma is what kind of standing military forces to maintain in peacetime—enough to prevent a quick defeat if war breaks out, but not so much as to overburden one's economy (see pp. 223–224).

Strategies also shape policies for when a state is willing to use its power capabilities. The *will* of a nation or leader is hard to estimate. Even if leaders make explicit their intention to fight over an issue, they might be bluffing.

The strategic actions of China in recent years exemplify the concept of strategy as rational deployment of power capabilities. China's central foreign policy goal is to prevent the independence of Taiwan, which China considers an integral part of its territory (as does the United Nations and, at least in theory, the United States). Taiwan's government was set up to represent all of China in 1949, when the nationalists took refuge there after losing to the communists in China's civil war. Since the international community's recognition of the Beijing government as "China," however, Taiwan has attempted to operate more and more independently, with many Taiwanese favoring independence. China may not have the military power to invade Taiwan successfully, but it has declared repeatedly that it will go to war if Taiwan declares independence. So far, even though such a war might be irrational on China's part, the threat has deterred Taiwan from formally declaring independence. China might lose such a war, but would certainly inflict immense damage on Taiwan. In 1996, China held war games near Taiwan, firing missiles over the sea. The United States sent two aircraft carriers to signal to China that its exercises must not go too far.

Not risking war by declaring independence, Taiwan instead has engaged in diplomacy to gain influence in the world. It lobbies the U.S. Congress, asks for admission to the UN and other world organizations, and grants foreign aid to countries that recognize Taiwan's government (23 mostly small, poor countries worldwide as of 2011).

China has used its own diplomacy to counter these moves. It breaks diplomatic relations with countries that recognize Taiwan, and it punishes any moves in the direction of Taiwanese independence. Half the countries that recognize Taiwan are in the Caribbean and Central America, leading to a competition for influence in the region. China has tried to counter Taiwanese ties with those countries by manipulating various positive and negative leverages. For example, in Panama, where China is a major user of the Panama Canal (which reverted to Panama from U.S. ownership in 1999), Taiwan has cultivated close relations, invested in a container port, and suggested hiring guest workers from Panama in Taiwan. But China has implicitly threatened to restrict Panama's access to Hong Kong, or to reregister China's many Panamanian-registered ships in the Bahamas instead. (The Bahamas broke with Taiwan in 1997 after a Hong Kong conglomerate, now part of China, promised to invest in a Bahamian container port.) Similarly, when the Pacific microstate of Kiribati recognized Taiwan in late 2003 to gain Taiwanese aid, China broke off relations and removed a Chinese satellite-tracking station from Kiribati. Because the tracking station played a vital role in China's military reconnaissance and growing space program—which had recently launched its first astronaut—its dismantling underscored China's determination to give Taiwan priority even at a cost to other key national goals.

Two of the seven vetoes China has used in the UN Security Council were to block peacekeeping forces in countries that extended recognition to Taiwan. These vetoes

AMPLIFYING POWER


Coherent strategy can help a state make the most of its power. China's foreign policy is generally directed toward its most important regional interests, above all preventing Taiwan's formal independence. Despite conflicts with a number of its neighbors, China has had no military engagements for 25 years. Here, China uses its veto in the UN Security Council for only the fifth time ever, to end a peacekeeping mission in Macedonia, which had just established ties with Taiwan, 1999.

demonstrate that if China believes its Taiwan interests are threatened, it can play a spoiler role on the Security Council. When the former Yugoslav republic of Macedonia recognized Taiwan in 1999 (in exchange for \$1 billion in aid), China vetoed a UN peacekeeping mission there at a time of great instability in next-door Kosovo (by 2001, Macedonia had switched its diplomatic recognition to China). By contrast, when its Taiwan interests are secure, China cooperates on issues of world order. For example, although China opposed the 1991 Gulf War, it did not veto the UN resolution authorizing it.

These Chinese strategies mobilize various capabilities, including missiles, diplomats, and industrial conglomerates, in a coherent effort to influence the outcome of China's most important international issue. Strategy thus amplifies China's power.⁵⁶

The strategy of **deterrence** uses a threat to punish another actor if it takes a certain negative action (especially attacking one's own state or one's allies). If deterrence works, its effects are almost invisible; its success is measured in attacks that did not occur.⁵⁷

Generally, advocates of deterrence believe that conflicts are more likely to escalate into war when one party to the conflict is weak. In this view, building up military capabilities usually convinces the stronger party that a resort to military leverage would not succeed, so conflicts are less likely to escalate into violence. A strategy of **compellence**, sometimes used after deterrence fails, refers to the threat of force to make another actor take some action (rather than refrain from taking an action).⁵⁸ Generally, it is harder to get another state to change course

(the purpose of compellence) than it is to get it to refrain from changing course (the purpose of deterrence).

⁵⁶Rohter, Larry. Taiwan and Beijing Duel for Recognition in Central America. *New York Times*, August 5, 1997: A7. Zhao, Quansheng. *Interpreting Chinese Foreign Policy: The Micro-Macro Linkage Approach*. Oxford, 1996.

Swaine, Michael, and Ashley Tellis. *Interpreting China's Grand Strategy: Past, Present, and Future*. Rand, 2000.

⁵⁷Zagare, Frank C. *Perfect Deterrence*. Cambridge, 2000. Goldstein, Avery. *Deterrence and Security in the 21st Century*. Stanford, 2000. Morgan, Patrick. *Deterrence Now*. Cambridge, 2003. Huth, Paul K. *Extended Deterrence and the Prevention of War*. Yale, 1988. Jervis, Robert, Richard Ned Lebow, and Janice Gross Stein. *Psychology and Deterrence*. Johns Hopkins, 1985. George, Alexander L., and Richard Smoke. *Deterrence in American Foreign Policy: Theory and Practice*. Columbia, 1974.

⁵⁸Schelling, Thomas C. *The Strategy of Conflict*. Harvard, 1960. Art, Robert J., and Patrick M. Cronin, eds. *The United States and Coercive Diplomacy*. U.S. Institute of Peace, 2003.

One strategy used to try to compel compliance by another state is *escalation*—a series of negative sanctions of increasing severity applied in order to induce another actor to take some action. In theory, the less severe actions establish credibility—showing the first actor’s willingness to exert its power on the issue—and the pattern of escalation establishes the high costs of future sanctions if the second actor does not cooperate. These actions should induce the second actor to comply, assuming that it finds the potential costs of the escalating punishments greater than the costs of compliance. But escalation can be quite dangerous. During the Cold War, many IR scholars worried that a conventional war could lead to nuclear war if the superpowers tried to apply escalation strategies.

An **arms race** is a reciprocal process in which two (or more) states build up military capabilities in response to each other. Because each wants to act prudently against a threat, the attempt to reciprocate leads to a runaway production of weapons by both sides. The mutual escalation of threats erodes confidence, reduces cooperation, and makes it more likely that a crisis (or accident) could cause one side to strike first and start a war rather than wait for the other side to strike. The arms race process was illustrated vividly in the U.S.-Soviet nuclear arms race, which created arsenals of tens of thousands of nuclear weapons on each side.⁵⁹

Rationality in International Relations

Most realists (and many nonrealists) assume that those who wield power while engaging in statecraft behave as **rational actors** in their efforts to influence others.⁶⁰ This view has two implications for IR.

INTERNAL DIVISIONS



The unitary actor assumption holds that states make important decisions as though they were single individuals able to act in the national interest. In truth, factions and organizations with differing interests put conflicting pressures on state leaders. In extreme cases, weak states do not control the armed factions within them. These Somali pirates being captured by Turkish commandos in 2009 are just one of the internal groups, ranging from autonomous territories to Islamist militants, that operate with impunity within Somalia.

⁵⁹ Isard, Walter, and Charles H. Anderton. Arms Race Models: A Survey and Synthesis. *Conflict Management and Peace Science* 8, 1985: 27–98. Glaser, Charles. When Are Arms Races Dangerous? Rational versus Suboptimal Arming. *International Security* 28 (4), 2004: 44–84.

⁶⁰ Brown, Michael E., Owen R. Cote, Sean M. Lynn-Jones, and Steven E. Miller, eds. *Rational Choice and Security Studies*. MIT, 2000. Lake, David A., and Robert Powell, eds. *Strategic Choice and International Relations*. Princeton, 1999. Fearon, James. Rationalist Explanations for War. *International Organization* 49 (3), 1995: 379–414. Friedman, Jeffrey, ed. *The Rational Choice Controversy: Economic Models of Politics Reconsidered*. Yale, 1996.

First, the assumption of rationality implies that states and other international actors can identify their interests and put priorities on various interests: A state's actions seek to advance its interests. Many realists assume that the actor (usually a state) exercising power is a single entity that can "think" about its actions coherently and make choices. This is called the *unitary actor* assumption, or sometimes the *strong leader* assumption. The assumption is a simplification, because the interests of particular politicians, parties, economic sectors, or regions of a country often conflict. Yet realists assume that the exercise of power attempts to advance the **national interest**—the interests of the state itself.

But what are the interests of a state? Are they the interests of a particular agency within the government? Are they the interests of domestic groups? The need to prevail in conflicts with other states (see Chapter 5)? The ability to cooperate with the international community for mutual benefit (see Chapter 7)? There is no simple answer. Some realists simply define the national interest as maximizing material power—a debatable assumption.⁶¹ Others compare power in IR with money in economics—a universal measure. In this view, just as firms compete for money in economic markets, states compete for power in the international system.⁶²

Second, rationality implies that actors are able to perform a **cost-benefit analysis**—calculating the costs incurred by a possible action and the benefits it is likely to bring. Applying power incurs costs and should produce commensurate gains. As in the problem of estimating power, one has to add up different dimensions in such a calculation. For instance, states presumably do not initiate wars that they expect to lose, except when they stand to gain political benefits, domestic or international, that outweigh the costs of losing the war. But it is not easy to tally intangible political benefits against the tangible costs of a war. Even victory in a war may not be worth the costs paid. Rational actors can miscalculate costs and benefits, especially when using faulty information (although this does not mean they are irrational). Finally, human behavior and luck can be unpredictable.

These assumptions about rationality and the actors in IR are simplifications that not all IR scholars accept. But realists consider these simplifications useful because they allow scholars to explain in a general way the actions of diverse actors.

The Prisoner's Dilemma

Game theory is a branch of mathematics concerned with predicting bargaining outcomes. A game is a setting in which two or more players choose among alternative moves, either once or repeatedly. Each combination of moves (by all players) results in a set of payoffs (utility) to each player. The payoffs can be tangible items such as money or any intangible items of value. Game theory aims to deduce likely outcomes (what moves players will make), given the players' preferences and the possible moves open to them. Games are sometimes called formal models.

Game theory was first used extensively in IR in the 1950s and 1960s by scholars trying to understand U.S.-Soviet nuclear war contingencies. Moves were decisions to use nuclear weapons in certain ways, and payoffs were outcomes of the war. The use of game theory to study international interactions has become more extensive among IR scholars in recent

⁶¹Waltz, *Theory of International Politics* (see footnote 7 in this chapter).

⁶²Morgenthau and Thompson, *Politics among Nations* (see footnote 6 in this chapter). Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics* (see footnote 13 in this chapter).

years, especially among realists, who accept the assumptions about rationality. To analyze a game mathematically, one assumes that each player chooses a move rationally, to maximize its payoff.

Different kinds of situations are represented by different classes of games, as defined by the number of players and the structure of the payoffs. One basic distinction is between **zero-sum games**, in which one player's gain is by definition equal to the other's loss, and *non-zero-sum games*, in which it is possible for both players to gain (or lose). In a zero-sum game there is no point in communication or cooperation between the players because their interests are diametrically opposed. But in a non-zero-sum game, coordination of moves can maximize the total payoff to the players, although each may still maneuver to gain a greater share of that total payoff.⁶³

The game called **Prisoner's Dilemma (PD)** captures the kind of collective goods problem common to IR. In this situation, rational players choose moves that produce an outcome in which all players are worse off than under a different set of moves. They all could do better, but as individual rational actors, they are unable to achieve this outcome. How can this be?

The original story tells of two prisoners questioned separately by a prosecutor. The prosecutor knows they committed a bank robbery but has only enough evidence to convict them of illegal possession of a gun unless one of them confesses. The prosecutor tells each prisoner that if he confesses and his partner doesn't confess, he will go free. If his partner confesses and he doesn't, he will get a long prison term for bank robbery (while the partner goes free). If both confess, they will get a somewhat reduced term. If neither confesses, they will be convicted on the gun charge and serve a short sentence. The story assumes that neither prisoner will have a chance to retaliate later, that only the immediate outcomes matter, and that each prisoner cares only about himself.

This game has a single solution: both prisoners will confess. Each will reason as follows: "If my partner is going to confess, then I should confess too, because I will get a slightly shorter sentence that way. If my partner is not going to confess, then I should still confess because I will go free that way instead of serving a short sentence." The other prisoner follows the same reasoning. The dilemma is that by following their individually rational choices, both prisoners end up serving a fairly long sentence—when they could have both served a short one by cooperating (keeping their mouths shut).

PD-type situations occur frequently in IR. One good example is an arms race. Consider the decisions of India and Pakistan about whether to build sizable nuclear weapons arsenals. Both have the ability to do so. Neither side can know whether the other is secretly building up an arsenal unless they reach an arms control agreement with strict verification provisions. To analyze the game, we assign values to each possible outcome—often called a *preference ordering*—for each player. This is not simple: If we misjudge the value a player puts on a particular outcome, we may draw wrong conclusions from the game.

The following preferences regarding possible outcomes are plausible: the best outcome would be that oneself but not the other player had a nuclear arsenal (the expense of building nuclear weapons would be worth it because one could then use them as leverage);

⁶³ O'Neill, Barry. A Survey of Game Theory Models on Peace and War. In Aumann, R., and S. Hart, eds. *Handbook of Game Theory*. Vol. 2. North-Holland, 1994. Powell, Robert. *In the Shadow of Power: States and Strategies in International Politics*. Princeton, 1999. Morrow, James D. *Game Theory for Political Scientists*. Princeton, 1995.

FIGURE 2.8 Payoff Matrix in India-Pakistan PD Game

| | | Pakistan | |
|-------|-----------|-----------|--------|
| | | Cooperate | Defect |
| India | Cooperate | (3,3) | (1,4) |
| | Defect | (4,1) | (2,2) |

Note: First number in each group is India's payoff, second is Pakistan's. The number 4 is highest payoff, 1 lowest.

second best would be for neither to go nuclear (no leverage, but no expense); third best would be for both to develop nuclear arsenals (a major expense without gaining leverage); worst would be to forgo nuclear weapons oneself while the other player developed them (and thus be subject to blackmail).

The game can be summarized in a *payoff matrix* (see Figure 2.8). The first number in each cell is India's payoff, and the second number is Pakistan's. To keep things simple, 4 indicates the highest payoff, and 1 the lowest. As is conventional, a decision to refrain from building nuclear weapons is called *cooperation*, and a decision to proceed with nuclear weapons is called *defection*. The dilemma here parallels that of the prisoners—each state's leader reasons: "If they go nuclear, we must; if they don't, we'd be crazy not to." The model seems to predict an inevitable Indian-Pakistani nuclear arms race, although both states would do better to avoid one.

In 1998, India detonated underground nuclear explosions to test weapons designs, and Pakistan promptly followed suit. In 2002, the two states nearly went to war, with projected war deaths of up to 12 million. A costly and dangerous arms race continues, and each side now has dozens of nuclear missiles, and counting. Avoiding an arms race would benefit both sides as a collective good, but the IR system, without strong central authority, does not allow them to realize this potential benefit. This example illustrates why realists tend to be pessimistic about cooperative solutions to collective goods problems such as the one that the PD game embodies.


IR scholars have analyzed many other games beyond PD. For example, *Chicken* represents two male teenagers speeding toward a head-on collision. The first to swerve is "chicken." Each reasons: "If he doesn't swerve, I must; but if he swerves, I won't." The player who first commits irrevocably not to swerve (for example, by throwing away the steering wheel or putting on a blindfold while behind the wheel) will win. Similarly, in the 1962 Cuban Missile Crisis, some scholars argued that President John F. Kennedy "won" by seeming ready to risk nuclear war if Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev did not back down and remove Soviet missiles from Cuba. (There are, however, alternative explanations of the outcome of the crisis.)

Chicken sheds light on the concept of *deterrence* (see p. 74). Deterrence involves convincing another actor not to undertake an action it otherwise would. Just as in the game of Chicken, when one driver commits to not swerving, state leaders attempt to convince others that they will respond harshly if they (or an ally) are attacked. But because not swerving risks disaster for both sides, it is difficult for one side to convince the other that he or she will risk crashing (fighting a war) if the other side decides not to swerve.⁶⁴

⁶⁴Goldstein, Joshua S. *Dilemmas: Crossing the Road to Cooperation*. In Zartman, I. William, and Saadia Touval, eds. *International Cooperation: The Extents and Limits of Multilateralism*. Cambridge, 2010.

Game theory often studies *interdependent decisions*—the outcome for each player depends on the actions of the other.

This chapter has focused on the concerns of realists—the interests of states, distribution of power among states, bargaining between states, and alliances of states. The chapter has treated states as unitary actors, much as one would analyze the interactions of individual people. The actions of state leaders have been treated as concerned with maximizing power through pursuing definable interests through coherent bargaining strategies. But realism is not the only way to frame the major issues of international relations. Chapter 3 reexamines these themes critically, relying less on the core principle of dominance and more on reciprocity and identity.

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CHAPTER REVIEW

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SUMMARY

- Realism explains international relations in terms of power.
- Realists and idealists differ in their assumptions about human nature, international order, and the potential for peace.
- Power can be conceptualized as influence or as capabilities that can create influence.
- The most important single indicator of a state’s power is its GDP.
- Short-term power capabilities depend on long-term resources, both tangible and intangible.
- Realists consider military force the most important power capability.
- International anarchy—the absence of world government—means that each state is a sovereign and autonomous actor pursuing its own national interests.
- The international system traditionally places great emphasis on the sovereignty of states, their right to control affairs in their own territory, and their responsibility to respect internationally recognized borders.
- Seven great powers account for half of the world’s GDP as well as the great majority of military forces and other power capabilities.
- Power transition theory says that wars often result from shifts in relative power distribution in the international system.
- Hegemony—the predominance of one state in the international system—can help provide stability and peace in international relations, but with some drawbacks.
- The great power system is made up of about half a dozen states (with membership changing over time as state power rises and falls).
- States form alliances to increase their effective power relative to that of another state or alliance.
- Alliances can shift rapidly, with major effects on power relations.