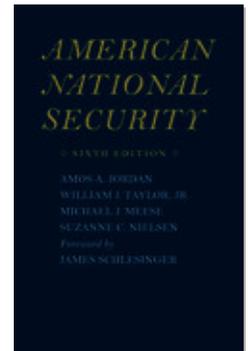# American National Security

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The International Setting

Every day, newspapers, television news channels, and Internet sites cover a wide variety of political, economic, and military developments around the world. Given this vast volume and variety of information, it can be difficult to determine which events and trends are most likely to affect the national security of the United States. Although the derivation of a constant set of generic criteria may be impossible, theories and concepts from the discipline of political science can help concerned observers analyze and assess a complex international system.

Unfortunately, there is no "silver bullet" or simple answer that holds the key to understanding international politics and their setting. However, reliable conclusions are more likely when an analyst explicitly acknowledges assumptions, is unambiguous about the meaning of key concepts, and can clearly state the logic of his or her cause-and-effect arguments. This approach best prepares the analyst to analyze the evidence and test assessments in light of competing views and explanations. Of course, all analyses of important issues are likely to be accompanied by uncertainty. A sensible approach for both analysts and policy makers would include an estimate of the degree of uncertainty associated with a particular assessment, an exploration of potential implications, and a provision for hedging against key uncertainties wherever possible. Although a sound understanding of the international environment is not sufficient to ensure good national security decisions, it is an essential starting point.

National Security

The term *national security* refers to the safeguarding of a people, territory, and way of life. It includes protection from physical assault and in that sense is similar to

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the term *defense*. However, national security also implies protection, through a variety of means, of a broad array of interests and values. In one definition the phrase is commonly asserted to mean "physical security, defined as the protection against attack on the territory and the people of the United States in order to ensure survival with fundamental values and institutions intact; promotion of values; and economic prosperity."[1] Preserving the national security of the United States requires safeguarding individual freedoms and other U.S. values, as well as the laws and institutions established to protect them. The specific definitions used by different analysts may vary, and the prioritization of national interests may be difficult and controversial. Nevertheless, in essence, national security encompasses the protection of the fundamental values and core interests necessary to the continued existence and vitality of the state.[2]

This traditional conception of national security, which focuses on preserving the state from threats, is being challenged from several directions. One set of questions has been raised by those who believe that traditional notions of national security have focused too much on threats from other states and have paid inadequate heed to a variety of transnational phenomena. Some of these transnational forces, such as migration, narcotics, transnational crime, and terrorism, have human beings as the main actors. However, other phenomena, such as environmental degradation, critical resource shortages, and infectious diseases, might not be the specific product of human intention, yet they still pose critical challenges to states. Advocates for a focus on this broader security agenda—an agenda that has received greater emphasis since the end of the Cold War—believe that these issues deserve a place next to traditional military and economic issues as national security priorities.[3]

A second challenge, related but even more fundamental, is raised by scholars and policy advocates working in a field known as *human security*. They question the adequacy of the concept of national security itself by challenging the presumption that the state rather than the individual is the key unit of value. Particularly in predatory, failing, or failed states, security from external threats may not be the most meaningful concern. As one recent study states, "during the last 100 years far more people have been killed by their own governments than by foreign armies." The study goes on to note that violent conflicts within states "now make up more than 95% of armed conflicts."[4] Scholars vary in the definition of human security that they use, with some focusing on the full range of threats to personal well-being and dignity and others focusing more narrowly on political violence. However, they agree on putting the welfare of individuals at the center of their analyses. Though this volume focuses primarily on traditional national security issues, the new security agenda and human security are discussed in greater depth in Chapter 25.

A third challenge to traditional concepts of national security is one of emphasis rather than content. One could argue that protection of the home territory has always been a priority, even if in certain periods of U.S. history it could be taken somewhat for granted. However, after the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks that killed almost three thousand people on U.S. territory, homeland security has received new emphasis. The terrorist attacks highlighted limitations in the understanding

of important threats; inadequacies in the United States' ability to prevent attacks; the need for organizational reforms in federal bureaucracies; and the imperative to enhance cooperation across federal, state, and local levels of government. When President George W. Bush signed legislation creating the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) in November 2002, he created an organization intended to "prevent terrorist attacks within the United States; reduce America's vulnerability to terrorism; and minimize the damage and recover from attacks that do occur." To accomplish this, the new DHS "would mobilize and focus the resources of the federal government, state and local governments, the private sector, and the American people."[5]

Though properly considered to be a component of national security, a new focus on homeland security has highlighted problems not previously emphasized due to the historical tendency of national security analysts to focus on external threats. The increased salience of homeland security concerns will be particularly evident in Part II of this volume, on national security actors and processes, and is the specific focus of Chapter 6.

The term *national security* is an elastic one; its meaning and implications have expanded, contracted, and shifted over time. Reminiscent of Dr. Samuel Johnson's definition of patriotism as "the last refuge of scoundrels," protection of national security has sometimes even been invoked to justify or conceal illegal acts. Because national security issues can involve high stakes, it is especially important to critically analyze arguments invoking national security as a justification for a position or action. It is also useful to remember that national security policy in the U.S. context serves both material interests and nonmaterial values and to return occasionally to first principles. Does a particular policy further U.S. security or economic interests while preserving the U.S. Constitution and the framework it establishes for the American way of life? If the answer to that question is uncertain, then so may be the grounds on which a particular policy rests.

Perspectives on International Politics

Among scholars of international relations, three of the most important intellectual perspectives are realism, liberalism, and constructivism.[6] These worldviews affect such basic assumptions as which phenomena are truly important and how the world is expected to operate. These perspectives have practical relevance because, just as scholars may accept core assumptions of a particular worldview, so may policy makers. It is useful for both scholars and policy makers to be self-conscious about their perspectives so they understand the likely strengths and weaknesses of their approaches. Clarity about core assumptions may also help policy makers anticipate circumstances under which their various initiatives may be mutually reinforcing or internally contradictory.

Realism.   The oldest and perhaps most dominant tradition with regard to the nature of international politics is *realism*. With intellectual roots dating back to Thucydides and Machiavelli, realists see international politics as a dangerous,

conflict-prone realm in which security is far from guaranteed. States are the primary actors and can be analyzed as if they were unitary and rational actors whose core national interest can be defined as power. Given the presence of anarchy—defined as the lack of a single authority with sovereign power over states in the international system—realists assert that states must pursue self-help strategies in order to survive. Though some states may seek only to maintain their own survival, others may seek universal domination. To preserve independence and prevent destruction, states seek to balance the power of other states either through alliances or through internal means of increasing their relative power, such as arms build-ups or economic mobilization. Although alliances may be useful forms of cooperation, they should be expected to last only as long as the common threat that initially brought the allies together.

An important contribution of the realist school of thought is its emphasis on the central concept of power. Though it can be tempting to define power as influence or as the ability to get one's way, this approach can easily become misleading. For example, Canada's victory in a trade dispute with the United States does not make it reasonable to conclude that Canada is more powerful. Political theorist Kenneth Waltz sought to give the term a more scientific and measurable formulation, arguing that power was a combination of seven components: size of population, territory, resource endowment, economic capability, military strength, political stability, and competence.[7] All these elements must be considered in any assessment, though the weighting of the different elements varies in different contexts. Waltz's central prediction is that states can be expected to react to the power of other states by engaging in balancing behavior. He argues that if "there is any distinctively political theory of international politics, balance of power theory is it."[8]

In an effort to refine Waltz's approach, Stephen Walt argues that power is important but not fully adequate to explain what motivates state behavior. States respond not just to power, but to *threat*, with threat defined as encompassing power as well as geographic proximity, offensive power, and aggressive intentions.[9] Though Waltz and Walt differ slightly on the key motivator for balancing behavior, they have in common the majority of assumptions that characterize the realist school of thought: The world is a dangerous place in which each state must ensure its own survival by obtaining and competently applying power.

Although realism has proven itself an enduring and valued paradigm, it has weaknesses as well as strengths. Realists have traditionally emphasized the primacy of the state and the relative importance of relations among the great powers.[10] In an era marked by the decreasing relevance of state boundaries and by weak and failed states as the source of critical transnational threats, the primacy that realists give to great power competition is challenged. A second issue is the priority that realists give to power and security—especially military security. Realists may be right about the centrality of these state concerns, but this may simultaneously make realism a less valuable approach to explaining state policies in other issue areas. For example, although a realist perspective may help to explain international trade issues in some cases, convincing scholarship has argued for the frequent significance of other variables, such as domestic interests, domestic and

international institutions, the structure of the international economy, and the interactions of state and nonstate actors.[11]

Finally, realism does not contain within itself an adequate explanation of change. To a great extent, realists have taken pains to point out continuity in international politics. For example, realists might argue that the same fear that Sparta had of an increasingly powerful Athens—which Thucydides argues contributed to war between those powers more than two thousand years ago—could just as easily serve as a powerful explanation for war today.[12] This emphasis on the balance of power between states and states as key actors makes realists less likely to explore such potential system-transforming phenomena as the rising importance of transnational actors and the impact of the processes of globalization on the international system.

Liberalism.   A second major international relations tradition has its roots in the political writings of Immanuel Kant and other Enlightenment thinkers. Whereas the core value for realists is state security, the core values for liberals are individual liberty and moral autonomy. Though states may still be seen as the key actors in international politics, their status rests on whether or not they can reasonably be seen as the legitimate guarantors of the rights and aspirations of their populations. This perspective underpins the right to rebel that exists within the political theory of important liberal thinkers, such as John Locke.[13] Where a realist may be content to assume that a state is unitary and not carefully analyze domestic institutions or politics, a liberal sees societal actors as having central importance.[14] According to the liberal tradition, democratic institutions, as well as liberal democratic values within a population, will have an important impact on foreign policy behavior.

With regard to U.S. national security, perhaps the single most important international relations insight stemming from the liberal tradition is *democratic peace theory*. This theory seeks to explain the empirical reality that liberal democracies have rarely gone to war with one another. Though the exact mechanisms through which this result has been achieved are the focus of ongoing research, explanations generally focus on the nature of democratic institutions and norms. Democratic institutions require consensus and therefore create time for debate, as well as preclude wars for unpopular purposes (presumably war with another liberal democracy would be unpopular). Democratic norms emphasize peaceful conflict resolution and compromise—especially with another democratic government, which is seen as the legitimate custodian of the interests of its people.[15]

In addition to focusing greater attention on the domestic characteristics of states, liberalism also differs from realism in the mechanisms it suggests for the maintenance of international peace and stability. Though realists would likely dismiss any suggestions that a permanent peace between states is possible, they would hold that periods of relative peace and stability can be achieved if states prudently look to their interests (defined as power) and pay adequate attention to ensuring a balance of power in the international system.[16] Liberals, on the other hand, would be more likely to look to the mechanisms identified by Kant in his

political essays "Perpetual Peace: A Philosophical Sketch" and "Idea for a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Purpose."[17]

In the first of these essays, Kant hypothesizes that a permanent peace would have three characteristics: All states would have representative, elected governments; these governments would form a federation among themselves to resolve differences and to ensure an overwhelming response to any state's aggression; and individuals would enjoy the basic right of not automatically being treated as an enemy when arriving in a foreign land. This last provision, a minimal human right that opens the door to commerce, identifies a mechanism for the development of peaceful relations, which is further developed in the second of Kant's essays. According to this essay, trade will increase the interconnectedness between societies, which will in turn increase the benefits of peaceful relations and heighten the costs of increasingly destructive wars.

Although scholars working within the liberal tradition have refined these basic arguments and developed more specific propositions since Kant's time, his central ideas still underpin much of the liberal approach. Democratic peace theorists explore the possible benefits of democracy in terms of peace and security. Kant's notion of a federation of states is an early articulation of the focus of modern liberal theorists on the roles that international institutions and international law can play in furthering common interests among states. Finally, the idea that increased trade can promote peace continues to inform liberal thinking. For example, Robert Keohane and Joseph Nye developed an approach called *complex interdependence* that sees the mutual dependence between states created by economic interconnectedness as making conflict less likely.[18]

For most liberals, these ideas are underpinned by some concept of universal rights and the view that the freedom and moral autonomy of the individual are central values. A classic statement of this viewpoint can be found in the U.S. Declaration of Independence: "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness. That to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed."[19] The liberal desire to protect the individual is embodied in international law, such as the "Universal Declaration of Human Rights" adopted by the United Nations (UN) in 1948, as well as in the Law of War.[20]

Like realism, liberalism has both strengths and weaknesses. It is a historical fact that liberal democracies have rarely if ever fought one another, though the process of democratization can itself be quite dangerous to international peace and security.[21] International law can be useful in defining standards, in establishing a mechanism to punish individuals when domestic systems cannot, and in providing legitimacy, but its most significant shortcoming is the lack of guaranteed enforcement. Similarly, international institutions have been significant mechanisms in helping states to achieve mutually beneficial outcomes—think of the contribution of the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (later the World Trade Organization) in facilitating free trade—but are also limited by uncertain enforcement. Finally, increased international commerce has improved individual welfare around the

world—if unevenly—and the mechanism of mutual dependence has been used to make war less likely between states. As an example, Germany and France established the European Coal and Steel Community (which has now evolved into the European Union [EU]) in the early post–World War II years with the intent of making war between them less likely. But, even in the area of trade there have been disappointments. In 1910, Sir Norman Angell published *The Great Illusion*, arguing that economic interconnectedness made war obsolete and conquest counterproductive. Of course, World War I broke out only four years later. Overall, the world wars in the middle of the twentieth century were great setbacks to the liberal vision. Enlightenment did not necessarily mean progress, and economic interdependence, democracy, and international institutions were not adequate to preserve the peace.

Neoconservativism.   Although it is not an enduring tradition of international relations, such as those discussed above, an American school of thought that achieved prominence and influence in U.S. foreign and security policy in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries is *neoconservativism*—a perspective that actually blends propositions from the realist and liberal traditions. Neoconservatives have much in common with the realist view, seeing the international environment as dangerous and as more characterized by conflict than by cooperation. Like the realists, they put power at the center of their analyses and see it as the responsibility of the great powers—or, more precisely, the United States, as the world's only remaining superpower—to manage world affairs and to provide what peace and stability can be attained.[22] They are skeptical of the notion of an international community and of the idea that consensus among states that uphold different values confers meaningful legitimacy. They also question the value of international law and international institutions, especially the UN, which has proven itself, in their view, to be the "guarantor of nothing."[23]

Despite these commonalities with a realist perspective, neoconservativism also incorporates strands of liberal thought, viewing realism as ultimately inadequate for its lack of moral vision. The use of U.S. power should always be guided by moral values and should be used to promote "democracy, free markets, [and] respect for liberty."[24] As have many liberal-tradition thinkers, neoconservatives have argued that doing the morally right thing—such as supporting the development of liberal, democratic governments abroad—would also be the best way to promote U.S. interests. Neoconservatives share with at least some liberals the notion that the condition of international affairs is improvable, though by using U.S. power rather than by strengthening mechanisms of global governance. International institutions and international law, in the neoconservative worldview, often merely mask efforts of weak or undesirable actors to restrict U.S. freedom of action.

The reader can evaluate the degree to which the neoconservative outlook reflects traditional American approaches to national security by consulting Chapter 2. Here, it is sufficient to note that both realists and liberals challenge the neoconservative outlook for different reasons. Neoconservatives have argued that "America must be guided by its independent judgment, both about its own interest and the

global interest."[25] Realists would deride the notion of a "global interest," as well as the claims of any state to possess and to be acting in accordance with universal moral values. Liberals would question the legitimacy of U.S. claims to this decision-making authority and question the ability of the United States to exercise it well. A second issue stems from the neoconservative claim that the United States is a uniquely benign global hegemon, which validates and enables its world leadership.[26] Realists might question the importance of a benign status but be even more skeptical of the notion that the United States is capable of remaking the world in its own image. Liberals question whether the unilateral use of U.S. power, particularly the U.S. military, can succeed at democracy promotion and whether such an approach would preserve global perceptions that the United States is benign. Whatever its future, neoconservatism has been charged with being excessively realist for its focus on material power and U.S. national interests, as well as excessively idealist in its agenda of democracy promotion abroad.[27] It has also been widely criticized as the rationale for increased unilateralism and the decision to invade Iraq in 2003.

Constructivism.   In addition to realism and liberalism, a third worldview is offered by scholars working within a paradigm known as *constructivism* who examine the potential importance of nonmaterial as well as material factors in shaping situations and affecting outcomes. For example, Alexander Wendt rejects the centrality that a realist might give to the distribution of material capabilities, arguing instead that relative material capabilities only affect behavior in the context of amity or enmity between the actors involved. As an example, the imbalance of power between the United States and Canada does not foster the same sense of insecurity that is created by the imbalance between India and Pakistan (see Chapter 19). Shared knowledge and the practices of the actors involved are also important in understanding how states will behave in any given situation.[28]

Besides illuminating the potential importance of nonmaterial factors in shaping the relations among states, an additional constructivist contribution is to provide an explanation for change. The constructivist asserts that identity not only shapes but is also shaped by social interaction over time. Because change may occur at a level of values and fundamental interests rather than just at the level of behavior, the fundamental character of international politics could change over time as the interactions among states affect the identity of the actors involved.

The constructivist view of international relations aids in the examination of a number of issues of potential significance to national security. For example, constructivism provides an approach that facilitates an understanding of aspects of identity, such as strategic or organizational culture, that may help to explain a state's behavior.[29] As a second example, constructivists have looked at the role of international norms, such as those that govern state intervention into other states, to evaluate how they may shape behavior as well as how they have evolved over time.[30] As a final example, constructivists examine socialization processes—such as the interaction of states in international institutions—for their potential explanatory

power.[31] Constructivists offer an alternative worldview that adds to the manner in which scholars and policy makers can seek to understand the behavior of key actors in international politics.

Key Concepts

This section introduces four concepts that are essential tools to critical and analytical thinking about international politics: anarchy, sovereignty, levels of analysis, and power.

Anarchy.   As used in international relations, the term *anarchy* refers not to mere disorder, but instead to a lack of formal and authoritative government. It is the existence of anarchy that distinguishes international politics from the domestic realm. Although there may be such mechanisms as international institutions intended to provide some degree of governance within particular issue areas, in the world as it exists today, there is no single authority to which one can turn that can arbitrate disagreements and enforce the decisions that result from such arbitration.

The traditions of international relations discussed above agree on the existence of anarchy; they merely disagree on its implications. For such realists as Hobbes, where there is no overarching authority, there is no law and no peace because individuals must constantly compete with one another merely to survive.[32] Among states in a condition of anarchy, one should expect constant suspicion and the ever-present possibility of war. For such liberals as Locke, on the other hand, society is possible in the absence of a common authority. Instead of constant war, the state of nature is one of inconvenience because enforcement is uncertain. An implication of this view is that states could form some type of rudimentary society in which, even in the absence of world government, they could cooperate to achieve mutual gains. For constructivists, either the realist or the liberal outcome could be possible, depending on the identities of the states involved and the social context of their interactions.

Sovereignty.   The modern conception of sovereignty dates to the Peace of Westphalia in 1648, which many mark as the origin of the modern state system. Intended to bring a bloody period of religious conflict to a close, the Peace of Westphalia also reflected a desire to limit future wars by establishing the principle of sovereignty. In essence, sovereignty means that each state has total authority over its own population within its own territory. Modern recognition of sovereignty can be found in the UN Charter. This document recognizes the "sovereign equality" of all of the member states of the UN and affirms that "nothing contained in the present Charter shall authorize the United Nations to intervene in matters which are essentially within the domestic jurisdiction of any state."[33]

Many important national security issues involve the concept of sovereignty. A first instance is the concept of the formal legal equality of all states. Though this is recognized in the UN General Assembly, where each state gets one vote, the limits to this idea are also recognized in the UN Security Council, where five

permanent, great-power members get a veto. States may be legally equal, but relative power also shapes how they interact. A second issue is the contrast between the ideal of sovereignty and the fact that many of the world's more than 190 states lack sufficient capacity to exercise full control over their populations and territories. This shortcoming in governance helps to create, and makes it more difficult to resolve, a variety of transnational security concerns. A third issue relates to limits to sovereignty. In 1951, for example, the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide went into force, which commits the contracting states to "undertake to prevent and to punish" acts of genocide.[34] This international agreement makes clear that genocide, perhaps the most egregious form of human rights violation, justifies the intervention of states into each other's affairs. As states decide when to intervene in response to either human rights or security concerns, the value of preserving the ideal of sovereignty as a limiting force in international conflict is a value that must be carefully weighed.

Levels of Analysis.   As an organizing framework, levels of analysis can be of great utility in aiding clear and critical thinking about international affairs. Introduced by Waltz in *The Man, the State, and War* in 1959 as the three "images" of international relations, the concept of levels of analysis has become a common organizing framework for thinking about the causes of outcomes in international politics.[35] As a useful simplification, the causes of international developments can be thought of as stemming from the nature of individuals, domestic factors, or the international system as a whole. Though one or another may have greater explanatory power in a given instance, all may well bear on a given case.

Individual Level of Analysis.   One place to look for causes of events is at the individual level of analysis. As an example, some argue that war will always be a part of the human experience, because the tendency toward competition and violence is intrinsic to human nature. This view that war is embedded in human nature has been held by a number of leading realist thinkers, including Thucydides and Hans Morgenthau. Though perhaps plausible, this perspective cannot provide a complete account, because an unchanging human nature cannot explain variations in war and peace over time. There are other explanations that also reside at the individual level of analysis that are more helpful in accounting for variation. These explanations may draw upon the role of psychological factors or even specific personalities. As a case in point, analysts argue that Saddam Hussein's personal characteristics played a role in the defeat of his regime at the hands of U.S.-led coalition forces in 2003.[36] Caution is called for here as well. Although the characteristics of individuals may often be important, a focus upon them must be accompanied by an explanation as to the process through which individual motivations and dispositions are able to affect state action.

Domestic Level of Analysis.   A second approach suggests that actions in international affairs are best understood as the product of the internal character of states.

Vladimir Lenin's view of the imperialistic activities of capitalist states is an example.[37] He believed that the capitalistic states' struggle for markets, resources, and profits would inevitably lead them to dominate and exploit the underdeveloped areas of the world. As the potential colonial territory of the world diminished, Lenin foresaw increased competition that would ultimately result in violent conflict among the imperial states and the end of the capitalist system.

Other possible characteristics of states that have been hypothesized to affect international behavior include their political institutions, culture, ideology, and bureaucratic and organizational politics. Democratic peace theory provides an example of the first two. In explaining why liberal democratic states do not war with one another, some analysts emphasize the characteristics of democratic institutions, while others highlight shared cultural beliefs and values that conduce to the peaceful resolution of differences. The third characteristic mentioned above, ideology, is of course not always peaceful. Defined as a set "of beliefs that give meaning to life" and "an explicit or implicit program of action," the program-of-action component can constitute a threat to states of differing ideologies.[38] As exemplified in the German Third Reich, Nazism was a threat to every other ideology. Finally, numerous scholars have examined the manner in which bureaucratic politics within a government and the characteristics of large government organizations can influence state behavior.[39]

International Level of Analysis.   A final place to focus when seeking to understand actions or outcomes in international politics is the international system as a whole. Accepting anarchy as a starting point, those who look to the international system generally focus on one of two categories—process or structure.

Those who look to *process* examine the interactions of states or even the transnational forces that are not clearly motivated by or confined within particular states. An example of the focus on states is provided by theorists who focus on the weight of international institutions in shaping state behavior. Given the existence of self-interested states in an anarchic system, it may nevertheless be possible to structure their interactions through institutions so that cooperation is more likely.[40] An example of the focus on transnational forces is provided by scholars and policy makers who argue for the importance of globalization. Although there is not one single agreed-upon definition, *globalization* is generally seen as an ongoing process that is decreasing the significance of state borders.[41] Enabled by reductions in transport and communication costs, new technologies, and the policy choices of many of the world's political leaders, international trade is increasing, international flows of capital are on the rise, the nature of international business activity is changing, and there is a tremendous diffusion of cultural forms. Although it may be difficult to point to globalization as the specific cause of any one event or outcome, its processes are arguably changing the character of international politics by altering the relative economic power of states, raising the salience of certain transnational concerns, increasing the challenges of global governance, and empowering new actors (see Chapter 25).

In addition to process, the *structure* of the international system can also be useful for understanding international politics. Perhaps the clearest formulation of this is in Waltz's *Theory of International Politics*. He argues that as long as anarchy exists and two or more actors seek to survive, it is possible to understand a lot about the nature of international politics merely by knowing the number of great powers in the international system.[42] For instance, a world with one great power which outstrips all others, or *unipole* (as is arguably the case with the United States today), will see other powers seeking to balance against that dominant state. At the same time, the unipole will be tempted into an overactive role in the world, because its power is unchecked.[43] Waltz's argument helpfully illuminates general tendencies, but it is unlikely to yield the specific, context-sensitive prescriptions needed by policy makers.

National Power.   Despite the central importance of the concept of power, there is no universally accepted definition. This lack of agreement partially stems from four aspects of power that make it difficult to settle on a single formulation. The first of these is that power is *dynamic*. New instruments of power have appeared continuously over the centuries, and new applications for old forms are always being found. Even a seemingly backward society can achieve surprising results under strong political leadership that is willing and able to engender sacrifice and a sense of purpose among its people. The defeat of the French in Vietnam and the subsequent failure of the U.S. intervention to support South Vietnam are classic cases. The collapse of the Soviet Union in the early 1990s provides an example of the manner in which a particular state's power can change dramatically over time.

In addition to being dynamic, power is also *relative*, *situational*, and at least partially *subjective*. Power is relative because its utility depends in part on comparing it with whatever opposes it, and it is situational because what may generate power in a particular set of circumstances may not in another. Finally, it is subjective in that a reputation for being powerful may be sufficient to achieve results without power actually having to be applied.

Despite these difficulties, it is nevertheless possible to say something useful about power by focusing on its relatively objective characteristics—measurements of capabilities. One of the classic definitions is Morgenthau's from *Politics Among Nations*. He defines power as consisting of: geography, natural resources, industrial capacity, military preparedness, technology and innovations, leadership, quantity and quality of armed forces, population, national character, national morale, quality of diplomacy, and quality of government.[44] Morgenthau argues that these aspects must be evaluated for the both the present and the future, and that an assessment requires analyzing each factor, associated trends, and how these trends are likely to interact over time.[45] Waltz, in his later definition already introduced above, emphasizes only seven elements. Though simpler, Waltz's formulation is similar to Morgenthau's in that they both cannot fully resolve difficulties in assessment stemming from imperfect information, weighting, and aggregation. Because of these difficulties, even careful efforts to assess and measure relative power will always be accompanied with a degree of uncertainty.

In the parlance of some observers of international relations, the definition of power as capabilities is also known as *hard power*. This is to distinguish it from a competing concept, *soft power*. Originally coined by Nye, soft power refers to "the ability to achieve desired outcomes in international affairs through attraction rather than coercion." He explains:

> It works by convincing others to follow, or getting them to agree to, norms and institutions that produce the desired behavior. . . . If a state can make its power legitimate in the perception of others and establish international institutions that encourage them to channel or limit their activities, it may not need to expend many of its costly traditional economic or military resources.[46]

If power is not thought of as an end in itself, but rather as a means to further U.S. interests and values, Nye argues that the power of attraction and legitimacy can help the United States to secure these interests and values at lesser cost. Skeptics, on the other hand, argue that soft power will tend to have little or no force in shaping the behavior of other states when they have important interests at stake.

Assessing national power is an art, not a science; any specific assessment will be open to a variety of challenges. National security analysts in and out of public office are inescapably faced with the task of identifying a moving and ill-defined target and of counting that which has often yet to be adequately measured. Still, policy makers in Washington and the rest of the world must act, however scant and unreliable their information may be. National power, in one sense or another, is generally a central feature of the analyses behind their actions.

Practical Assessments of Power. When decision makers actually assess power, they invariably do so in specific contexts; that is, they engage not in some general, theoretical exercise but in a specific, situational analysis: *Who* is involved, over *what issue*, *where,* and *when*? Taking each of these questions in turn, the *who* element is crucial. Not only are all states not equal in quantity of resources, but the quality also differs. Health, education, motivation, and other factors confound attempts to establish reliable equivalency ratios. As an example, Israel manages to more than hold its own against adversaries many times its size. Though no government can make something from nothing, clearly some can and do have the organizational, managerial, technical, scientific, and leadership skills that enable them to make much more with equal or lesser amounts of similar resources.

This leads to the second element of situational analysis—namely, the *issue*. Its significance lies largely in the support or lack thereof given to national leaders over a particular matter. All governments depend on at least the passive support of their citizens in order to function, and none can expect to endure once it has lost that minimum loyalty embodied in the term *legitimacy*. As long as a government satisfies the minimum expectations of the politically active or potentially active members of its society, there is little chance of internal upheaval.[47] Mobilizing resources to apply to national security tasks requires more than passive support, however; it invariably necessitates some degree of sacrifice and active involvement. For some issues, such support may be difficult to muster; others have an

almost electrifying effect upon a nation's consciousness, eliciting enormous willingness to sacrifice. The attack on Pearl Harbor in 1941 had such an effect on the American people; the terrorist attacks on 9/11 arguably had the same potential—at least initially. The morass of Vietnam had little such support even at the outset and, like the war in Iraq begun in 2003, gradually generated quite the opposite. Between extremes of support and dissent lie most national security issues. In these cases, leaders must build support for those tasks they believe important or resign themselves to impotence.

The third situational feature of power is geographic—*where* events take place. All states are capable of making some sort of splash somewhere in the pool of world politics, normally in their own immediate areas. No matter how large a splash may be, its effects tend to dissipate with distance from the source. The ability to apply resources at a distance sufficient to overcome resistance generated by those closer to the conflict has always characterized great powers; it continues to provide a useful test by which to appraise claimants to that status.

This introduces the final situational feature of power, *time*. The interplay of leaders' ambitions and creativity, changes in resources, technological developments, and the public response to challenges all work to effect a continual redistribution of global power. Empires acquired to the great satisfaction of their builders have overtaxed the abilities of their successors to maintain them, resulting not only in the loss of domain but in the collapse of the founding unit as well. The Soviet Union's demise makes this point dramatically. Similarly, the piecemeal application of resources may ultimately produce a long-term drain that adversely affects areas of national life not originally thought vulnerable. This insight in part motivates those concerned about U.S. activism abroad during the 1990s and into the early twenty-first century.

Application of Power.   Power for its own sake can be likened to money in the hands of a miser; it may delight its owner, but it is of little consequence to the world because it is applied to no useful purpose. The American experience between the two world wars in many ways resembles such a situation. In profound isolation, the United States forfeited its initiative in world affairs to other states, principally to the traditional European powers and Japan. The reputation of the United States as a significant military power, established in the Spanish-American War and World War I, plus its geographic advantage of being separated from other great powers by oceans served to protect the nation and its interests during this period. But reputation is a fleeting thing, especially for great powers that are identified in their own time with the existing world order. Steamship and bomber technology partially overcame the barrier of the oceans, while a foreign policy of isolationism eroded the American military reputation. Pearl Harbor and four very expensive years of war were the result of ignoring the relevance and uses of power.

The purpose of power is to overcome resistance in order to bring about or secure a preferred order of things. When the resistance is generated by other human beings, the purpose of power is to persuade those others to accept the designs or preferences in question or to destroy their ability to offer continued resistance.

LURIE'S WORLD

"Now, if you'll just put it down carefully....."

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Depending upon the importance attached to the goal, the capabilities available to the respective protagonists, the skills they possess in applying those capabilities, the vulnerabilities each has in other areas upon which the opposition may capitalize, and the history of conflict between them, the techniques of persuasion can take either of two principal forms: rewards or punishments.

Rewards themselves are of two types: the presentation of some benefit in exchange for the desired reaction or the willingness to forgo negative behavior in exchange for compliance. Threats in this context are considered part of the reward approach to persuasion, because unless and until the threatening actor delivers on its threat, no actual harm has occurred. Either type of reward will work as long as all parties concerned feel they are getting something worthy of the exchange or are minimizing their losses in a situation where all the alternatives appear worse.

Since the early 1990s, U.S. negotiations with North Korea over the status of its nuclear weapons program provide examples of each. The United States has proven willing to offer North Korea aid and other incentives for verifiable disarmament. At the same time, the United States has threatened economic embargo and even harsher measures in the absence of compliance. (For more on the North Korean nuclear situation, see Chapter 18.)

When nations in a dispute decide to carry out a threat or initiate negative action without prior threat, they are seeking to persuade through *punishment* or coercion. Clearly, such persuasion works only if the actor being punished can avert its predicament by compliance. Therefore the threatened punishment, its timing, and

its application must be chosen carefully in order to achieve the desired effect. To punish indiscriminately not only squanders resources, driving up costs, but also may be counterproductive in that it antagonizes and sharpens resistance by forcing a change in the perception of stakes.

International Relations Theory and National Security Policy

International relations theories can often be associated with such international relations traditions as realism, liberalism, and constructivism, but theories are more carefully specified. A *theory* consists of assumptions, key concepts, propositions about causal relationships, and an articulation of the conditions under which it can be expected to hold. These elements should be sufficiently clear so that the theory can be subjected to testing and possible falsification. Two examples from the realist perspective include *balance of power theory*, which looks at expectations of state behavior given different relative power situations, and the *theory of hegemonic stability*, which examines the manner in which a single, dominant power in the international system can foster an open system of international trade.[48] Two liberal tradition examples are *neoliberal institutionalism*, which examines the role of international institutions in fostering cooperation, and *democratic peace theory*, which seeks to explain peaceful relations among democracies. A theory is useful to the extent that it contributes to describing, explaining, and predicting international events and has implications for policy prescription.

When approaching a particular national security problem or situation, every policy maker has a theory. It may be held more or less self-consciously or be more or less carefully specified, but it nonetheless exists. As international relations scholar Walt states, "theory is an essential tool of statecraft. Many policy debates ultimately rest on competing theoretical visions, and relying on a false or flawed theory can lead to major foreign policy disasters."[49] As an example, Walt gives the "infamous 'risk theory'" of German Admiral Alfred von Tirpitz before World War I. His theory held that Germany's ability to threaten British naval supremacy would cause Great Britain to accept Germany's preeminence on the continent; the opposite proved to be true. As a more recent example, advocates of the U.S. war in Iraq in 2003 "believed war would lead to a rapid victory, encourage neighboring regimes to 'bandwagon' with the United States, hasten the spread of democracy in the region, and ultimately undermine support for Islamic terrorism. Their opponents argued that the war would have exactly the opposite effects."[50] As Walt goes on to explain, at stake here are propositions about the fundamental dynamics of international relations that theories can help to illuminate.

An example that shows the significant policy implications of theoretical differences is the rise of China. A realist, balance of power theorist would expect an increasingly powerful China to become increasingly assertive and a possible threat to its neighbors. As a counter, the United States should shore up regional alliance arrangements and potentially increase various facets of its own power. A neoliberal institutionalist, on the other hand, might focus on China's increasingly extensive engagement in regional and international institutions and recommend policies to

encourage and reward this engagement as a way of fostering common interests and the value that China places on peaceful relations. A constructivist might argue that China's future behavior will be decisively governed by the dominant Chinese "national ideas about how to achieve foreign policy goals" and the extent to which these ideas are achieving success.[51] If China's current policies meet setbacks, and alternative national ideas are present within important Chinese domestic constituencies (emphasizing, for example, separation from or the revision of the international system), China's policy approach could be expected to change in potentially dangerous or disruptive ways. (For more on China, see Chapters 18 and 26.)

Though it might be frustrating for a policy maker to be given such contrasting visions of important policy problems, the preservation of multiple perspectives is valuable. These competing explanations and prescriptions suggest a continuing need to engage with available evidence and test reality when making critical policy choices.

Characteristics of the Current International System

One way of examining the nature of the international system today focuses on globalization and its effects. As introduced above, the economic, cultural, and political processes associated with globalization will lessen the significance of state borders over time, change the relative power among states, increase the importance of nonstate actors, and contribute to the challenges associated with global governance. Although a state can still decide to close itself as much as possible to the outside world—North Korea is the most dramatic example—the costs of doing so are only increasing over time (see Chapter 18).

The forces of globalization do not have purely positive or purely negative effects. In economic terms, although technological diffusion, increased trade, and increasingly international capital flows have improved the welfare of millions of people around the world, all countries and individuals are not able to benefit equally. Even within countries, the benefits from an increasingly open international trading system are not evenly spread. In addition to economic issues, the forces of globalization can be disruptive or even unwelcome to traditional societies in which rapid change may be difficult to assimilate and can empower violent nonstate actors.[52] (For more on globalization and human security, see Chapter 25.)

Despite the importance of globalization, states will remain the key actors in international politics for the foreseeable future. For one thing, both independently and through their actions in such international institutions as the World Trade Organization, the decisions made by states will affect the pace and nature of globalization. In addition, until or unless more effective institutions of global governance are constructed, states will remain the actors with the most capability to solve problems.[53] Even individuals or groups with a transnational agenda will need to work with or through states in order to realize their goals. Any who are tempted to take a determinist view of the impact of globalization would be wise to keep in mind the capabilities and political choices of states.

In addition to the ongoing processes of globalization, international relations scholar Robert Jervis argues that from the perspective of international security there are three remarkable aspects of the international system in the early twenty-first century. The first is the existence of a security community among the great powers: "war among the leading powers—the most developed states of the United States, Western Europe, and Japan—will not occur in the future, and is indeed no longer a source of concern for them."[54] Jervis goes on to argue that though war may be possible between Russia or China, or between one of these countries and one of the members of the security community, the diminished prospects of war between the leading powers (which are also the most economically developed and democratic) is a remarkable historical development. There is no guarantee as to duration, and possible tensions with Russia or China retain significance, but the existence of the security community is an important aspect of the current international environment that can all too easily be taken for granted.

A second important characteristic of the current international system, noted by Jervis as well as many others, is the extraordinary concentration of political, economic, and military power in one state—the United States. The status of the United States as a single, dominant power is likely to have a significant impact on international relations for the foreseeable future, though interpretations of its implications vary widely. The realist expectation is that other states will seek to balance against the power of the United States; as this expectation has not been fully met in the early twenty-first century, analysts have looked for forms of "soft balancing" as evidence that states are still seeking ways to resist and restrain U.S. power.[55] Others argue that the U.S. position of dominance enables it to play the role of global hegemon, serving as a key provider of the collective goods that sustain the international economy. The extent to which this is sustainable depends on the will of the American population as well as the extent to which other major powers in the system also see the United States as acting in their interest.[56] Finally, analysts from the liberal tradition might argue that U.S. unipolarity is an opportunity to reinforce the rule-governed international system, which it played such an important role in founding after World War II, through a multilateral approach to international affairs and an embrace of international institutions.[57] Though the above interpretations have limitations as well as strengths, they have in common the insight that U.S. national security policy decisions are likely to have uniquely significant force in a world in which it holds such disproportionate power.

The third characteristic of the international system identified by Jervis is the rise of terrorism and the U.S. response to the attacks on its own soil on 9/11. This characteristic is related to the second issue above, as "the American response is clearly conditioned by the nation's great capabilities and the lack of challenges from peers."[58] The unique position of the United States in the world means that actions that the United States takes in this area may have broad repercussions for international politics for years to come.

Despite important changes in the international strategic environment of the United States over time, there are also constants. One of the most important of these is that the United States will always face the need to balance the limited

means it is willing to devote to national security policy with the ends it seeks to pursue. The traditional American approaches likely to shape this balance are the subject of Chapter 2; the manner in which the United States has managed or not managed to strike this balance over time is the subject of Chapter 3. Whether one assesses the current and future international environment to be extremely threatening or relatively benign, the challenges faced by U.S. policy makers in balancing U.S. national security needs with other interests and domestic priorities remain great.

Discussion Questions

1. Define the terms *national security* and *human security*. Are there any tensions between these two concepts?

2. What is the realist worldview? What are strengths and weakness of the realist perspective on international politics?

3. What does balance of power theory predict? Can you provide examples of balance of power theory in action?

4. What are the main mechanisms through which adherents of the liberal tradition believe that peace can be furthered in international politics? What are their strengths and weaknesses?

5. What is the constructivist critique of the idea that anarchy causes security competition among states?

6. What is *national power*? Can you quantify national power? How?

7. What is *soft power*? Is soft power important in explaining the U.S. role in the world? Why or why not?

8. How important are theories of international relations to policy makers? Should they be? Why or why not?

9. What are the most important characteristics of the international strategic environment of the United States today?

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U.S. Central Intelligence Agency *World Factbook*, www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/index.html

U.S. Department of State, www.state.gov

The White House, www.whitehouse.gov

World Trade Organization, www.wto.org