

**Genest, M. (2004). *Conflict and cooperation: Evolving theories of international relations*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Belmont, CA: Thomson, Wadsworth.**

## **Chapter 1**

### **Introduction – What is International Relations Theory?**

More than ever, our lives are shaped by the world in which we live and the people, or groups of people, that surround us. We have formed boundaries, cultures, and communities that define what we call nations. The relationship of nations and their behavior toward one another—international relations—is what makes up our human history.

Scholars throughout history have studied the human condition—assessing, evaluating, and even predicting patterns of behavior—using and developing various theories. A **theory** is a proposition, or set of propositions, that tries to analyze, explain or predict something. An **international relations theory**, then, is defined as a set of principles and guidelines used to analyze both world events and relations between states. International relations scholars often interchange various terms with theory, such as *paradigm*, *model*, *image*, or *perspective*. Whatever the words, the important thing to remember is that theories help to assess past and present conditions and, in turn, provide a reasonable basis for predicting future trends.

The development of international relations theory could be compared to a laboratory experiment. Scientists use their knowledge of specific elements and their properties to predict how they might behave in various combinations and under specific conditions, as well as to produce a certain reaction or outcome. Theories about international relations are formed in a similar way. In this case, though, the laboratory is the international system as a whole, and we must speculate about the behavior of the states and individuals within it.

Theories of international relations can be grouped into two broad categories: explanatory theories and prescriptive theories. As the name implies, **explanatory theories** try to explain events and circumstances. They are based on description and evaluation of past events, conditions, and patterns of behavior. Scholars form a theory based on how nations have acted and interacted in the past in order to predict what their future behavior may be. For example, many theorists have studied past wars, trying to find certain patterns of behavior that may tell them why war is such a perennial problem in international relations. One popular international relations theory, realism, can be considered an explanatory theory.

Prescriptive theories, also referred to as normative theories, do not discount the value of historical experience but also incorporate moral principles and the setting of goals. A **prescriptive theory** is a set of principles or guidelines that contain overt value judgments about how the world ought to be rather than how the world actually is. Prescriptive theory often involves the development of standards or principles for the conduct of international relations. Based on both past and contemporary conditions and patterns, theories prescribe or suggest a particular course of action, policy, or doctrine. This prescription is designed to improve and enhance relations between states within the international system. Peace studies is an example of this category of prescriptive theories. Many theories, such as liberalism, class system theory, and postmodernism, actually cross over, incorporating both the explanatory and prescriptive methods.

Finally, it is important to note that a theory may be correct, incorrect, or even partially correct. In the end, it is up to individual students to decide for themselves which theory or theories provide the most accurate and useful guidelines for understanding the course of global politics.

### **How Is International Relations Theory Formed?**

We have discussed what international relations theory is; now let us address the question of how it is formed. In developing a theory of international relations, social scientists and scholars of world affairs consider a number of factors. They do not simply look at distinct, isolated events

that have occurred over the course of history. They also examine the various elements that acted as the driving force of the crises. These elements provide important clues in discovering how a crisis originated. The nature of the states and system when not in crisis can serve as a starting point for the investigation. That is, the specific details of a crisis lose their meaning if we do not know what led up to the event and what happened afterwards.

Scholars begin with what is called a **hypothesis**. A hypothesis is essentially an educated guess or proposition about how or why something—an event or specific set of conditions—occurred. A hypothesis must, however, have a certain degree of probability; if one does not believe something to be possible, there is no point in determining its likelihood.

The hypothesis is then put to the test using certain methods. The methodology commonly employed in the development of international relations theory consists of several components, used either singly or in combination: analysis of historical events, conditions, or progressions; reasoned deduction based on the facts or evidence; and assessment of quantitative data.

By using these techniques, scholars and students of international relations come up with theories about the behavior and interaction of states. These theories might be explained through case studies. A **case study** uses a specific event, set of circumstances, or period of time to introduce and/or exemplify the key concepts of a given theory. A **concept** is an idea, thought, or notion derived from the theory.

There can be no absolutes in theorizing about international relations, particularly given the vaguaries and random actions that can, and do, occur in human interaction. Unlike many stable, constant elements of a laboratory experiment—whether solids, gases, or liquids—the world is an ever-changing environment. A theory of international relations may well be relevant and applicable during a specific period of history with a specific set of circumstances. New theories, however, must be periodically adapted and applied to our changing environment. Quite apart from simply invalidating the "old" theory, this continuous theoretical growth instead speaks to the exciting, even limitless, possibilities for examining, evaluating, and developing international relations theory.

### **Levels of Analysis: A Method for Studying International Relations Theory**

One apparently lasting methodology for studying international relations theory is what is known as the levels of analysis. Developed originally in the 1950s by Kenneth Waltz, **levels of analysis** is exactly what it says—a method for examining international relations theory based on three different "units of measure," in purely scientific terms, or "levels." These levels are—from broad to narrow in scope—system level, state level, and individual level. That is, each theory or set of theories associated with a given level emphasizes the characteristics, conditions, and confines of that particular level in understanding and explaining world events and relations between states.<sup>1</sup>

Different levels focus on different questions. The system level of analysis looks at the international environment and how that shapes the pattern of interaction between countries. At the system level of analysis, questions center on how the distribution of military and economic power among states affects the course of international relations and how the global political environment affects the behavior of states. The second level, the state level of analysis, examines how states make foreign policy. This level asks two fundamental questions: First, are some types of governments more prone to war than others?

Second, does the competition for influence over policy making between interest groups and within bureaucracies have a significant impact on a state's foreign policy? Finally, individual-level analyses center on whether and how the characteristics, values, and perspectives of individual leaders affect their foreign policy decisions.

The levels of analysis concept is a tool to assist us in our examination of international relations. It helps us understand that international politics is the result of numerous sources. Each level features a different view of the event or events we are examining. It is like taking a picture from different distances. The system-level approach will give you a sense of the broad features of

the environment and provide the widest perspective, but will give very little detail of the individual parts. The state level can be compared to a photograph taken from several steps closer.

We can now distinguish the objects in the photograph, though specific details remain unclear. The individual level provides the closest look at our subject, offering terrific detail but eliminating the perspective provided by the broader views. Like the different photographs, all three levels of analysis have unique value. Together they provide the most accurate and complete understanding of international relations.

For an international relations example, we see that the origins of the Cold War cannot be analyzed properly without the proper context—the role of certain key individual leaders, the types of countries involved, and the way the structure of the international system shaped or constrained the behavior of the United States and the Soviet Union. This provides perspective on the causes and ramifications of the event itself.

At the beginning of the Cold War, many countries were still suffering from the effects of World War II. Great Britain was weak from the effort of defeating Nazi Germany, and all three of the traditional European powers—Great Britain, France, and Germany—were trying to rebuild from the rubble of countless battles and bombings. Indeed, after the United States dropped the first two atomic bombs on Japan in 1945, all of the former Axis powers (Germany, Italy, and Japan) who had initiated World War II had been defeated.

Only two nations at this time were strong enough to take leading roles on the international stage: the United States and the Soviet Union. But the styles of government in these two states were at opposite ends of the political spectrum and were not at all compatible. In the democratic United States, individual rights were and are valued and protected. Checks and balances within the government and on the government ensure these individual freedoms, yet provide a structure for national self-determination. Reliance on capitalist economic principles with free trade and open markets both helps to support American-style democracy and is supported by the democratic process.

The communist government of the Soviet Union emphasized collective rights over individual rights and freedoms. Power flowed from the center of the political structure and was dictatorial in nature, particularly under the rule of Joseph Stalin in the early Cold War years. Along with this centralized political authority came centralized economic planning. That is, the government owns the "means of production"—from factories and farms to tools and other equipment. Essentially, everyone in the Soviet Union was an employee of the state, and private ownership was kept to a bare minimum.

So, in the broadest sense, we see that the world was in a very delicate position at the beginning of the Cold War. The traditional European powers of Great Britain, France, and Germany were recovering from the damage of World War II. Only the United States and the Soviet Union were powerful enough to influence world politics. The problem lay in the extreme differences of the two nations. Each state wanted to channel the course of international politics in its own direction and rebuild the world in its own image. For the Soviet Union, that image was communist. For the United States, the image was democratic capitalism. These differences and the power vacuum created by the weakness of the other states in the international system contributed to the competition and confrontation of the United States and Soviet Union.

In addition to the weakness of the system and the confrontational relationship between the two countries, we might also take a step closer and speculate about the psychological motivations of individual leaders. With Joseph Stalin as head of the Soviet Union during this period, his need for absolute authority, as well as his insecurities and ruthlessness, shaped both his decisions and Soviet foreign policy. These tendencies, combined with Stalin's documented fear of the West, compounded—and was compounded by—the shaky condition of the international system and the inevitable friction between the two competing political-economic systems.

On the American side, the fact that Harry Truman quite suddenly became president of the United States upon the death of Franklin Roosevelt made him feel somewhat anxious about the need to appear decisive and in control. His state of mind with respect to the Soviet Union is best described in his own words: "If the Soviets do not wish to join us, they could go to Hell." This

attitude may have exacerbated hostility between the two nations and made cooperation much less likely in the post-World War II environment.

Let us now reexamine our example on the origins of the Cold War within the levels of analysis framework. On a system level, the United States and the Soviet Union were the two most powerful states left standing in the post-war world. The global situation was in turmoil. Formerly strong nations were helpless in the wake of a massive war effort.

So, we have two strong powers dominating the international system. Looking at the situation from a state-level perspective, conflict between the democratic United States and the communist Soviet Union is not surprising. The countries had radically different political and economic structures with neither, at that point, willing to compromise.

Finally, on an individual level, there was a serious mistrust on the part of both President Truman and Soviet leader Stalin. There was an almost cyclical reinforcement between these different levels of analysis and interaction. Competition between the United States and the Soviet Union was natural because of their differences. This competition reinforced those differences and fed the fears and wariness of the individual leaders.

Overall, we see that there are points to be made at each level of analysis with respect to this example. Let us now examine the specifics of each level—system, state, and individual—and the theories of international relations that go along with them.

### **System Level**

Beginning with the broadest method, the theories associated with **system-level analysis**—realist, liberal, class system, and, to a lesser extent, postmodernism—all tend to suggest that relations between states can be explained by factors that influence the system as a whole and by the characteristics and proclivities of the system itself. Allocation of power among states or groups of states, economic interdependence, and distribution of wealth are some of the general factors used in system-level analysis. The dynamic created both within and by the system then shapes the relations of states and individuals.

For example, one type of system-level theory is known as the realist school of thought. Realist theory emphasizes that the distribution of power in the international system shapes the behavior of the states within it. Some realists focus on the structure of the international system and the fact that there is no international authority to achieve and maintain global peace and stability among nations. Realists call this condition—the absence of an overarching government in the system— anarchy. States, then, are forced to be self-reliant and use their own power—or establish a mutually beneficial alliance structure with other states—to preserve their independence. Power—its uneven distribution in the system and the quest of states for it—shapes the behavior of nations and alliances.

The first scholar to remark on the importance of power and shifts in power was the Greek historian Thucydides, in 461 B.C. Using the rivalry between the city-states of Athens and Sparta as his case study, Thucydides found not only that uneven rates of development and levels of power create tension between nations but that generally "strong states do what they have the power to do and weak states accept what they must." And with no international government in place to preserve law and order, as well as the rights of the weak, it is understandable that power—its acquisition and preservation—becomes an important commodity.

If the realists are generally pessimistic in their view of power and the anarchic nature of the international system, a second group of theorists, whom we shall call the liberals, take a somewhat brighter view. Though liberals, like realists, accept that the world is anarchic, they also suggest that this condition is not static and the system can be changed. Liberals base this assumption on the notion that even in the absence of an overarching government in the international system, a harmony of interests does exist among nations. This implies that the incentive to cooperate with one another is stronger than the incentive for conflict. Creating international organizations and international law can build on these bonds and further promote good relations between states.

Liberals who advocate this kind of institutional approach—that is, the creation of international political organizations and international law—are known as liberal institutionalists (sometimes referred to as idealists). Proponents of this theory are looking to establish an international society in which hostility and mistrust no longer characterize relations among states. Selfishness is replaced by mutual respect and understanding.

Despite their faith in the ability of these organizations and the rule of law to help avoid conflict, liberal institutionalists acknowledge that some friction within the system is inevitable. At these times, states can come together under what they call collective security. The term *collective security* suggests that if all states agree to join together to defend the independence of every state in the international community, then their collective ability to rebuff the aggression of a single state is greatly enhanced. Similar to the old adage about safety in numbers, collective security provides for the safety and security of its members.

According to liberal institutionalists, cooperation and collective security can be established through the use of international organizations. Thus liberal institutionalists are proponents of international organizations such as the United Nations which focus on enhancing cooperation and stability. These organizations are designed to preserve and enforce specific rules and norms in global politics. Economic liberals, on the other hand, emphasize the importance of other transnational actors, such as multinational corporations (MNCs). MNCs build bonds between nations based on economics and trade. Economic liberals contend that by expanding international economic ties, all nations will have a stake in preserving peace and promoting stability. In short, while the institutional and economic branches of liberalism emphasize different mechanisms and actors, they both focus on the common goal of building international cooperation.

The third theory in our presentation of system-level analyses is based primarily on an economic foundation. Class system theory suggests that the distribution of wealth within the international system shapes the system itself. Among class system theorists, it is generally accepted that this shape is capitalist. In the world capitalist system, wealthy people and wealthy countries mold global affairs to their own benefit. This perpetuates a cycle of dependency among poor and weak states.

Karl Marx and V. I. Lenin were perhaps the best known advocates of this theory. They contended that this exploitation crossed state boundaries and would eventually unite the working class, or proletariat, in an international revolution against imperialist domination. Conflict, then, occurs primarily on an economic basis—the global exploitation of the poor by the wealthy and by the imperialist force of capitalism.

The final system-level theory is labeled postmodernism. This paradigm includes a rather diverse array of theories that have certain key assumptions in common. Postmodernism focuses primarily on the importance of ideas and culture in shaping our understanding of international politics. Postmodernists argue that traditional theories of international relations are inherently subjective and merely reflect the biases and motivations of the people who created the theories in the first place. Many postmodernists argue that it is impossible to construct an objective or unbiased theory of international relations and therefore focus on how our understanding of international relations is shaped by our beliefs and social identities.

## **State Level**

**State-level analysis** brings the examination of relations between states and the formulation of international relations theory a step closer. State level emphasizes the nature and characteristics of individual states in evaluating the dynamics of global politics and the international system. As we see in our example on the origins of the Cold War, the fundamental differences between communist states and capitalist democracies can be a source of tension.

Both of the two major state-level theories that we will discuss in this book— political regime theory and decision-making process theory—emphasize the domestic factors of nations in their international behavior. These factors include the type of government and how it operates, level of

citizen participation, sense of popular well-being, and adaptability of the state to both internal and external pressures and changes.

In political regime theory, the central question is whether the type of government of a nation has an impact on that nation's foreign policy. More specifically, we might ask, are authoritarian regimes more prone to conflict or war than democracies?

Francis Fukuyama argues that different types of governments do behave differently and that democracies are, indeed, less likely to go to war than authoritarian or totalitarian regimes. He generally attributes this to the fact that the political ideals forming the basis of democracies incorporate a great respect for human rights, the value of international law, and the resolution of conflict through negotiation. Since democratic leaders must answer to a popular mandate, the foreign policy of democratic countries conforms to these principles as closely as possible.

The other state-level theory presented, decision-making process theory, emphasizes not the type of government but the characteristics of the bureaucratic machine itself. That is, how do governments make foreign policy and how does that, in turn, affect foreign policy?

Process theorists contend that decisions are quite often the result of compromise between competing factions or groups within the government bureaucracy. An example might be the influence of the U.S. military-industrial complex on companies that specialize in manufacturing military hardware and the influence branches of the military have over the country's defense and foreign policy. The role of these factions in the government and the competition between them are important contributing factors to the politics of the state.

### **Individual Level**

The third and final level of analysis takes a look at the role of the individual in society. **Individual level** approaches to understanding international politics emphasize the common characteristics of all individuals, often referred to as "human nature," or they look for explanations based on the impact that particular individuals have on the foreign policy of a given state.

Individual-level explanations examine the human actor in several different ways. The first approach looks at the base characteristics of human nature in general. According to Thomas Hobbes, it is the nature of the individual, which is naturally insecure and aggressive, that shapes, defines, and characterizes society and government. The second analyzes the motives, principles, and preconceptions of individuals. Thomas Carlyle once said, "The history of the world is but the biography of great men." This notion suggests that the perceptions, misperceptions, and behavior of individual leaders can have a dramatic impact on the actions of a state. These actions then create ripples through the international system as a whole.

Using these guidelines, this study will examine the individual level of international-relations analysis in terms of three theoretical treatments: human nature, the nature of the individual, and the mitigation of human aggression. The articles in this section offer a range of viewpoints. From pessimists, such as Thomas Hobbes, one is left with the impression that people are by nature aggressive and driven in a quest for power. Only strong governments, Hobbes suggests, can mitigate these tendencies and preserve domestic and international stability.

An alternate approach addresses the ability of a single leader or personality to shape the actions of a nation. In so doing, that individual is able to alter the course of political interaction on a global scale. The rise and fall of Adolf Hitler is one of the most vivid contemporary examples of such a leader, but he is certainly not alone. From George Washington to Ronald Reagan, from Lenin to Mikhail Gorbachev, individuals have made, and no doubt will continue to make, their marks on the international system.

Finally, an optimistic perspective of the individual is set forth in the last section. As part of the relatively new field of peace studies, Arthur Stein characterizes humans as potentially "good" and capable of positively transforming individuals, societies, and the world in general. The theory of peace studies more broadly focuses on building harmonious relations among individuals and states. It asserts that if certain prescriptions are followed, a more peaceful and stable world may be created. Individual enlightenment, accordingly, is the key.

It is important to understand that Waltz's three levels of analysis for international relations theory differ not in their coverage but in their emphasis. No single level by itself can provide a complete explanation of events and changes in world politics. Each level organizes the facts in its own particular fashion, and each level focuses on different facts. Only by examining what scholars and proponents of all three levels have said about individuals and their societies as well as the global environment can we hope to create a more complete picture of our world and our future.

The second reading in this chapter, by Stephen Walt, presents a very insightful evaluation of the strengths and weaknesses of the four predominant system-level paradigms of international relations theory. It is important for readers to note that in some cases, the names of the theories differ from those used in this text. For example, Walt uses the term "radical theory" to describe what this book refers to as class system theory (Chapter 4). There are two explanations for this confusion. The first is that international relations scholars are stubborn academics and cannot seem to agree on a common label for the different paradigms. The second and more profound reason is that international relations theory is a dynamic field of study. Scholars constantly devise new theories, and even the traditional theories continue to evolve and adjust to fill in theoretical gaps or respond to changes in global affairs. To limit the confusion, each chapter begins by identifying the alternative labels for every paradigm that is covered in this text.

One final note: The articles in this book have been organized by level of analysis— system, state, and individual, in that order. This methodology is an analytical tool used to clarify and order our exploration of the different dimensions of international relations theory. However, students should be aware that many of the theorists presented in this volume incorporate some of the basic assumptions of more than one level of analysis. For example, Hans Morganthau, a realist, is categorized as a system-level theorist even though he had strong views about human nature (individual level) and the role of governments (state level) in shaping foreign policy. His overall emphasis, though, was primarily directed at the behavior of states as shaped by the international system. So again, it is a matter of emphasis rather than exclusivity that allows us to categorize theories according to the three levels of analysis.

## Key Concepts

**Case study** uses a specific event, set of circumstances, or period of time to introduce and/or exemplify the key concepts of a given theory.

**Concept** is an idea, thought, or notion derived from a theory.

**Explanatory theories** try to explain events and circumstances. They are based on description and evaluation of past events, conditions, and patterns of behavior. Scholars form a theory based on how nations have acted and interacted in the past in order to predict what their future behavior might be.

**Hypothesis** is essentially an educated guess or proposition about how or why something—an event or specific set of conditions—occurred. A hypothesis must, however, have a certain degree of probability.

**Individual-level analysis** is an approach to understanding international relations that focuses on the role and impact of particular individuals, or looks for explanations based on "human nature," or common characteristics of all individuals.

**International relations theory** is a set of principles and guidelines used to analyze both world events and relations between states. Such theories help to assess past and present conditions and, in turn, provide a reasonable basis for predicting future trends.

**Levels of analysis** is a method for examining international relations theory based on three different perspectives or levels. These levels are, from broad to narrow in scope, system level, state level, and individual level. Each theory or set of theories associated with a given level emphasizes the characteristics, conditions, and confines of that particular level in understanding and explaining world events and relations between states.

**Prescriptive theory** is a set of principles and guidelines that contain overt value judgments about how the world ought to be rather than how the world actually is. Prescriptive theory often

involves the development of standards or principles for the conduct of international relations. Based on both past and contemporary conditions and patterns, these theories prescribe or suggest a particular course of action, policy, or doctrine. This prescription is designed to improve and enhance relations between states within the international system.

**State-level analysis** is an analytical approach to international relations that focuses on the domestic or internal causes of state actions. State-level theories attempt to explain international relations by emphasizing the internal workings of the state itself.

**System-level analysis** attempts to explain international relations by focusing on the manner in which the structure of the international system (global distribution of resources among states) shapes or constrains the actions of states. System-level theories contend that relations between states can be explained by factors that influence the system as a whole and by the characteristics and proclivities of the system itself.

**Theory** is a proposition or set of propositions that tries to analyze, explain, or predict something.

<sup>1</sup> Some works on international relations theory have identified as many as six levels of analysis: individual, roles, government, society, international relations, and the world system. See Bruce Russett and Harvey Starr's *World Politics: The Menu for Choice*, 4th edition (New York: W.H. Freeman and Company, 1992), pp. 11-17. For this textbook, Kenneth Waltz's original three levels provide students with a clearer, more basic framework for studying international relations theory.

## Chapter 2

### System Level International Relations Theories – Realism

In the preceding section, we introduced the levels of analysis methodology used in the study of international relations theory. In this section, as well as the sections that follow, we will take a closer look at each of these levels and provide some of the classic readings from the available literature.

We focus here on theories from the system level of analysis. System-level theorists assume that international relations is best understood by taking a broad, global perspective. They look at the nature of the system as a whole and at how states behave within that system. The system, then, sets the standard; it conditions and constrains the behavior of those who operate within it.

We present four major system-level theories in this section: realism, liberalism, class system, and postmodernism. Since each of these theories is discussed in detail in the following chapters, here we will merely summarize how they characterize the international system and the role of states and other major actors in that system.

Realist theory focuses on power. It looks at how the distribution of power, quest for power, and ability to preserve power within the system supercede other goals and dictate the behavior of states and organizations. Some realists argue that this situation is the result of the structure of the international system in which there are no overarching authorities to maintain order on a global scale. States arm themselves and form strategic military alliances for security and self-preservation. This sense of "everyone for him- or herself" tends to strengthen a system dominated by the drive for upward mobility in a hierarchy of power.

Our second theory, liberalism, does not dispute that the international system lacks a global authority to instill order and regulate the behavior of states. Liberals, though, argue that this does not necessarily have to be the case. There are a number of instances in which states have positive incentives to cooperate with one another—trade and other economic partnerships or environmental and conservation efforts, for example. Another aspect of liberal theory points out that international organizations, such as the United Nations, do exist to help bring order to the global community and could be strengthened and expanded.

The third system-level theory is what we have termed class system theory. As the name implies, this theory focuses on the distribution of wealth throughout the world and how that distribution—usually uneven—creates economic classes of people that transcend state boundaries. Essentially, the world is segregated by economics into "haves" and "have-nots." Under such conditions the wealthy classes in different countries have more in common with one another than with the poorer classes of their own nation. They also have a substantial stake in preserving the existing system. Conflict occurs along economic class lines on a global basis, cutting across state boundaries, as the poorer classes revolt against economic imperialism.

The final system-level theory falls under the label of postmodernism. Postmodernism encompasses a rather broad array of perspectives that are united by the contention that reality is shaped by perceptions. The postmodernist emphasis on the subjectivity of ideas, theories, and even social science methodology provides a highly useful counterweight to mainstream perspectives of international relations theory. The constructivist branch of postmodernism focuses on the identities and perceptions of elites and states and the ways in which these preferences are socially constructed. The feminist branch asserts that gender is the key to understanding world politics. Feminist postmodernists focus on the social construction of gender roles and its impact on the structure of society and international relations.

These theories all provide unique perspectives on the system and the behavior of states within it.

In the coming chapters, we will discuss the readings, highlight important terms and concepts, and look at some of the strengths and weaknesses of each paradigm. An effective theory of international relations—whether system, state, or individual level—provides not only a

frame of reference for looking at past events but also a method for analyzing current conditions and making projections about our future.

### **Introduction to Realist Theory**

Realism is the oldest theory for understanding and explaining international politics. The roots of this school of thought extend back nearly 2,500 years. The fundamental principles and implications of realism can be found in the writings of the ancient Greek historian Thucydides and the Italian Renaissance political philosopher Niccolo Machiavelli. Many contemporary scholars, including Hans Morgenthau, Edward Hallett Carr, and Kenneth Waltz, have further explored and developed realist principles.

Indeed, the realist school of thought so dominated the study of international politics in the post-World War II era that it became the theoretical basis for U.S. foreign policy during the Cold War. The list of practitioners includes some of the most influential people in the American foreign policy establishment. George Kennan, U.S. envoy to the Soviet Union during World War II and chief architect of the Containment Doctrine, used the realist balance-of-power concept in constructing the American policy to contain Soviet influence in the Cold War years. American presidents Harry Truman, Dwight Eisenhower, and Richard Nixon and Secretaries of State John Foster Dulles and Henry Kissinger relied to a significant extent on realist principles in shaping their foreign policy decisions.

Many scholars argue that realism's influence on political leaders is evidence of the strength and utility of its principles. They contend that leaders rely on realist theory because it presents a "realistic" view of international relations and focuses on how the world *is* rather than how it *ought* to be. They believe that a careful and objective assessment of world history is important because the fundamental characteristics and behavior of countries have remained essentially unchanged. Thus, realist scholars attempt to discern patterns of behavior among states in the past and then use these observations to analyze and predict the behavior and actions of nations in contemporary international politics.

For realists, power is the key factor in understanding international relations. Global politics is considered a contest for power among states. A state's power is measured primarily in terms of its military capabilities. International diplomacy is based on **power politics**, in which force or the threat of force is the primary method states use to further their interests. According to realists, international relations is a struggle for power and security among competing states. It is the responsibility of each nation-state to provide for its own defense and security. Thus, states are compelled to base foreign policy decisions on considerations of power and security, rather than morality or ideals.

### **Classical Realism**

In his work *The History of the Peloponnesian War*, the Greek scholar and historian Thucydides was one of the first to distinguish these realist principles. He used the war between the city-states of Athens and Sparta as a case study for his analysis. Thucydides described the underlying cause of war between Athens and Sparta in clear terms: "What made war inevitable was the growth of Athenian power and the fear which this caused in Sparta." Sparta was wary of the innovative and dynamic nature of Athenian society, which was growing and modernizing both economically and militarily. The Spartans perceived a shift in the balance of power between the two states. The **balance of power** principle contends that if two or more states, or coalitions of states, maintain an even distribution of power, neither side can be confident of victory should conflict arise. Under such conditions, we would presume that states are reluctant to initiate or pursue a military resolution to their differences with other states. In this way, balance and stability in the system are preserved.

Returning to Thucydides' example, Sparta began to strengthen its position militarily in response to the vitality of Athens. The Athenians then grew fearful of their rival's arms build-up and

responded in a similar fashion. War between Athens and Sparta erupted shortly thereafter. Thucydides recorded and analyzed these events to provide a background on the nature of war for future historians and scholars.

One of those who followed was the Italian philosopher Niccolo Machiavelli. Machiavelli is considered the first modern political theorist because, in traditional realist fashion, he sought to describe politics as it is, not as it ought to be. In his book *The Prince*, Machiavelli sought to separate politics from ethics because he wished to provide a practical and objective account of the political process.

In addition, Machiavelli made two other notable contributions to realism. First, his view that humans are "wicked" became one of the central tenets of classical realism. In *The Prince*, Machiavelli wrote that the "gulf between how one should live and how one does live is so wide that a man who neglects what is done for what should be done learns the way to self-destruction rather than self-preservation." Second, this pessimistic assessment of human nature led Machiavelli to emphasize the importance of military power and national security. The survival of the state, as represented figuratively by the prince, is the most important goal in politics. Machiavelli argued that "it is unreasonable to expect that an armed man should obey one who is not or that an unarmed man should remain safe and secure when his servants are armed." Certainly, this statement demonstrates his conviction that those who hold the reins of power must be prepared to contend with threats to their rule. That is, leaders who neglect national security not only do so at their own peril but also jeopardize the security of the state as a whole.

In his book *Politics Among Nations*, Hans Morganthau used the principles of classical realism to both analyze and shape geopolitics of 1948. In doing so, Morganthau created a more scientific approach to the study and practice of foreign affairs in our contemporary age.

Morgenthau, like Machiavelli, maintained that insecurity, aggression, and war are recurring themes of international politics and that these themes are ultimately rooted in human nature. Morgenthau, again like his realist predecessors, recognized that on a fundamental level, conflict was driven not by political or ideological differences as much as by human desire to dominate other humans. He suggested that "statesmen think and act in terms of power."<sup>1</sup> One common characteristic of all states, Morgenthau assumed, was their tendency to behave as rational actors. According to the **rational actor** assumption, states pursue prudent goals that are within their power (capability) to achieve. Likewise, a state's foreign policy is based on prudent calculations of national interest.

Morgenthau's prescription for a "rational theory of international politics" was based on the notion of "interest defined as power." That is, in a system consisting of individual states or blocs of states struggling for power, Morgenthau suggested that the "ever present threat of large-scale violence" had in the past, and could in the future, be contained by pursuing a balance-of-power strategy. As discussed earlier, this strategy contends that if two or more coalitions of states maintain a roughly equal distribution of power, no single state can be confident in its ability to win a war. Consequently, all states would be reluctant to initiate conflict, and balance, order, and peace would, in theory, be preserved.

The selection by George Kennan provides an excellent example of the application of realist principles to the formulation of American foreign policy. In 1946, Kennan, an American diplomat then serving in Moscow, sent his now-famous "long telegram" to Washington. The telegram was a detailed assessment of the sources of Soviet conduct. One year later, using the pseudonym of X, Kennan's argument was published in the highly respected journal *Foreign Affairs*. His ideas provided the intellectual and geopolitical foundation for the United States postwar policy of "containment," aimed at curbing Soviet expansionism. Kennan's analysis and policy recommendations relied upon the realist concepts of both power politics and balance of power.

## Neo-Realism

Some contemporary proponents of realist theory, known as neo-realists, suggest that it is not just the uneven development or distribution of power among states—like that between Athens and Sparta—that leads to conflict. **Neo-realism** differs from classical realism on one basic point: Neo-realists believe that the struggle for power is the result of the structure of the international system as a whole rather than a fundament of human nature. Specifically, the problem is found in the anarchic nature of the international system. The term **anarchy** refers to the lack of a central authority or government to enforce law and order between states and throughout the globe.

Kenneth Waltz, founder of neo-realist theory, suggests that this lack of central authority is key to understanding the international system and international relations theory. According to Waltz, states are compelled to base their foreign policy on national security considerations because they are ultimately responsible for their own survival. Since there is no overarching world government to enforce peace, states exist in a **self-help system**. Like the call on a sinking ship, the anarchic nature of the international system leaves "every state for itself."

This type of self-help situation leads to a security dilemma. A **security dilemma** is the result of fear, insecurity, and lack of trust among states living in an anarchic international system. States arm themselves in order to pursue the rational goal of self-preservation. But by arming themselves, more fear and insecurity is created among other states. These states, in turn, also increase their armaments. Even though a state may be arming itself for purely defensive purposes, this process makes all states within the system less secure and fuels an arms race. We see that each state may be acting rationally on an individual basis, but, collectively, their actions lead to unintended consequences. At the very least, these consequences can include an expensive and wasteful arms race, and, in the end, such actions can even lead to war.

Many of the assumptions of neo-realism outlined above can be found in Kenneth Waltz's piece, in which he discusses the relevance of structural realism in the post-Cold War era. Waltz defends the key concepts of structural realism and argues that the demise of the Cold War has not changed the essential behavior of states. Waltz analyzes alternative explanations for the transformation of international politics including the spread of democracy, interdependence, and the role of international institutions and finds that all three lack the insights and explanatory power of structural realism.

The excerpt from Robert Gilpin's book *War and Change in World Politics* highlights the realist principle of hegemony. A **hegemon** is a preponderant power that dominates other states within its sphere of influence. Gilpin discusses the realist view of how change occurs in international politics and identifies a pattern by which hegemonic states both rise and fall from power. Gilpin distinguishes three structural causes of a decline in power. First is the economic and military burdens of maintaining dominance over other states. Second, hegemons tend to gradually lose their economic and military vitality because domestic consumption rises as the public enjoys the benefits of world preeminence. Third, the inevitable spread of technology tends to weaken a hegemon's economic and military advantages over its competitors. In the end, the hegemon's weakness is increasingly evident and it becomes vulnerable to challenges from potential rivals.

In the final reading, former Secretary of State Henry Kissinger presents a realist interpretation of the global war on terrorism. The author discusses the impact of the events of September 11, 2001, on the course and conduct of American foreign policy. He argues for a strong response to the events of September 11 because the "whole structure of the security of the post-war world will disintegrate" if the United States fails to respond to an attack on its own territory. Finally, Dr. Kissinger offers some insights into how the war on terrorism is likely to affect U.S. relations with its traditional European allies as well as with Russia, China, and South Asia.

## A Critique of Realist Theory

As we have discussed, classical realism and the more contemporary neo-realism offer important and unique insights into the essential characteristics of international relations. Like any theory of international relations, however, the realist paradigm has both strengths and weaknesses. From a practical standpoint, realist theory offers a set of simple, straightforward principles that have guided political leaders in their decision making for many years. These pragmatic guidelines strip away moral and idealistic notions of how states *should* act or how international dialogue is to be conducted. Rather, the focus is on how nations actually *do* behave within the international system, both individually and collectively.

Realism also has some valid strengths from a historical, scholarly standpoint. From the ancient Greek historian Thucydides to contemporary scholars like Hans Morgenthau and Kenneth Waltz, there is certainly a wide body of historical evidence to support the realists' supposition that states are locked in a struggle for power that can, and often does, lead to war.

Realists contend, as well, that history tends to favor their approach to international relations theory. The conflict between Athens and Sparta, the conditions that led to the Cold War, and even the U.S. war with Iraq in 2003 all serve as case studies and provide data to support an argument for realism.

That so much of history can be used to support the realist perspective and that so many leaders and policymakers have relied on realist principles are valid, if somewhat self-serving, testaments to the strength of the theory. We must also acknowledge, however, some problems in applying realism to conditions in our world today. As we shall see in the next chapter, liberal theorists argue that realism places too great an emphasis on conflict while underestimating the role of international institutions in promoting cooperation. The nature of international competition has changed, and war is no longer considered a natural extension of politics among major powers. Perhaps most dramatically, nuclear weapons have made the pursuit of power using war or armed conflict dangerous and costly. It is fairly safe to assume that war between two nuclear powers would be unwinnable.

Aside from the devastating consequences, the use of force—under most conditions—is less acceptable in today's increasingly interdependent world. In its emphasis on conflict, realist theory tends to ignore the current expansion of cooperation between states. Further, the international conditions that allow for, indeed even promote, cooperation between nations challenge the neo-realist notion of anarchy. Certain generally accepted rules and norms—as well as the institutions that establish and uphold them—play an important role in facilitating and promoting an appropriate climate for cooperation. Anarchy, even anarchy ordered by a specific power structure as neo-realists describe, does not offer an adequate explanation for the kind of cooperation and transnational linkages so common in our contemporary world.

With this idea of extended cooperation, we can see some other weaknesses of realist theory. States are no longer the only important actors on the international stage. International organizations, like the United Nations, and nongovernmental organizations, such as multinational corporations and environmental organizations, perform important functions in maintaining stability and expanding cooperation worldwide.

Another problem confronting realism is the increasing relevance of substate actors such as terrorists. Realists contend that states are the primary actors on the international stage and that all other identities are less important to our understanding of global affairs. Surely the events of September 11 and the current global war on terrorism highlight the significant security threat posed by global terrorist networks like Al Qaeda.

And we must question, too, whether states, particularly under these more complex global conditions, can be considered truly unitary actors in the realist sense. Can a nation be viewed monolithically, able to make coherent decisions based strictly on considerations of the national interest? The politics of a state, both internal and external, are more likely a messy business, full of compromise and competing interests. That the actions of a state reflect rational, consistent cost-

benefit calculations based purely on self-interest, as realist theory suggests, is, at the very least, difficult to prove.

One final weakness in the case for realism is the theory's inability to account for peaceful change. According to realists, change in the international system can only come about from, and is often the catalyst for, war. In the wake of the Cold War and peaceful dissolution of the Soviet Union, we might say that realism is left holding the theoretical bag on the phenomenon of peaceful change.

Twenty-first century society is more and more characterized by the spread of consumerism and the free exchange of ideas and technology, by expanded economic and political ties, and by growth through cooperation and conflict resolution through peaceful means. Without some sort of modification, proponents of realist theory might be put in a difficult position if these trends continue well into the next decade.

In response, realists would question whether the international politics of today are, indeed, so different from the past. The latest war with Iraq certainly demonstrates that war between nations is not an obsolete concept. Moreover, the continuing tension between India and Pakistan offers almost daily reminders of the realist principles of power politics and the utility of nuclear deterrence. Finally, the contemporary tragedies in Bosnia, Somalia, and Rwanda, to name just a few examples, provide ample evidence that violence and conflict are still very much a part of our world.

### **Key Concepts**

**Anarchy** refers to the lack of a central authority or government to enforce law and order between states and throughout the globe.

**Balance of power** is a policy aimed at maintaining the international status quo. According to this theory, peace and stability are best preserved when power is distributed among five or more states and no single state has a preponderance of military power.

**Hegemon** A state with overwhelming military, economic, and political power that has the ability to maintain its dominant position in the international system.

**Neo-realism** is a variant of realism that contends that the struggle for power among states is the result of the anarchic structure of the international system as a whole, rather than a fundament of human nature.

**Power politics** are policies in which force, or the threat of force, is the primary method used to further a state's interests. According to realists, international relations is a struggle for power and security among competing states.

**Rational actor** refers to the realist assumption that states generally pursue attainable, prudent goals that are commensurate with their power (capability) to achieve.

**Security dilemma** is the result of fear, insecurity, and lack of trust among states living in an anarchic international system. States arm themselves in order to pursue the rational goal of self-preservation. But by arming themselves, more fear and insecurity is created among other states. These states, in turn, also increase their armaments. Even though a state may be arming itself for purely defensive purposes, this process makes all states within the system less secure and fuels an arms race.

**Self-help system** is the neo-realist concept that, in an anarchic international system where there is no overarching global authority (like a world government) to enforce peace and stability, each state is responsible for its own survival and cannot rely on the help of other states.

<sup>1</sup> Hans J. Morgenthau, *Politics Among Nations* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1993), p. 5.

## Chapter 3

### Liberalism (Transnationalism, Pluralism)

The idea of promoting global order through expanded political and economic ties leads us to our next theory, liberalism. Liberals point out that realism fails to offer an adequate explanation for the order that we see within our presumably anarchic system. Advocates of liberalism argue that states cooperate as much as, if not more than, they compete. And this cooperation, they assert, is more consistent than the realists' fleeting convergence of national interest among limited numbers of states. Rather, states cooperate because it is in their common interest to do so, and prosperity and stability in the international system are the direct result of that cooperation.

In addition, liberals believe that states are not motivated solely by national interest defined in terms of power. Unlike realism, liberalism contends that international politics can no longer be divided into "high" and "low" politics. While the high politics of national security and military power remain important, liberals maintain that economic, social, and environmental issues—or low politics—have become priorities on the international agenda.

The establishment and success of international order, according to liberalism, depends largely on four major factors: the role of international institutions; international rules and norms for behavior of states; the increasing economic interdependence between nations; and technological advancement and the growth of global communication. Liberals acknowledge that international institutions, rules and norms, economic interdependence, and advances in global telecommunications can neither create nor enforce the type of stable international order that might be provided by a strong world government. These elements do, however, play an indispensable role in constraining, or regulating, the behavior of nation-states within the system as well as in shaping the international environment as a whole. The transnational linkages that these four factors represent build incentives for cooperation, enhance trust between nations, and promote negotiation rather than military confrontation as a means to resolve disputes between states.

### Institutional Liberalism

At this point, we must distinguish between two branches of liberal theory. The first branch, which we shall call **liberal institutionalism** (also referred to as *idealism*), focuses on institutionalizing global cooperation. Liberal institutionalists call for the creation of a new global power structure, supported by a variety of international organizations. Advocates of this theory believe that global cooperation is founded upon three primary factors: enhancing the role and influence of international organizations, instituting collective security, and enforcing international law. All three of these factors might be viewed as prescriptions for how states should behave, with an ultimate goal of reforming the anarchy of the international system and forging a harmonious community of nations.

An early proponent of what we now call liberal institutionalism was the classical legal scholar Hugo Grotius. In his book *On the Law of War and Peace* (1625), Grotius contended that a fundamental "natural law" exists and that this natural law transcends the domestic law of states. **Natural law** is based on the belief that humans have basic, inalienable rights. These inalienable rights (essentially, rights to life and liberty) bind states together, forming an international "society of states" linked through certain rules and norms of conduct.

Grotius thought these universal rules of international behavior would determine relations between states within the system—even to the point of regulating the conduct of war. This concept would later form the basis for international law in the European state system. **International law** is the codification of rules that regulate the behavior of states and set limits upon what is permissible and what is not permissible. These rules are binding on states, as well as on other international actors.

Contemporary liberal institutionalism was also influenced by idealist scholars and political leaders who dominated the formulation and practice of international relations after World War I.

The idealists believed that the relations between states in the international system needed to be fundamentally reformed to ensure that future wars might be avoided.

One notable idealist at that time was U.S. President Woodrow Wilson. He believed that the balance-of-power premise, so critical in realist theory, was unlikely to produce a stable international order. Instead, Wilson, like Grotius, wanted to build an international community of nations. This new community would follow international law as well as specific rules and norms of behavior and would be regulated by international institutions. The transnational linkages established by these international institutions, such as the League of Nations and, later, the United Nations, would presumably moderate—or, ideally, even eliminate—the need for power politics.

Acknowledging the need to temper such idealistic goals with the harsh realities of international politics, Wilson suggested that order within the community could be preserved through collective security. **Collective security** is a system in which states band together to safeguard the territorial independence and security of one another against aggression. That is, the use of force by a state or group of states would be curtailed by the strength of all states working through an international institution designed for that purpose. Collective security differs from balance-of-power politics in that it is directed not against a specific nation but against any state that threatens the status quo. Enforcing international law would then be a collective responsibility for the good of all states within the community.

Wilson, then, believed that order within the international system could be established through reform and the creation of effective international organizations capable of enforcing order and facilitating cooperation between states.

Another liberal institutionalist, Hedley Bull, interpreted the nature and course of international relations in a somewhat more practical manner. Bull focused on the tools and methods by which order already exists within the system. He suggested that while anarchy could not be abolished, the behavior of states in the international system could be constrained. According to Bull, diplomacy, balance-of-power politics, and alliances, as well as international law and institutions, all contribute to preserving order, enhancing cooperation, and promoting international ethical standards.

### **Economic Liberalism**

The second branch of liberals emphasizes economic ties between nations as a basis for establishing and preserving order within the international system. Similar to institutional liberalism, **economic liberalism** (also referred to as the *interdependence model*) highlights the transnational ties or linkages between states. Economic liberals, however, identify the increasingly integrated nature of the global economy as a major force in promoting those linkages.

With this merging of international and domestic economic interests, states, according to economic liberals, have become increasingly interconnected or interdependent. Interdependence is a pivotal part of economic liberalism. **Interdependence** can be defined as the "mutual dependence" of nations within the international system and liberals argue that it is a defining characteristic of our contemporary world. Joseph Nye provides a good summary of the principal components of interdependence. Nye believes that the expansion of global trade and investment has blurred the distinction between domestic economies of individual states and of the international economy as a whole. The more states interact within the global marketplace, the more their prosperity depends on the political and economic cooperation of other states.

As in any interdependent relationship, however, we must acknowledge that some states are more vulnerable than others to the ups and downs of the global economy. That is, smaller, less developed nations can be more vulnerable in such a relationship than larger, more economically diverse countries. Although interdependence generally carries substantial economic benefits, the various levels of sensitivity between nations to downturns in the international economy can create both political and economic tension.

As a practical matter, we might suggest that interdependence is based on three general assumptions: First, states are not the only key actors in international relations. International

institutions; nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), such as large multinational corporations (MNCs); economic cartels, such as OPEC; Green-peace; or even large religious groups, such as the Catholic Church—all these actors take positions on the global stage. Second, the agenda of international relations is more complex and diverse than it was in the past. Issues such as trade, technology, and the environment can be as important as traditional national security concerns. Finally, military force plays less of a role in contemporary international politics. Economic interdependence, along with expanded political ties, have increased the value of cooperation and decreased the utility of force.

According to economic liberals, interdependence has transformed the nature of power in the international system. No international actor can meet its needs—whether those needs involve national security or economic prosperity—without the cooperation or participation of other states and nonstate actors. Power is no longer measured solely in terms of military strength. Influence is often the result of economic flexibility or technological innovation, and leadership involves negotiating expertise and economic coordination. Interdependence has dramatically increased the incentives for cooperation, not only among states but among all international actors.

Robert Keohane, in his book *After Hegemony*, argues that international cooperation is not restricted to formal international organizations like the United Nations. Instead, cooperation often results from the creation of international regimes. A **regime** is a set of accepted rules, norms, and procedures that regulates the behavior of states and other actors in a given issue area. A regime also encompasses the international institutions, NGOs, and treaties that enhance cooperation in that area. Issues such as trade, the environment, monetary relations, and so forth represent a host of different international concerns that might be targeted. Cooperation, then, according to Keohane, is based on a variety of regimes designed to meet the needs of specific issue areas.

Economic liberals tend to focus on international economic integration and the role of nongovernmental organizations as a means to enhance this cooperation. They argue that, with greater cooperation and integration, a state's economy is merely one piece of an increasingly integrated, world-economic whole. In this **complex interdependence**, we see "more actors, more issues, greater interactions, and less hierarchy in international politics."<sup>1</sup> Hence, though it is important to encourage economic growth of individual nations so that they, too, might have a stake in preserving and increasing interdependence, the capacity of a single state to have decisive control over the global economy is limited.

Within this interdependent economic system, the realist assumption that states are the primary actor in international relations is no longer the case in a strict sense. As we noted, economic liberals suggest that nonstate actors—nongovernmental organizations and multinational corporations—play a vital role in building and maintaining global interdependence. These organizations help to break down national boundaries and blend domestic and international political interests.

**Multinational corporations** are companies that have production facilities or branches in several countries. The influence of multinational corporations is twofold. First, MNCs expand and reinforce global economic and political linkages among people and groups across national borders. These organizations can have greater economic resources and international influence than many smaller or less developed nations. Companies conducting business across state boundaries also make states more interdependent and create a new context in which countries make decisions about one another.

One thing to keep in mind, however, is that these MNCs have their own agendas; their interests do not necessarily coincide with the interests of those states in which they conduct business. MNCs operate in the interests of their stockholders, and their goal is to maximize profits for those stockholders. For example, when General Motors decides to close a plant in Michigan and open a new plant in Mexico, the impact of this decision is felt by both nations. The United States must contend with increased unemployment, while Mexico gains job opportunities and tax revenue.

Though MNCs might operate to further their own agenda, their well-being is linked to that of the international community in a fundamental way, which leads to our second point. MNCs need a

stable international environment—an environment that facilitates trade, commerce, and international investment. Economic liberals suggest that in a self-reinforcing pattern, force plays a smaller role in international politics because states have formed closer economic, as well as political, linkages. These linkages—and the NGOs and MNCs that help to promote them—flourish only in a stable international environment. Consequently, all members of the community have a stake in preserving order to further their own interests.

Perhaps the best way to describe this process is as a harmony of interests among states. **Harmony of interests** is the belief that the interest of all states coincides with the interest of each state. This concept is generally accepted by both institutional and economic liberals and focuses on the mutual advantages of cooperation between nations. For institutional liberals, harmony of interests emphasizes that the security of all nations is enhanced by international cooperation. For economic liberals, that harmony of interests revolves around the growing economic interdependence of nations. For both branches of liberal theory, the utility of power and military force as instruments of foreign policy has been marginalized by greater linkages and expanded cooperation—political or economic—among all nations of the international system.

### **A Critique of Liberalism**

Critics of liberalism—both institutional and economic—contend that the theory places too much emphasis on this harmony of interests. Cooperation between states, 'whether political, economic, or even military, is subject to a number of internal and external pressures, making success much more problematic than liberals might imply.

The critique of liberalism tends to focus on three broad issues: basic tendencies of human nature, national security interests, and economic cooperation. With respect to human nature, realist critics suggest that liberalism underestimates the conflictual aspects of state interests and that the benefits of cooperation can often be outweighed by fear and mistrust.

Though these feelings might be engendered by past experiences, liberalism also fails to take into account the powerful role of nationalism in world politics. Human history—both ancient and contemporary—is, quite literally, littered with examples in which religion or ethnicity formed the basis for conflict between nations. From the Crusades to more recent events in Iraq and Rwanda, human nature offers more complex questions than liberals are prepared to answer in this regard.

Compromise and settlements are often clouded by the unavoidable intrusion of human passions—complicating already volatile situations. In an unusual sense, the end of the Cold War actually signals the beginning of new, more complex conflicts, no longer frozen or confined by the two great ideological camps. Nuclear weapons may have deterred superpower confrontation, but conventional conflict between smaller states still occurs. Moreover, critics point to recent tensions between India and Pakistan as evidence that there is still a danger of conventional conflict escalating into a potential nuclear confrontation. Since the demise of the Cold War, states and even nonstate actors such as terrorist organizations now pursue their own narrow interests—often guided by ethnic or nationalist ideals. Liberalism fails to take these more unpredictable factors into account in its approach to international relations theory.

Critics of liberal institutionalism also argue that states cannot be expected to pursue collective gains on a consistent basis. Maintaining long-term or comprehensive cooperation between nations is more problematic than liberalism implies. States—like individuals—can be attracted by relative gains, settling for less gain but more control and self-reliance than the broader cooperation of liberalism necessitates. Also, the goals and priorities of states can change, making such an arrangement too confining or inappropriate under new or altered circumstances.

Realists tend to criticize liberals particularly with respect to our second issue— national security. The theme of national interest defined as self-interest (as opposed to liberalism's collective interest) is evident in many past and contemporary conflicts throughout the world.

Certainly the most glaring lapses in a collective security arrangement—and, indeed, in liberal theory generally—occurred prior to World War II when the League of Nations failed to either prevent or offset the rise of Hitler and Mussolini. Despite idealistic goals and cooperative intent of

the League of Nations, fascism gained not only a foothold but a firm grip on Western Europe that only a prolonged and costly world war could break.

In addition, the direct intervention by the United States to relieve widespread starvation in Somalia is the exception, rather than the rule, in international politics. The prolonged bloodshed in Rwanda and the Congo and the failure of the Western powers to mobilize either sufficient political or military force to alleviate the situations illustrate the reluctance of states to extend themselves when vital interests are not at risk. This point is clear when we recall how quickly and effectively the international community responded in 1991 when Iraq threatened the vast oil reserves of Kuwait during the first Persian Gulf War. It seems, then, that collective security is problematic at best. Small countries with limited economic or geopolitical value to the major powers rely on collective security only at their own considerable peril.

Similarly, realists are also skeptical of the liberals' notion that "low politics" have become as important as these national security issues. Certainly, the world community has become more attuned to social, environmental, and economic issues. According to realists, however, national security and the well-being of the state remain top priorities for leaders in formulating and implementing foreign and domestic policy.

Realists point to a tendency among liberal theorists to cross the line between describing the interaction of states in the international system and attributing certain patterns of behavior to certain global conditions into a more prescriptive posture. That is, liberals actually become advocates of their own program for global interdependence, rather than maintaining theory positions as neutral observers and analysts of international relations.

In addition, liberalism's proposed economic interdependence is subject to criticism on several points. Realists argue that the economic integration of states ascribed by liberalism does not necessarily lead to greater cooperation. As we discussed earlier, realists are more skeptical about the long-term success of converging state interests. Changing priorities or global conditions make the outlook for prolonged economic interdependence somewhat problematic.

Finally, proponents of class system theory, which will be discussed in greater detail in the next section, also question the assumption that interdependence facilitates greater cooperation among nations. In addition to being "Western-centric," they view interdependence as exploitative of rather than beneficial to less-developed countries. Indeed, interdependence affects countries differently. Developing nations, such as Haiti and Botswana, are more vulnerable to the economic shifts and cultural intrusion or imperialism associated with interdependence than richer, industrialized states like the United States.

Liberals might respond to their critics by stating that their theory presents a systemic explanation that takes into account the changing nature of twenty-first-century international relations. The realist emphasis on military power and conflict and the class system focus on the exploitation of the poor by the rich are too simplistic and do not provide accurate explanations of international relations.

To the realist's critique, liberals would respond by saying that they do not reject many of the major tenets of realism; they simply use them as a foundation upon which to build new explanations for contemporary global politics. For example, liberals accept the realist notion of anarchy, but argue that the growth of international economic interdependence and the expanding roles of nonstate actors and international institutions have transformed world politics, making it less anarchic and more cooperative.

To the class system theorists, liberals would point out that they do take into account that less-developed countries (LDCs) are more vulnerable than advanced industrialized states. However, they reject the argument that the global economy is structured to oppress the LDCs. Liberals view international relations as much more complex and subtle. They contend that the ability of individual corporations or states to control the course of international relations is more limited than the class system theorists believe.

Overall, liberalism offers a fairly flexible and nuanced explanation for contemporary international relations. Like all theories of global politics, liberalism has gaps and weaknesses, but it does offer unique insights into the changing nature of our twenty-first-century world.

## Key Concepts

**Collective security** is a liberal institutionalist concept of a system of world order in which aggression against an individual state is considered aggression against all states and will be met by a collective response from all states within the system. Collective security differs from balance-of-power politics in that it is not directed against a specific nation but against any state that threatens the status quo.

**Complex interdependence** is an economic liberalist concept that assumes states are not the only important actors, social welfare issues share center stage with security issues on the global agenda, and cooperation is as dominant a characteristic of international politics as conflict.

**Economic liberalism** is a theory of international relations that highlights the economic transnational ties or linkages between states. Economic liberals identify the increasingly integrated nature of the global economy as a major force in international relations. According to economic liberals, with the merging of international and domestic economic interests, states have become increasingly interconnected or interdependent and less dependent on, or less willing to use, force or the threat of force to further their national interests.

**Harmony of interests** is a liberal concept stating that the interest of all states coincides with the interest of each state. This concept is generally accepted by both institutional and economic liberals and focuses on the mutual advantages of cooperation between nations. Harmony of interests implies that the incentive to cooperate with one another is stronger than the incentive for conflict.

**Interdependence** is an economic liberalist concept that focuses on the "mutual dependence" of nations in which two or more states are mutually sensitive and vulnerable to each other's actions. Economic liberals argue that this is a defining characteristic of our contemporary world.

**International law** is the codification of rules that regulate the behavior of states and set limits upon what is permissible and what is not permissible. In theory, these rules are binding on states, as well as other international actors.

**Liberal institutionalism** is a theory of international relations that contends global cooperation is founded upon three primary factors: enhancing the role and influence of international organizations, instituting collective security, and enforcing international law. All three of these factors might be viewed as prescriptions for how states should behave, with an ultimate goal of reforming the anarchy of the international system and forging a harmonious community of nations.

**Multinational corporations (MNCs)** are companies that have production facilities or branches in several countries.

**Natural law** is a view that there is a system of rules and principles for the conduct of human affairs, founded on the belief that all people have basic, inalienable rights. In theory, these inalienable rights (essentially to life and liberty) supersede any mortal authority and cannot be legitimately denied by any government or society. Natural law is widely accepted as one of the philosophical foundations of international law.

**Regime** is a set of accepted rules, norms, and procedures that regulate the behavior of states and other actors in a given issue area. A regime also encompasses the international institutions, NGOs, and treaties that enhance cooperation in that area. Issues such as trade, the environment, monetary relations, and so forth represent a host of different international concerns that might be targeted. International cooperation is based on a variety of regimes designed to meet the needs of specific issue areas.

<sup>1</sup> Joseph S. Nye, Jr., "Understanding U.S. Strength," *Foreign Policy* 72 (Fall 1988), p. 108.

## Chapter 4

### Class System Theory (Globalism, Radical, Neo-Marxist)

The next system-level theory is what we have termed *class system theory*. This paradigm is also known as the radical, globalist, or neo-marxist theory. "Class system" seems a particularly good title, since advocates of this theory contend that it is classes, and the divisions between them, that define and determine the course of international politics.

Class system theory is based on four important concepts. First, proponents contend, economic factors are the driving force of international politics. Political and military power are the direct result of the underlying economic strength of the dominant class. Second, class system theory focuses on the development of the capitalist world economy and how it both creates and perpetuates uneven development between advanced capitalist states and poor, less developed states. Third, theorists point to an international class structure in which the advanced industrialized states in the center of the world capitalist system dominate and exploit poorer states, occupying the periphery of this system. Finally, transnational class coalitions represent the primary actors in international politics. States are important, but only as agents of the dominant class. Nonstate actors, most notably multinational corporations, allow capitalist elites to maintain the exploitative economic links that bind core countries with those on the periphery.

Economic forces, then, are a key part of the framework of class system theory. Unlike economic liberals, however, class system theorists emphasize the exploitative nature of international economic ties between states. They believe there is a systemwide hierarchy of classes and states that is rooted in the unequal distribution of wealth. According to class system theory, the structure and process of international relations is largely the result of the struggle between rich and poor countries over the control and distribution of economic resources. The tension between rich and poor countries is often referred to as the **North-South conflict**. The North represents the wealthy industrialized states that lie primarily in the northern hemisphere, while the South depicts the less developed countries, generally located in the southern hemisphere.

When conflict arises among states, it is caused, according to class system theory, by the clash of opposing economic interests—namely, the clash between capitalist and noncapitalist states. War is the result of capitalist states attempting to increase their wealth and power through imperialist foreign policies—policies in which strong capitalist states seek to exploit weaker noncapitalist states. Presumably, these conflicts will continue until the international status quo is radically altered, socialism replaces capitalism as the dominant socioeconomic system, and a more equitable distribution of wealth among nations is attained. However, beneficiaries of the "capitalist world system," the dominant capitalist class, certainly have a stake in preventing such radical change and preserving the current arrangement: keeping the rich wealthy, while the poor remain poor.

Class system theorists acknowledge that states are important actors, but they also emphasize that the dominant class exerts significant influence and often controls government policymakers. Unlike realism, which holds that states pursue national security interests, class system theory argues that states act in accordance with the wishes of the dominant economic class within the state. If the dominant class is capitalist, a state's foreign policy will be oriented to enhance the wealth and influence of the capitalist class.

With the diminished position of individual states, or groups of states, and emphasis on class conflict, class system theory also attributes a greater role to nonstate actors, such as multinational corporations and international institutions. These non-state actors are important because they foster transnational class coalitions. The idea of **transnational class coalitions** suggests that economic classes form close ties across national boundaries. It is important not to confuse the notion of transnational class coalitions with the liberal theory presented in the previous chapter. Unlike liberals, who focus on the positive aspects of increasing international economic linkages,

class system theorists emphasize the exploitative nature of the global economic system and the role that transnational actors, such as multinational corporations, play in this exploitation.

Multinational corporations (MNCs) are companies that have production facilities or branches in several countries. With headquarters in the advanced states, MNCs are the mechanism by which the capitalist class penetrates the poor countries. Rather than assisting in the development of these poor countries, multinational corporations exploit lesser developed countries as a source of cheap labor and inexpensive natural resources. MNCs then transfer profits from the lesser developed states to the base of operations in advanced capitalist states. These profits enable the capitalist class to increase global influence and sustain a dominant position in the world.

At this point, we might ask why the dominant class of a capitalist society doesn't exhibit a more selfless, "share the wealth" attitude. More broadly, why are some countries rich ("core" states) and some poor (periphery or semi-periphery states)? Here, we see some similarity to realism in that class system theory also suggests that human nature tends toward self-interest and the need to dominate others. However, unlike the realists, most class system theorists believe that if society were based more on an equal distribution of wealth, the aggressive and negative aspects of human nature might be reformed and perfected.

## Marxism

Most class system theorists rely on the fundamental assumptions of marxism, and on its critique of capitalism, as the intellectual basis for their theories about international relations. Karl Marx was not an international relations scholar but a German social and economic theorist. Together with his lifelong collaborator Friedrich Engels, Marx wrote *Manifesto of the Communist Party* (1848) and *Das Kapital (The Capital)*, (1867), providing a social and economic doctrine that served as a basis for many theories of international relations. Marx and Engels created a body of political, social, and economic prescriptions that formed the ideological foundation of modern communist parties and strongly influenced many twentieth-century socialists and class system theorists.

According to Marx, the driving force of history is the struggle between economic classes. He termed this condition **dialectical materialism**. The dialectic, as it is called, suggests that history moves through stages—from feudalism to capitalism to socialism and, finally, to communism. The transition from one stage to the next is often prompted by the struggle between economic classes, as we have pointed out, as well as by the development and spread of technology. Politics, then, both domestic and international, would be best understood in terms of the structure and interaction of economic classes.

In the capitalist phase of Marx's dialectic, human interaction is characterized by the strong exploiting the weak, the struggle between the oppressed and the oppressors. He contends that capitalist society is divided into three basic classes. The dominant class, made up of wealthy capitalists, owns and controls the means of production, that is, factories and land. Although the capitalist class represents the smallest percentage of society, it is this ownership of both the factories and the land that enables it to control and exploit the other classes and amass even greater wealth and power.

The second class consists largely of workers living in the cities and working in these capitalist-owned factories. Marx wrote that the workers, or **proletariat**, are nothing more than "wage slaves," paid subsistence wages and exploited by capitalist factory owners whose sole motivation is greed. In a similar plight, the third class is made up of peasants who work the land. Capitalist land owners exploit peasant farm labor in return for allowing the peasantry to live on their land.

The division of society into these three classes represents the core of marxist theory, emphasizing the history of society as the history of class struggle, in which the oppressed worker and peasant classes attempt to free themselves from the domination of the wealthy capitalist class. As competition for wealth increases among the capitalists, this clash, leading from capitalism to

socialism, is, according to Marx, inevitable. A redistribution of wealth within society would take place under the leadership of the proletariat.

## Imperialism

John A. Hobson, a British economist and journalist, wrote *Imperialism: A Study* in 1902, focusing on the imperialist policies of the European colonial empires. Classical **imperialism** is the policy of expanding a state's power and authority by conquering and controlling territories called colonies. Hobson stripped away any notion of imperialism as *noblesse oblige*, that is, a wealthy nation's duty or noble obligation to "assist" poorer, less developed nations. According to Hobson, imperialism is an extension of the capitalist search and competition for cheap labor and raw materials, and occurs when wealthy states exert political and economic control and influence over weaker nations or territories. Such a pattern is often sanctioned, even facilitated, by the powerful state's government and foreign policy. Hobson argued that imperialism was designed to increase the wealth and power of strong states at the *expense* of weaker states.

Hobson said that far from any selfless desire to promote growth in these underdeveloped areas, capitalists invest abroad because of the potential for higher profits. Reinvestment at home would not yield the same benefits as exploitation of raw materials and cheap labor in these colonies. The foreign and domestic policies of a state are often guided by the ruling class—the wealthy capitalists—and, therefore, facilitate this system of imperialism.

V. I. Lenin, founder of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, used Hobson's writings as the basis for his notion that imperialism is, in fact, "the highest stage of capitalism." He contended that international politics was simply the "internationalization of the class system." Lenin asserted that in order to survive, capitalism needed to expand constantly. Having exploited the workers in their own states, European capitalists sought new markets, cheap raw materials, and greater profits. The acquisition of colonies fulfilled these requirements.

The problem with this "scramble for colonies" was that, by the late nineteenth century, most areas in the world were already colonized. Once this occurred, the expansion of one imperialist power could come only at the expense of other imperialist powers. This process, according to Lenin, led to world war between the great European imperialist states. World War I, he reasoned, was simply the final stage of capitalist imperialism.

This link, between imperialism and the inevitability of war due to imperialism, is one of Lenin's fundamental contributions to international relations theory. We now see that, although their explanations are quite different, both class system theorists and neo-realists view the causes of war as coming from the nature of and conditions in the international system itself. For neo-realists, the problem is anarchy; for class system theorists, it is imperialism and economic dependence.

## Dependency Theory

Dependency theory, as part of the class system paradigm, is discussed in the article by Immanuel Wallerstein. He developed dependency theory to explain the uneven development in wealth between poor and rich countries. **Uneven development** is defined as the propensity of capitalism to create and perpetuate an unequal dispersal of global wealth and prosperity.

**Dependency theory** asserts that trade, foreign investment, and even foreign aid between advanced, industrialized countries and poor, less developed states is inherently exploitative, works to the disadvantage of the poor nations, and perpetuates the dependency of these less developed countries.

With respect to dependency theory, Wallerstein suggests that relations between states in the international system can be classified as part of a system of dependency and exploitation. The term **neo-imperialism** is used to describe the less overt control now exercised by the North over exports and raw materials in developing nations. Though distinct from the imperialist practices of the European colonial empires, the economic and political influence exercised by advanced capitalist powers over less developed countries is simply a new, more subtle form of imperialism.

In conjunction with dependency theory, Wallerstein also developed the notion of a **capitalist world system**, dividing states into three categories: core (wealthy), periphery (poor), and semi-periphery (less developed). In many ways, the relationship between these three categories of countries parallels that between different classes within capitalist society. Dominant core nations are wealthy, with economies geared more toward technologically or economically advanced businesses—from high technology manufacturing to banking and global finance. These countries control the global means of production. Machinery for manufacturing, tools for agricultural production, and world monetary systems are in the hands of these core nations.

To support their dominant position, core nations depend on the raw materials and cheap labor of periphery, or poor, states. Like the underclass or the proletariat in a capitalist society, periphery states depend on the orders and work provided by core countries for their survival. Indeed, core countries exploit the cheap labor and raw materials to maintain a high profit margin and to sustain their own dominant position in the international system. Semi-periphery states, or less developed countries, are important when the cost of labor in core countries becomes too high, and they also serve as markets for excess production and investment capital.

Using Wallerstein's outline of the capitalist world system, let us look at the positions of core, periphery, and semi-periphery countries with respect to one another; this should help to explain why and how such a system is maintained. This theory not only describes the hierarchical international system in which the rich states continue to dominate poor, less developed states but also provides an explanation for the uneven rates of development between the North and the South.

Dominant core countries have a stake in preserving this cycle of dependency and exploitation that exists with periphery and semi-periphery states and pursue foreign and domestic policies to further that goal. Poor and less developed countries are virtually locked into a position of dependency. As we discussed earlier with regard to transnational class coalitions, class system theorists suggest that strong capitalist nations have allies in these poor nations. Small groups of capitalist elites in the peripheral states act as liaisons to and partners with leaders, policymakers, and business executives in the core countries. These elites have more in common with the capitalists of foreign nations than with the underclass of their own state. They too, then, have a stake in preserving the status quo—the dependency and exploitation—of their own country.

### **Contemporary Class System Theory**

The selection by Fred Halliday provides us with an example of how the major assumptions of class system theory can be used to develop an innovative and provocative explanation for the collapse of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War. His analysis emphasizes the vitality of Western capitalism and the inability of the Soviet Union to compete effectively.

Realist theoreticians treated the Cold War as a continuation of traditional power politics, but Halliday focuses on the ideological and socioeconomic aspects of superpower conflict. He argues that the structure of the international system is actually the result of specific historical conditions. The conditions that prevailed in the Cold War environment depended on the dominance of two contending political, economic, and ideological systems locked in a struggle for ascendancy.

Though Halliday's analysis of the Cold War acknowledges that the United States and the Soviet Union were engaged in a broad bipolar conflict, that conflict was actually motivated and propelled by competition on three distinct levels. Two of these, socioeconomic and ideological, were at least as important as, if not ultimately more important than, the third, traditional military competition. Despite his mistrust and criticism of capitalism, Halliday, unlike many class system theorists, at least acknowledges the vitality of capitalism as a dynamic economic and social system.

The last article is written by Noam Chomsky, one of the most prominent political dissidents and leftist theorists of the last several decades. Chomsky presents a class system analysis of the U.S. war against terrorism. The author contends that American armed intervention in Afghanistan and previous U.S. military actions could equally be classified as terrorist acts. Chomsky urges

Americans to reassess the long-term implications of America's military attacks abroad and change U.S. policy accordingly.

### **A Critique of Class System Theory**

Like the proponents of all our system-level theories, class system theorists tend to emphasize the unique contributions of their own paradigm as a model to assess and interpret international relations. This theory does, indeed, have certain strengths. While both realism and liberalism tend to focus primarily on the interaction of wealthy, powerful states, only class system theory examines the so-called pattern of dependence that distinguishes the relationship between rich and poor countries.

Perhaps, for this reason, class system theory, though out of favor in Western circles, remains popular and widely accepted by scholars in less developed nations. Today, many prominent class system theorists are, in fact, from Latin America. This theory, with its emphasis on the North-South conflict and problems of development, poverty, and other social-welfare issues, is one of the few paradigms that tries to provide an explanation for the disparities in wealth and development worldwide.

Class system theory must be credited with at least some success in providing an explanation for these and other problems facing less developed states. Certainly, poor countries are more vulnerable to shifts in the international marketplace, relying on exports of primary products—raw materials and natural resources—to sustain themselves economically. Moreover, class system theory contains a valuable critique of the excesses of capitalism and its impact on less developed countries. It is difficult to deny that some vestiges of imperialism are still in place today. Many people living in less developed parts of the world resent not only the economic but also the cultural penetration of their countries. Capitalism, from their vantage point, is closely linked to Western—particularly American—culture and viewed as a threat to indigenous cultural traditions and ways of life.

Though there is merit to the arguments in favor of class system theory, critics are not without ammunition. Many critics argue that class system theory exaggerates the role of the world capitalist system in limiting development and ignores the impact that policies adopted in the less developed states have on their own economic development.

Specifically, class system theory fails to address the impact that different development strategies have had on various countries facing similar problems with economic development. Dependency theory can account only for those countries that have failed to develop. How could, for example, Immanuel Wallerstein explain the remarkable economic growth of many countries occupying what he describes as the semi-periphery? Rapid and successful industrial development in Taiwan, Singapore, Hong Kong, South Korea, and Brazil is difficult for class system theorists to explain or dismiss. These newly industrialized countries (NICs) are the rising economic powers of the late twentieth century and already compete successfully with major capitalist powers in the North. Clearly, these countries illustrate that, contrary to the suppositions of class system theory, capitalism can be beneficial and bring prosperity to developing countries.

In addition to ignoring the progress of these economically vibrant nations, some class system theorists have been criticized for being ahistorical—a potential trap for any theorist of international relations. Critics point out that class system theorists rely on case studies that conform to and confirm their particular paradigm while ignoring states that fall outside these parameters.

This theoretical blind eye is especially true with respect to weaknesses of communist nations. While focusing on North-South relations, class system theorists fail to account for a significant percentage of the globe. The former Soviet Union and Eastern European states, even China, present some difficulties for the class system paradigm. Certainly, during the Cold War era, the Soviet Union maintained policies of imperialism in the subjugation and exploitation of Eastern Europe. Imperialist domination of other states is, evidently, not limited solely to capitalist powers.

Class system theory also falls short in explaining the failure of marxist principles and communist doctrine in the former USSR and Eastern Bloc nations, as well as the capitalist reforms now under way in these countries. Though advocates might suggest that true marxist doctrine was never fully implemented in the region, surely this cannot be considered true of communist China. Even in this most ideologically committed nation, the Chinese government has turned to free enterprise and open markets to stimulate its formerly stagnant socialized economy.

Despite these flaws, class system theory still provides important insights into the economic development process and remains a highly popular explanation of global politics, particularly among scholars in less developed countries. Like any theory, it is important for students to decide for themselves which explanation, if any, provides the most accurate description of international relations.

## Key Concepts

**Capitalist world system** is a concept of class system theory that focuses on the exploitative nature of the global spread of capitalism. This system divides states into three categories: core (wealthy), periphery (poor), and semi-periphery (less developed). Core nations are wealthy, advanced powers that control the global means of production and use their wealth and power to exploit and dominate those states residing in the semi-periphery and periphery of the global economic system.

**Class struggle** is the marxist theory that history is a story of struggle between economic classes in which the oppressed worker and peasant classes attempt to free themselves from the domination of the wealthy capitalist class.

**Dependency theory** is a concept associated with class system theorists that asserts that trade, foreign investment, and even foreign aid between advanced industrialized countries and poor, lesser developed states is inherently exploitative and works to the disadvantage of the poor nations.

**Dialectical materialism** is a theory developed by Karl Marx positing that history moves through stages—from feudalism to capitalism to socialism and, finally, to communism. The transition from one stage to the next is often prompted by the struggle between economic classes as well as by the development and spread of technology.

**Imperialism** is the policy of expanding a state's power and authority by conquering and controlling territories, called colonies.

**Neo-imperialism** is the process of the international system in which the advanced industrial states' control of exports and raw materials in developing nations is simply a more subtle form of domination than the previous imperialist practices of the European colonial empires. The economic and political influence exercised by the advanced capitalist powers over less developed countries is simply a new, more insidious form of imperialism.

**North-South conflict** is a phrase used to characterize the tension between rich and poor countries. *North* represents the wealthy industrialized states that lie primarily in the northern hemisphere, while *South* is the term used for the less developed countries mainly located in the southern hemisphere.

**Proletariat** is a marxist term for industrial workers living in urban areas and working in capitalist-owned factories. Marx wrote that the workers are nothing more than "wage slaves," paid subsistence wages and exploited by capitalist factory owners whose sole motivation is greed.

**Transnational class coalitions** is a concept of class system theory contending that economic classes form close ties across national boundaries. Unlike liberals who focus on the positive aspects of increasing international economic linkages, class system theorists emphasize the exploitative nature of the global economic system and the role that transnational actors, like multinational corporations, play in this exploitation.

**Uneven development** is the propensity of capitalism to create and perpetuate an unequal dispersal of global wealth and prosperity.

## Chapter 5

### Postmodernism (Constructivism, Feminism, Critical Theory, Poststructuralism)

The fourth and newest system-level theory of international relations is known as **postmodernism**. This paradigm incorporates a rather diverse array of theories developed over the last twenty-five years, including constructivism, feminism, critical theory, and poststructuralism. Although these theories offer distinct views of international relations, they are united by their rejection of empirically based positivist traditions that are the cornerstone of the first three theories of international relations presented in this text.

Unlike realism, liberalism, and class system theory, postmodernism focuses primarily on the importance of ideas and culture in shaping our understanding of international politics. Postmodernists argue that traditional theories of international relations are inherently subjective and merely reflect the biases and motivations of the people who created the theories in the first place. Many postmodernists argue that it is impossible to construct an objective or unbiased theory of international relations and therefore focus on how our understanding of international relations is shaped by our beliefs and social identities.

At the root of the argument between postmodernism and mainstream IR theory is a difference over epistemology. **Epistemology** is the study of the origin, nature, and limits of human knowledge. Put another way, epistemology focuses on how we know or attain knowledge. Traditional theorists of international relations (realists, liberals, and class system theorists) believe that it is possible to acquire objective knowledge of the world. These mainstream approaches rest upon the assumption that it is possible to develop rational and testable theories to explain international relations. This can be accomplished by relying on the methodologies developed by the natural sciences and adopting them to explain social phenomena such as domestic and international politics. This school of thought is called positivism.

**Positivism** is a philosophical movement characterized by an emphasis upon science and scientific method as the only dependable sources of knowledge. Positivists believe that reliable knowledge can be acquired only through experimental investigation and empirical observation. So traditional IR theory is based on the belief that it is possible to identify objective facts and use them as a basis for developing testable hypotheses upon which we can form theories of international relations.

Postmodernists, on the other hand, question the validity of positivist epistemology. The postmodernist critique of conventional IR theory can be divided into three basic parts. The first part involves hermeneutics and its effect on theory development. **Hermeneutics** is the study of how we interpret, explain, and draw meaning from language. Postmodernists differ with traditional theorists over the value of language as a tool for understanding the world in which we live. The positivist views the world and reality as constructed through the orderly system of language, while postmodernists distrust the reliance on language as the path to knowledge.

Second, many postmodernists argue that there is no such thing as objective, value-free theory. Theory is merely the product of our perception of reality. In fact, postmodernists contend that theory simply reflects the values of the individuals who construct the theories. Therefore, they are skeptical about whether the methodology of the natural sciences can be applied to the social sciences. Postmodernists emphasize the difference between theories in the natural science such as chemistry and biology as opposed to social science theories such as political science. In chemistry, elements have distinct properties and react in particular ways that can be replicated in laboratory settings. These chemical reactions occur regardless of what we believe or want to happen. Social scientists, on the other hand, study human interactions that cannot be isolated in controlled laboratory conditions. Thus, the study of human beings is far more complex and subject to influences outside of the control of the social scientists. So when social science scholars study IR theory, there is an unavoidable relationship between theory and practice, between what political leaders think about how the world works and how they behave in the world.

Third, postmodernists' uncertainty about the objectivity of language and the ability of theorists to produce value-neutral theory caused them to search for alternative ways to interpret IR theory. This skepticism regarding the ability of language to represent an objective view of reality led them to the literary and philosophical theory of deconstruction. **Deconstruction** is a theory about language and literature that postmodernists adapted to analyze theories of international relations. Deconstruction is an analytical method that seeks to take apart, or "de-construct," verbal and written language in search of the hidden meanings implanted inside. Deconstruction offers social and political context to our understanding of language. It is a view of language as it exists not only in books but in speech, in history, and in culture. For the deconstructionist, language creates human reality. Language provides the broader cultural background that gives meaning to social conventions and concepts. In short, deconstruction is used by postmodernists to demonstrate that language and therefore knowledge is a human construct that is subjective.

In the chapter's first reading, Yosef Lapid introduces the basic underpinnings of postmodernism. Lapid presents both the promises and potential problems associated with postmodernism. The author begins by asserting that the postmodernist paradigm represents a serious challenge to our understanding of social science and consequently our study of international relations theory. Lapid reminds us that we need to be aware of the potential weaknesses of mainstream analytical methodology used in traditional theories of international relations. The author concludes with a warning that uncritical acceptance of postmodernism can lead to theoretical relativism, in which all theories are considered equal regardless of their intellectual merit.

As noted earlier, the postmodernist paradigm represents a diverse and wide number of images in international relations. In order not to overwhelm students by presenting examples of all the key theories within postmodernism, we limited our attention to the two most influential and widely known branches of postmodernism. Therefore, we will focus on constructivist and feminist theories of postmodernism.

## **Constructivism**

The first branch of postmodernism is called constructivism. **Constructivism** is based on the claim that our understanding of reality is socially "constructed." By this we mean that constructivists place great attention on the role of ideas and beliefs in shaping our understanding of the world. They emphasize the identities and interests of individuals and states and the ways in which those preferences are a product of society. Constructivists examine the processes by which leaders, groups, and states alter their preferences, shape their identities, and learn new behavior.

Constructivists share the postmodernist position that knowledge is not just about what we observe but also about the meaning given to those observations. This view rests on the principle of social constructivism. **Social constructivism** is the study of how people's identities, values, and ideas are defined by their group affiliations. Social constructivism examines how ideas and identities are created, how they change, and how they shape the manner in which states act on the international stage. The constructivist approach to international relations centers on states as social actors whose actions adhere to international and domestic rules. Put simply, constructivists assert that the behavior of states is driven by rules, norms, institutions, and identities. Like other postmodernists, constructivists place great emphasis on the malleability of world politics and how social norms shape and change the nature of international relations. For example, conventional IR theory concepts such as power, anarchy, and state sovereignty are not objective (empirical) phenomena but are actually ideas given meaning by us. The constructivist approach is to study how these ideas and values came into being and how they affect the way states act.

The constructivist view of international relations is based on five basic assumptions. First, constructivists contend that ideas, beliefs, and identities of individuals and groups are key to understanding the nature and course of international relations.

Second, constructivists believe that people's identities, ideas, and values are created or "constructed" in large part by their group affiliations. In other words, who you are and what you

believe is in large measure the result of where you live and to what groups you belong. A young Afghan's view of the world will be dramatically different from that of a young American's. The values, ideas, and goals of each are, in part, the product of their distinct cultures, group affiliations, and social upbringing.

Third, constructivism places greater emphasis on social factors than on material factors such as military and economic power. Constructivists assert that people create social reality. This means that social factors such as ideas, values, and identities are most important in understanding international politics.

Fourth, constructivists contend that conflict or cooperation between states is largely the result of their values, views and ideas about each other and their place in the international system. For example, one of the architects of constructivism, Alexander Wendt, has argued that the realist principle of anarchy does not offer a satisfactory explanation of why conflict occurs between states. Realists argue that anarchy is an objective reality, whereas Wendt believes anarchy is subjective. Therefore, according to Wendt, anarchy exists only when people believe it exists. Most importantly, constructivists examine how anarchy is understood by states and how this understanding has shaped and continues to shape their actions.

Fifth, constructivists place great emphasis on explaining change in international relations. Change is a focal point for constructivists because their theory of the social construction of ideas holds that the way people and groups view the world can change dramatically over time. Overall, constructivists believe that concepts such as nation and sovereignty, democracy and terrorism are all socially constructed ideas with socially constructed definitions, and are not permanent, objective truths that are impervious to changing interpretations.

The last assumption may demonstrate why constructivism has drawn more serious scholarly attention since the end of the Cold War. Stephen Walt, a noted scholar of international relations theory (see his article in Chapter 1, "International Relations: One World, Many Theories," page 29), pointed out that constructivism is the only theory that offered a plausible explanation for the end of the Cold War between the United States and the Soviet Union. Constructivists argued that the end of the Cold War was a direct result of former Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev's embracing of new ideas and the gradual decline of the acceptance of communist ideology by elites within the Soviet Union.

In his selection, Alexander Wendt critiques realism and offers constructivism as an alternative theory of international relations. Wendt offers a brief overview of the major assumptions of the constructivist approach and contends that postmodernists are united by their focus on how world politics is socially constructed. Wendt stresses the ultimate subjectivity of interests and their links to changing identities. Finally, he emphasizes the importance of ideas and culture in shaping the behavior of states.

## **Feminist Theory**

Before we begin our discussion of the feminist branch of postmodernism it must be noted that not all feminist IR theorists fit into the postmodernist paradigm. In fact, many feminist IR theorists remain positivists and reject the fundamental principles of the theoretical approach of postmodernism. The point here is to emphasize the diversity within the feminist approach to international relations theory and that this chapter spotlights a major but not exclusive view of feminist writings on IR theory.

The analysis and articles presented here examine international relations and established theories of international relations from a feminist viewpoint. That is, they introduce the element of gender into our understanding of foreign policy and the behavior of states. Gender, with respect to political science, does not narrowly adhere to the traditional biological delineation between men and women. Rather, the term **gender** encompasses the social and cultural distinctions as well as the differences in conventional roles between the two sexes, not simply clinical or biological classifications. Further, when we associate a particular role with an individual or group, we generally mean the function or behavior patterns normally connected with a particular position.

Hence, **gender roles** are the jobs, tasks, and activities that are traditionally associated with either men or women as a group.

A key component of feminist theory is its questioning of the validity of the distribution of power, a key component in the behavior of and relations between states as the system currently stands. Feminist theorists do not believe that the accumulation of power, balance-of-power politics, and domination implicit in such an arrangement represent reasonable standards for the conduct of international affairs. Feminist theory also argues that the current system fails to promote the interests and roles of women in the world community. Traditional theorists' ignoring of women's contributions and issues renders the entire history and present system of, as well as the approach to, international politics one-sided, masculinist, and not fully representative.

Feminist theory may be viewed as a multifaceted effort to change the course and conduct of international relations in a way that incorporates the unique character and contributions of women. One aspect of feminist theory is its emphasis on the unique perspective and contributions that women bring to human relations and its analysis of these relations. This approach highlights the distinctions between men and women in terms of role, interests, capabilities, and so forth, arguing that women do not need to compete with or surpass men on every issue. Emphasis is placed on positive differences rather than negative competition. Feminist theorists argue that differences in women's expertise and perspective on various issues bring vitality, expand possibilities, and offer a new breadth of understanding to accepted norms and established theories of international affairs. For example, women's traditional skills and experience as primary caregiver and nurturer in the family setting and in society would presumably give them a greater range of abilities in the public spheres of conflict resolution, negotiation, and diplomacy. Overall, women's greater capacity to bond, form lasting relationships, and empathize with others provides them with a natural advantage over men in these situations—a point never considered in traditional international relations theories.

### **Postmodern Feminist IR Theory**

As in constructivism, social identity is a primary principle for **postmodern feminist** theory. Feminist postmodernists emphasize the social construction of gender roles and their impact on the structure of society and international relations. Postmodern feminists remind us that gender-based concepts and attitudes are social constructs that are created and rooted in interconnected systems of male dominated power. Consequently, feminists focus on the gender-related—often oppressive—themes and subtexts that litter a field dominated by men since its inception and still dominated by men today. A **subtext** is a hidden, underlying meaning or interpretation that can presumably be discerned by close examination of the words and phrases chosen by the author. Thus, both overtly and unconsciously, the analysis, worldview, and terminology widely used and accepted in the study and practice of international affairs is dominated by a male perspective.

Feminist theorists often use the term **androcentric** (male-centered) to describe the idea that mainstream theories of international relations (particularly realism) ignore alternative viewpoints and, instead, rely on essentially masculine interpretations of world affairs. The male approach—filled with images of power, strength, domination, and war—is quite distinct from the female approach—characterized by images of peace, equity, social justice, and environmental balance. By recognizing these inherent and pervasive inequalities and exposing the hidden masculinist agenda in the world political system, these feminist theorists hope to create a broader overall setting for enlightened discourse. And, since women have historically been outsiders in this global power game, this new approach would likely benefit peripheral nations (Third World, less-industrialized societies) that have also commonly found themselves on the fringes of political influence.

Obviously, feminist theory encompasses several viewpoints in a progressive dialogue on international relations theory. There is, however, agreement within the ranks of the debate on some key issues. To begin, the frameworks for both the practice of and theorizing about international affairs have been constructed to fit male conceptions of the world, life, and human

interaction. In addition to setting up these frameworks, men have played and continue to play the primary role within them. Feminist theorists generally agree that the inclusion of women, in any of the forms mentioned above, would have a significant, positive impact on the policy-making process and the policies themselves. Such changes would stem from the perspective and experience of women in society and would benefit the world community by promoting greater equality throughout the system, as well as policies emphasizing nonviolent solutions and alternatives.

### **Writings in Feminist Theory**

The articles selected for this chapter represent a sampling of the work being done on feminist theories of international relations. J. Ann Tickner's piece offers a frank discussion about the tensions between feminists and traditional IR theorists. The author examines the theoretical and methodological differences between feminist scholars and others. Tickner contends that feminists do not fit into the conventional state-centric and structural approaches and that this is one of the primary reasons why feminist IR theory is so misunderstood by conventional scholars in the field. Finally, Tickner explains how feminist perspectives of the conventional concept of security can contribute to our understanding of contemporary international politics.

In the next reading, Robert Keohane responds to J. Ann Tickner's article by providing an explanation of why feminist theory lacks widespread acceptance by mainstream IR theorists. In fact, Keohane asserts that much of the fault lies with feminists themselves. He decries the excessive politicization of the debate between feminists and traditional theorists and argues that this problem prevents serious discussion on feminist IR scholarship. Keohane concludes that feminist IR theorists must do more than offer critiques of mainstream IR theory. Instead, feminists need to develop systematic, testable, and falsifiable hypotheses because this will facilitate a more constructive scholarly dialogue between feminists and traditional IR theorists.

The selection by Birgit Locher and Elisabeth Prugl offers some unique insights into the similarities and differences between constructivist and feminist approaches to IR theory. The authors acknowledge that both theories share a fundamental agreement on the importance of the role of social construction of ideas and identities in understanding international politics. Many feminists agree that gender is a social construct, and this position forms the cornerstone of commonality between constructivist and feminist approaches to IR theory. But the authors contend that constructivism ignores key feminist epistemological insights and that there are profound differences between feminists and constructivists.

The final reading, by Saba Gul Khattak, is an interesting example of a policy-relevant feminist analysis of the utility and impact of the use of force. The author uses the U.S. bombing of Afghanistan in the aftermath of the events of September 11, 2001, to demonstrate the importance of understanding the problem from the perspective of Afghans in general and gender in particular.

### **A Critique of Feminist Theory**

One of the greatest strengths and contributions of postmodern feminist theory is that it examines the construction and role of gender that mainstream international relations theory ignores. It stands to reason that if men have dominated the course and conduct of international relations, and men have designed theories on this subject, that overall perceptions have been gender influenced. Just as two people witnessing the same event might describe it differently because of their unique backgrounds and preconceptions, it is likely that the predominance of men in international affairs has had an effect on the foreign policy behavior of states and theories about world politics.

Feminist theory has also made important headway both in uncovering the masculinist approach to international relations theory and in promoting the interests, goals, and equality of women in the field. Essentially, feminist theorists have moved beyond isolating the gender inequities in our traditional ways of looking at things and have also established various methods for redressing these inequities. These methods seek to incorporate a greater number of issues

important and relevant to women's lives or to expand the percentage of women in the foreign policy establishment. As the disparities in power and influence between men and women equalize, the nature and conduct of international politics may very well change.

A major criticism of the feminist paradigm, however, is its failure to provide a comprehensive theoretical construct for analyzing international relations. Conventional theorists might suggest it is not sufficiently rigorous, lacking an organized, cohesive framework. As a prescriptive theory, feminism falls into the trap of focusing too much of its efforts on how the situation in world politics, and the study of world politics, might be changed. What feminist theory does *not* supply are the explanatory and theoretical tools to conduct a thorough analysis.

We might also question some of the standards that are established in the context of feminist theory. Are feminists guilty of relying on their own stereotypes of gender characteristics? By using selective characterizations—women are more cooperative and peaceful, while men are more violent and aggressive—feminist theorists risk reinforcing the same gender stereotyping they are trying to overcome.

Despite our initial point, crediting feminist theory with uncovering gender bias in a male dominated field, there are skeptics who question the utility of this view. Critics contend that international relations theory should explain and predict behavior based on how the world actually operates. Since men hold the vast majority of leadership positions, scholars must study their behavior. Critics also point out that gender may not provide a sufficient explanation for past and contemporary international politics. Larger forces (human nature, disparities in wealth and power, anarchic world system, to name just a few) shape the behavior of various actors on the world stage, irrespective of gender. As evidence, critics point to the fact that when women have assumed leadership positions and confronted the same global problems that men have confronted, their actions have been similar to men's.

Feminist theorists respond to these arguments in a number of ways. First, feminists contend that illustrating that women and men behave differently is not engaging in stereotypes. It simply challenges scholars to appreciate the extent to which traditional theories of international relations rely solely on male conceptions of reality and ignore the perspectives and concerns of women. Second, they argue that feminist theories of international relations should not be judged by conventional, male-dominated rules of objectivity and analysis. Feminism is an innovative approach that seeks to inject a "feminine" perspective into the study of international relations. With this new perspective come new ways of analyzing global politics that cannot, and should not, be judged merely on how well the theories hold up to conventional social science methodologies and practices.

Whether we agree or disagree with these critics, feminist theory is now an important perspective in the field of international relations. In our study of how individuals behave in a global setting, differences between the sexes cannot be ignored. As men and women address gender issues in practice within society at large, it must certainly be time to address them in theory.

### **Critique of Postmodernism**

Even a cursory reading of this chapter makes it clear to the reader that postmodernism is a complex, diverse, and intellectually challenging view of international relations theory. Broadly speaking, postmodernism provides an engaging critique of the social sciences more generally and to IR theory specifically. The postmodernist evaluation of positivism reminds us of the limits of IR theory and offers a useful lesson that IR theory is not an exact discipline that contains immutable truths that can be relied upon with certainty. Its emphasis on the subjectivity of ideas, theories, and even methodology is an important counterweight to mainstream conceptions of IR theory. Moreover, both the constructivist and feminist branches of postmodernism point out that language, group identities, and gender roles are socially constructed concepts that have a profound impact on the conduct of our lives.

In general, postmodernists concentrate on important questions that the other paradigms sometimes ignore. Specifically, constructivists focus on why and how change occurs in

international politics. Feminists ask whether gender roles affect our view of global politics and whether our understanding of international relations has been narrowed by male-dominated cultures. What this demonstrates is that theories are important not just for the answers they supply but for the questions they ask. The postmodernists have broadened the agenda of IR theory by posing some very valuable questions that the other paradigms had customarily de-emphasized or disregarded. Criticism of postmodernist theory centers on three major problems. First, postmodernism rejects the positivist underpinnings of mainstream IR theory but it doesn't present any clear alternative with which to replace it. Second, postmodernism is merely a critique of traditional IR theory and nothing more. For that reason, critics contend that postmodernism is more accurately viewed as a radical approach to the study of theory in general than it is a cogent theory of international relations. Third, many mainstream IR theorists question the intellectual rigor of postmodernists who shun mainstream social science methodology and rely solely on non-falsifiable assertions regarding the nature and course of international relations. Finally, the postmodernist emphasis on the social construction of reality and the lack of objective truths leads many to wonder whether postmodernism is simply an anti-intellectual exercise that leads us nowhere.

Postmodernists respond by saying that traditional approaches to IR theory are too constraining and that the value of postmodernism cannot be judged by the conventional methods employed by mainstream IR theorists. Instead, postmodernism represents an attempt to broaden the horizon of international relations theory and employ new viewpoints and methods for understanding the changing nature of international relations. This debate is sure to continue for many years, but one thing remains certain: The postmodernist image of global politics has assumed its position as one of the major systemic theories of international relations.

## Key Concepts

**Androcentric** (male-centered) describes the idea that traditional theories of international relations (particularly realism) ignore alternative view points and, instead, rely on essentially masculine interpretations of world affairs.

**Constructivism** is a postmodernist theory of international relations that is based on the claim that our reality is socially constructed. Constructivists place great attention on the role of ideas and beliefs in shaping our understanding of the world. They emphasize the identities and interests of individuals and states and the ways in which those preferences are socially constructed.

**Reconstruction** is a theory about language and literature developed in the 1970s that postmodernists have adapted to analyze theories of international relations. Deconstruction is an analytical method that seeks to take apart or "de-construct" verbal and written language in search of the hidden meanings embedded inside.

**Epistemology** is the study of the origin, nature, and limits of human knowledge.

**Gender** encompasses the social and cultural distinctions, as well as the differences in traditional roles, between the two sexes, not simply clinical or biological classifications.

**Gender roles** are the jobs, tasks, and activities that are traditionally associated to either men or women as a group.

**Hermeneutics** is the study of how we interpret, explain, and draw meaning from language.

**Positivism** is a philosophical movement characterized by an emphasis upon science and scientific method as the only dependable sources of knowledge. Positivists believe that reliable knowledge can only be acquired through experimental investigation and empirical observation. Traditional IR theory is based on the positivist epistemology.

**Postmodernism** is the name of the paradigm that incorporates the following theories: constructivism, feminism, critical theory, and poststructuralism. Postmodernism asserts that it is impossible to construct an objective or unbiased theory of international relations and instead

spotlights how our understanding of international relations is shaped by our beliefs and social identities. Postmodernists believe that reality is shaped by perceptions and that knowledge is highly subjective.

**Social constructivism** is the study of how people's identities, values, and ideas are developed by their group affiliations.

**Subtext** is a hidden, underlying meaning or interpretation that can presumably be discerned by close examination of the words and phrases chosen by the author.

## Chapter 6

### State-Level International Relations Theories – Political Culture Theory

In Part I, we discussed system-level theories of international relations, focusing on the nature of the global system and how it shapes the behavior of states within it. Now, we turn our attention to the theories that fall under Waltz's second level of analysis—the state level. State-level theories, as noted in Chapter 1, concentrate on the individual attributes of states rather than the overall system in which they operate. The primary concern here is with the domestic, political, and cultural characteristics of a state. The key assumption is that the internal character and institutions of a state have a direct bearing on its foreign policy.

There are two primary state-level theories presented in this book; each focuses on the role of the state and its impact on international relations: political culture theory and decision-making process theory. In the first chapter, we examine the tenets of political culture theory, as well as its strengths and weaknesses. Some political culture theorists argue that the type of government a state has is a broad determining factor in its behavior and foreign policy. On a basic level, these theorists suggest that, generally, democracies tend to be inherently peaceful, while authoritarian regimes are likely to pursue more aggressive policies.

A second group of political culture theorists acknowledges that these differences between regimes can be important, but believes that it is the cultural and civilizing aspects of a society that shape and guide foreign policy. For these theorists, the traditions, customs, values, and beliefs that characterize a particular group of people also have an influence on the political behavior of that group or its governing body.

The theory presented in the following chapter, decision-making process theory, emphasizes the importance of how decisions are made and the impact of the bureaucracy itself on the government's decision-making process. The implication is that the structure of the government—with its various departments and competing interests—can have substantial sway over not just the policy-making process but the policies themselves.

In the next two chapters, we take a closer look at one of the primary actors on the world stage—the state. From this level of analysis, we examine how states and governments can influence the course of events in international relations. Types of political systems, bureaucratic structure, and unique characteristics of different cultures and civilizations are just some of the important features we will discuss as part of the state level of analysis.

### Introduction

Before we begin our discussion of political culture theory, it might be helpful to answer a few fundamental questions about states and how they operate, as well as to define some commonly used terms. Though it may seem fairly basic, let us first ask, What is a state, and how does a state differ from a government?

We can all list the names of any number of states throughout the world— France, Singapore, the United States, Kenya, and so forth. All are very different, yet all are considered states. A state or country (these terms are synonymous) is a political, legal, and territorial entity. A state consists of an internationally recognized territory, a permanent population, and a government that has control over the people within its acknowledged boundaries. In theory, states are sovereign. That is, the government is the supreme authority within the state and does not answer to any outside power. This sovereignty is recognized by international law and by other states through diplomatic relations, and often by membership in the United Nations. Though this definition may sound complex, if we refer back to our examples, we see they all fit this description. Each state has specific borders recognized by other states in the international community, and also has specific and unique political, economic, and military structures and goals.

On a broad level, the interaction of states is guided by each state's government. Government is a public institution that has the authority to create, implement, and enforce rules,

laws, and decisions within a state's territorial borders. These rules, laws, and decisions maintain order within society as well as project and protect the state's interests abroad. The number of branches within any particular system of government can vary but commonly consists of at least a leadership branch, a bureaucratic or administrative branch, and a judicial branch.

Governments present themselves and their interests to the international community using foreign policy. Foreign policy consists of the decisions and strategies used by governments to guide their interaction with other states in the international system. Typically, foreign policy promotes the political, economic, and military interests of the state. The way foreign policy is made depends, in large part, on the type of government that exists in any given country.

Returning to our discussion of political culture theory, this paradigm actually contains two distinct aspects. First, we will look at the regimist perspective, which emphasizes the nature of a state's government—democratic or authoritarian—as a vital factor in its foreign policy and behavior within the global system. Second, the civilizationist perspective of political culture theory acknowledges some points made by proponents of the regime category, but stresses the importance of culture and civilization in determining a state's behavior in the international system and the future of world politics.

Before we begin our discussion of either the regimists or civilizationists, as we will call them, it might be helpful to take a look at several fundamental terms. First, culture refers to a particular social group's commonly shared behavior patterns, including language, traditions, values, customs, institutions, and beliefs. Political culture points specifically to the dominant values, attitudes, and beliefs that affect the politics and behavior of individual governments. This set of common attitudes and values about politics is fostered by the collective history of the political system and becomes embedded in the national character. It is important to remember that political culture reflects the *dominant* values and beliefs of a society, which are not necessarily representative of the beliefs of all people within that society.

Political culture can be shaped by a wide array of factors—ideological, religious, social, and economic—that may influence a country's behavior. Political culture often varies dramatically from state to state, with each reflecting its own unique approach to politics and the role of government. The political culture of the United States, for example, reflects a common belief in democracy, individual rights, capitalism, and the separation of church and state, among many other things. On the other hand, the political culture of North Korea emphasizes order, obedience, deference to authority, and the sacrifice of individual rights in favor of the community as a whole.

Political culture theorists—both regimists and civilizationists—argue that a state's political culture has a substantial influence over its foreign policy. The political culture establishes broad guidelines within which leaders make foreign policy, and creates an attitudinal environment in which every political system operates. While not normally responsible for specific policies, political culture broadly affects the range of policy options available to individual leaders.

## The Regimists

Political culture theorists who emphasize the importance of regimes argue that it is the inherent differences between various types of government that can, indeed, influence state behavior on the world stage and, consequently, international politics. Unlike system-level theorists—who point to the characteristics of the system as a whole as the central force in international politics—political culture theorists suggest that the domestic characteristics of state governments are key determinants of world politics.

Let's look at the two primary types of governments and how their differences affect both their respective foreign policies and foreign policy-making processes. **Liberal democracies** (or "open" societies), in which the citizenry has a voice in government through duly elected representatives from two or more political parties, generally take a more pluralistic approach to foreign policy-making. **Pluralism** describes a political system in which decisions and policies are formulated on the basis of many different viewpoints or interests. Not just political parties, but other special interest groups (business, labor, or environmental groups, or even certain factions within

the bureaucracy) can make their opinions known by contacting leaders directly or through more indirect means (media campaigns, etc.). Though the ultimate decisions on these matters do rest with a fairly small leadership circle, the people can, and often do, influence the course and content of the policy-making process.

Conversely, in **authoritarian regimes** (or "closed" societies), decisions and policies are made by an individual or small group of leaders. The people in these states generally have no meaningful impact on the political agenda or foreign policy of the country. Under this system of decision making, sometimes called **elitism**, the policies that control the actions of the state and those who live within it are created and directed by a small ruling elite. This group formulates both the domestic and foreign policy agendas. The decisions are not completely without parameters—leaders in closed societies do face political limitations, economic or military power obstacles, bureaucratic inertia or public and/or private resistance, etc.—but these are minor when compared with the variety of interests represented in a liberal democracy.

The selection taken from Bruce Russett's book *Controlling the Sword* makes the case for proponents of the regime aspect of political culture theory, emphasizing the differences between these two types of governments. Liberal democracies, Russett suggests, are less "warlike" than authoritarian or totalitarian regimes. He looks not only at empirical evidence about whether democracies go to war less often, but also at domestic factors that might make democratic states more or less reticent to engage in conflict.

Studies and empirical research into what types of nations (democratic or authoritarian) go to war and how often they go to war have shown that democracies are just as likely to engage in conflict as any other type of regime. The important difference to note here, however, is that liberal democracies rarely, if ever, make war with one another. They actually tend to bond together, forming protective, generally defensive, political-military alliances. According to Russett, the specific structure, nature, and characteristics common to democratic governments all contribute to promote a more peaceful, less aggressive foreign policy.<sup>1</sup>

Political culture regimists point to a number of other broader political and social ideals associated with liberal democracies that contribute to a less warlike foreign policy. Respect for human rights and the rule of law (international law, in this case), as well as the tradition of resolution through negotiation, tend to promote both peace and greater stability.

In the next selection, Francis Fukuyama agrees with the points made by Russett about the impact of a state's regime on the course of its foreign policy and behavior in the world community. Fukuyama contends that ideological competition has been the driving force of conflict between the major powers in the twentieth century. These wars have been fought largely to secure a dominant position for what one might call the great "isms" of the day. Clashes occurred between western political and economic liberalism and its two ideological antagonists, fascism and communism. Fascism was defeated and discredited at the end of World War II with the victory over Nazi Germany by the allied powers and, forty-five years later, communism was dealt a severe blow with the collapse of the Soviet empire.

The success of western liberalism over its two ideological opponents led Fukuyama to take the regimist position on political culture theory a step further, concluding that "what we may be witnessing is not just the end of the Cold War, or the passing of a particular period in postwar history, but the **end of history** as such: that is, the end point of mankind's ideological evolution and the universalization of western liberal democracy as the final form of human government."<sup>2</sup> Western liberal democracy has triumphed over its ideological rivals, and—since history is marked by the clash of ideas—history, according to Fukuyama, has come to an end.

While this victory is "incomplete" and many nations, particularly in the third world, have not yet or not fully adopted western economic and political liberalism, Fukuyama believes the course of history will inevitably lead to the expansion and broad acceptance of these ideals. Prior to this point, the world can be divided into two major categories based on levels of liberal democratic development. Relations among liberal democratic countries in the "post-historical" stage are characterized by cooperation and stability. The non-democratic nations, classified as "still in history," continue to struggle with ethnic and nationalist conflicts. International conflict, Fukuyama

argues, will revolve around these states, while relations among post-historical states—largely in the West—will be limited primarily to peaceful economic and technological competition.

Fukuyama's thesis about the triumph of liberal democracy and what this means for the future of international relations has been hotly debated. Critics disagree with Fukuyama on a number of issues. They argue that the end of the Cold War does not necessarily represent the end of political rivalries among states—either post-historical or still in history. Indeed, as we will discuss in more detail later, Samuel E Huntington believes that the post-Cold War period may well lead to greater instability and conflict in world politics.

## The Civilizationists

The second perspective on political culture theory focuses on Samuel Huntington's examination of the impact of broad cultural factors on the behavior of individual states, or even groups of states that share a common culture. Samuel Huntington stresses the importance of culture in international relations. Huntington outlined this new theory of international politics for the post-Cold War world in his 1993 *Foreign Affairs* article "The Clash of Civilizations?" Unlike proponents of the regimist position, who are concerned primarily with the differences between democratic and authoritarian governments, Huntington focuses on the broader cultural attributes that both unite and divide people, states, and the world.

His view of civilization is a key component of this thesis. Huntington defines **civilization** as the "highest cultural grouping of people and the broadest level of cultural identity people have, short of that which distinguishes them from other species." Civilization, then, is composed of those elements that bind people together, such as common language, religion, customs, institutions, and identification with a particular culture. According to these criteria, states can be grouped together into eight major civilizations: Western, Confucian, Japanese, Islamic, Hindu, Slavic-Orthodox, Latin American, and African.

Now, let us see how Huntington applies the concept of civilization to his political culture theory of international relations. To begin, Huntington agrees with two points regarding the end of the Cold War in Fukuyama's article "The End of History?" First, Huntington accepts that the end of the Cold War was a turning point in global politics, setting the stage for new theories to explain recent developments in international relations. Second, he agrees, too, that this event also signaled the diminished relevance of ideology as a source of conflict between western countries. But, as we noted in the preceding section, Huntington draws the line well before Fukuyama, stating that conflicts themselves have not ended and that we are by no means at an end of history.

"The Clash of Civilizations?" lays out a theoretical framework suggesting that cultural differences have supplanted ideological differences as the most important source of conflict among peoples and states. Conflicts, Huntington contends, are most likely to develop between groups that are part of different civilizations. Likewise, cooperation occurs more frequently within civilizations rather than between them.

This argument centers on the idea that cultural differences between the eight civilizations—Western, Confucian, Japanese, Islamic, Hindu, Slavic-Orthodox, Latin American, and African—are more serious and could even be more dangerous than the traditional ideological and economic clashes characterizing past wars. Huntington asserts that advances in global communication and increasing economic and social interaction between people in different regions of the world have enhanced the awareness and importance of "civilization." In addition, modernization has eroded the relevance of local and national cultural identifications while magnifying the significance of this broader grouping.

As we noted, Huntington believes increasing "civilization consciousness" implies that cooperation will occur with greatest frequency among states within a particular civilization. Conflict is more likely to occur between groups in different civilizations. This is because cultural issues like religion and social traditions are more fundamental and less easily resolved through compromise and negotiation. Conflict will likewise most often occur along cultural fault lines. A **cultural fault line** is found where different civilizations share a common border; this includes both borders

between different states as well as the more tenuous ones found within states. According to Huntington, cultural fault lines now represent the most probable new "flash points for crisis and bloodshed."<sup>3</sup>

To support his theory, Huntington points to several contemporary ethnic and religious conflicts in the world. Among those flash points are the current warfare in the former Yugoslavia, where Western and Islamic civilizations meet within a confined geographic area. Christian and Muslim factions now battle for control over territory they once shared peacefully under a communist regime that suppressed these ethnic tensions. Also, the continued unrest between Israel and its Arab neighbors attests to not only the vehemence with which civilizations can clash but also the prolonged nature of these feuds. One other example might be found in India and Pakistan; both countries have been plagued by violence between Hindu and Muslim peoples within each state's own borders.

Clearly, there is no shortage of examples worldwide where one might find Huntington's clash of civilizations. But what do these clashes mean for the West and for western civilization? Taking a fairly dim view of the future, Huntington fears that conflict on a global scale—what he refers to as the "West versus the Rest"—is a possibility. Western political, economic, and cultural dominance is increasingly challenged by Confucian and Islamic states. These particular civilizations are increasingly more willing and able to assert their own economic, political, and military power against western-oriented institutions and ideals. Huntington believes that the West will have to learn to "accommodate" these rising nonwestern civilizations and "coexist" with countries "whose values and interests differ significantly from those of the West."<sup>4</sup>

The "Clash of Civilizations" thesis has been subjected to a remarkable amount of criticism from a variety of sources. Here, we offer an article by Stephen Walt that forcefully critiques Huntington's civilizationist theory. Walt questions the emphasis on civilizations as a source of either unity among or division between peoples. He contests Huntington's notion that civilizations are cohesive groupings, united in purpose. Huntington, according to Walt, glosses over significant economic, social, and political cleavages that exist within all of what Huntington has called civilizations. Similarly, Walt says, Huntington ignores examples of cooperation between states representing different civilizations.

But we might ask why Walt sees cooperation between civilizations where Huntington sees conflict. In a fashion reminiscent of realism, Walt argues that even in the post-Cold War environment, states remain the primary actors on the international political stage. The individual geopolitical and economic self-interests of the state supersede any fidelity toward a particular civilization. In addition, Walt suggests that economic and technological modernization and secularism actually enhance rather than prohibit cooperation between states.

In the end, Walt's argument echoes the realist view that international politics will continue to be dominated by states vying for geopolitical and economic position. Though we see many cases of this competition along the fault lines of Huntington's civilizations, contemporary history has also shown that when circumstances warrant cooperation between states and peoples, the differences of civilizations can be set aside in the interests of *realpolitik*.

The final two selections in this chapter offer examples of how political culture theory can be applied to recent events. In the short piece by Francis Fukuyama entitled "The west has won," the author defends his "end of history" thesis by noting that terrorism perpetrated by radical Islam is merely a backlash against modernity and does not represent a viable alternative to liberal democratic values. The final article by Benjamin Barber is a civilizationist critique of the utility of realism in the post-September 11 era. Barber argues that nonstate actors are motivated by dramatically different interests than states are. Therefore, traditional realist assumptions cannot be relied upon as useful guidelines for understanding the current global war on terrorism. Instead, Barber contends, we must focus on the social, political, cultural and economic conditions under which terrorism thrives.

## **A Critique of Political Culture Theory**

Certainly, the article by Stephen Walt provides a thorough critique of the "civilizationist" perspective of political culture theory offered by Samuel Huntington. It might be useful, however, to review here the major points both for and against what we call the regimist viewpoint of political culture theory.

There is little doubt that the type of government and the larger cultural attributes of a country have an impact on the course of international politics. As Bruce Russett and Francis Fukuyama indicated, considerable evidence shows that democracies do behave differently from authoritarian regimes. The virtual absence of war between democratic regimes speaks volumes about the cooperative nature of these governments. Critics have argued, though, that peace among democracies may be the result of particular geopolitical factors rather than the influence of shared common values. Regimists do, however, provide substantial evidence—both quantitative and qualitative—that democracies more commonly resort to negotiation than do authoritarian regimes as a means of conflict resolution.

The civilizationist perspective of political culture theory outlined in Samuel P. Huntington's "The Clash of Civilizations?" is perhaps the most innovative and ambitious attempt to codify international relations theory in the post-Cold War era. His idea that conflict between civilizations will supplant ideological conflict as the dominant force in international politics offers a unique look into the domestic-level explanations of what drives the actions of states and groups of states.

The question remains, however, whether civilization consciousness is truly a uniting or dividing force among states. Are cultural, religious, and ethnic factors vitally important sources of states' actions? Can the principles of liberal democracy bring states and peoples together? Or could the actions of states be shaped more by systemic factors, compelling all governments—irrespective of regime or civilization— to act in similar manners? Or might it be some combination?

## Key Concepts

**Authoritarian regimes** are societies in which dominant political authority and power resides in an individual or small group of leaders who are not responsible to the people under their control.

**Civilization** is composed of those elements that bind people together such as common language, religion, customs, institutions, and identification with a particular culture. Samuel P. Huntington defines civilization as the "highest cultural grouping of people and the broadest level of cultural identity people have short of that which distinguishes them from other species."

**Civilizationist perspective**, as used in this book, is one of two major divisions of political culture theory and is based on the theory set forth by Samuel P. Huntington in his article, "The Clash of Civilizations?" The civilizationist perspective stresses that the "principal conflicts of global politics will occur between nations and groups of different civilizations."

**Cultural fault line** is found where different civilizations share a common border; this includes both borders between different states as well as the more tenuous ones found within states. This term was coined by Samuel P. Huntington.

**Culture** refers to commonly shared behavior patterns, including language, traditions, values, customs, institutions, and religious beliefs of a particular social group.

**Elitism** exists where a small group of people control, rule, or dominate the actions of a state. This group formulates both the domestic and foreign policy agendas.

**End of history** is a phrase used by Francis Fukuyama to describe the triumph of western economic and political liberalism over its ideological alternatives, such as fascism and Marxism-Leninism, and the coming universalization of western liberal democracy.

**Foreign policy** is the strategy used by a government to make decisions and guide its interaction with other states in the international system. Typically, foreign policy promotes the political, economic, and military interests of the state.

**Government** is a public institution that has the authority to create, implement, and enforce rules, laws, and decisions within a state's territorial borders. These rules, laws, and decisions maintain order within society, as well as project and protect the state's interests abroad.

**Liberal democracies** are states in which the citizenry has a voice in government through duly elected representatives from two or more political parties.

**Pluralism** is a political system in which decisions and policies are formulated on the basis of many different viewpoints or interests.

**Political culture** refers to the dominant values, attitudes, and beliefs that affect the politics and behavior of individual governments.

**Regimist perspective**, as used in this text, is one of two major divisions of political culture theory. Regimists argue that democracies and authoritarian regimes behave differently in foreign affairs. Their analysis focuses on regime type as a vital factor in determining a state's foreign policy and behavior within the global system.

**Sovereignty** exists when the domestic government is the supreme authority within the state and does not answer to any outside power. This sovereignty is recognized by international law and by other states through diplomatic relations and often by membership in the United Nations.

**State** is a political, legal, and territorial entity. A state consists of an internationally recognized territory, a permanent population, and a government that has control over the people within its acknowledged boundaries.

<sup>1</sup> Many institutional transnationlists introduced in our analysis of system-level theories, such as, Immanuel Kant and Woodrow Wilson, have been strong advocates of the positive contribution made to the stability of the international system by liberal democratic regimes. Kant, in his work *Perpetual Peace*, published in 1795, argued that the accountability of democratic leaders to the people for their decisions makes them more cautious about taking steps that could lead to armed conflict. Understandably, the people tend to be equally cautious in supporting a bellicose foreign policy, since they would be called upon to do any fighting should the need arise.

<sup>2</sup> Francis Fukuyama, "The End of History?" *The National Interest*. No. 16 / Summer 1989, p.

<sup>3</sup> Samuel Huntington, "The Clash of Civilizations?" *Foreign Affairs*. Summer 1993. p. 29.

<sup>4</sup> Huntington, p. 49.

## Chapter 7

### Decision- Making Process Theory

In the introduction to Part II, we discussed how state-level theories examine the impact of domestic factors on the course and conduct of foreign policy. This chapter focuses on decision-making process theory, a state-level theory that emphasizes the role of bureaucratic organizations and how the process of decision-making within these organizations, and within a government as a whole, can affect its foreign policy and international relations.

As this notion suggests, decision-making process theory disassembles the state bureaucratic structure, taking a targeted look at specific component parts to understand how decisions are made. The idea here is that different factions of a large bureaucracy are likely to approach problems or issues from different perspectives and with different preconceptions and priorities. These different perspectives result from the fact that each faction or department has unique responsibilities. A pattern of decision-making is established based on the priorities that stem from these individualized responsibilities. Thus, bureaucratic agencies address issues from different points of view, or, as the saying goes, "Where you stand is largely determined by where you sit." Certainly, international conditions and forces surrounding an event or crisis have an impact, but, according to decision-making process theorists, the inner workings of the bureaucracy—bargaining strategies, departmental priorities, and the like—cannot be disassociated from an assessment of foreign policy or international relations.

### Bureaucracies and Decision Making

Before we proceed in our discussion of decision-making process theory, it might be helpful to answer two important questions. First, what is a bureaucracy, and, second, what do we mean by decision-making? A **bureaucracy** could be defined as a network of interconnected departments and organizations designed to manage and administrate the operations of a state. Authority for different aspects of this administration and management is diffused throughout the various offices. That is, a single department generally takes the lead over a unique and specific area of policy or governance, though several departments usually have input into any given decision.

Decision-making theorists believe that the manner in which government bureaucracies arrive at these decisions is a critical part of both foreign policy and relations between states. The method that a state or bureaucracy uses to reach decisions is called **decision making**. Decision making is the process by which government officials select a policy to pursue from a range of options. A key part of this process and a defining feature of large bureaucracies is their dependence on **standard operating procedures (SOPs)**. SOPs are accepted routines or patterns used by bureaucracies to organize and simplify the decision-making process. Standard operating procedures are utilized to handle problems or make decisions on a wide array of issues that confront governments on a daily basis—from internal personnel decisions to matters of international trade and diplomacy. Bureaucracies use SOPs because time, resources, and information in the decision-making process can be in short supply. Presumably, these standardized procedures simplify the decision-making process and help preserve the orderly function of government.

While standard operating procedures are aimed at making government more efficient and methodical, they have a profound impact on the type and quality of decisions made as well as on the policies adopted by governments. By relying on a set of specific procedures, a bureaucracy can limit the range and variety of policy options available to decision makers. Hence, both bureaucracies and leaders tend to depend on past policies or procedures in handling new problems. New policy decisions generally conform to those made in the past. A new, nonconforming policy would not only send a mixed message about a government's foreign policy platform and complicate the implementation process but would also disrupt the orderly workings of bureaucratic policy formulation. Therefore, if it is impossible to find a policy that is compatible with

established SOPs, bureaucracies conduct a narrow search for alternatives and solutions that will require minimum change from accepted practices.

New policies, then, are often the result of what is called **incrementalism**. That is, a bureaucracy allows only incremental or marginal alterations in existing policy to prevent major changes from established norms. This "new" policy may not be the best available alternative but is, instead, a broadly palatable option resulting from bargains and compromises between competing individuals and bureaucratic organs or factions. To a certain extent, the nature of a bureaucracy—with its competing departments jostling for position—creates a measure of rivalry, territoriality, and one-up-manship among the various offices. This translates into a cautious pattern of decision making, designed to avoid risk-taking both in the process itself and with respect to the final decision or policy.

## **States and Foreign Policy**

Decision-making process theorists view foreign policy and international relations largely as a by-product of these inner workings and the interaction of various state bureaucracies. The development of the decision-making approach to the study of foreign policy and international relations actually began in the 1950s as scholars became interested in applying the methodology of the traditional "hard" sciences to the study of human behavior. The "behavioralist school" of political science emerged as scholars began to rely more on the use of empirical research and quantitative analysis in developing and testing theories of international politics. Emphasizing the decision-making process of governments fit in quite well with this new, more scientific approach to the study of international relations and incorporated a number of features that had, up to that point, been largely overlooked.

The excerpt from Snyder, Bruck, and Sapin's book, *Foreign Policy Decision Making*, represents one of the first systematic approaches to the study of the decision-making process. Snyder and his colleagues developed a method for examining various components that influence the decisions taken by governments. The authors set up diagrams of "relevant factors" that might influence a state's behavior in a given situation. The premise here is that once the situation is defined, the path or policy a state chooses can be predicted by determining the factors that are relevant to the choice.

The diversity of viewpoints and responsibilities within a bureaucracy almost inevitably leads to conflict. Making a decision is not merely a progression of selecting goals, accumulating information, analyzing the various choices, and selecting a policy that most optimizes those goals. Policies are the result of diplomatic bargaining and compromise that take place within and between government agencies and bureaucracies. Also, being part of a bureaucracy can affect an individual's perceptions of the decision-making process and their role within it. The structure, purpose, and objectives or duties of these organizations can influence the decisions made by individuals working within them. These conditions tend to direct their attention away from purely international objectives and toward internal, domestic, and intra-bureaucratic concerns.

There is a subtle but crucial distinction between this notion and the premise of the theories in the following chapter that specifically address the role of individuals. It might be said, without oversimplifying the difference between these ideas, that the discussion here revolves around how bureaucratic organizations affect individuals. The next section presents theories on how individuals affect government decisions.

According to decision-making process theorists, then, there are a number of factors that influence a state's foreign policy and international relations. First, individuals operating within a large bureaucratic organization are constrained by position, loyalties, and duties within their individual departments and the bureaucracy as a whole. Second, the standard operating procedures (SOPs) used to guide the functions and decisions of the bureaucracy can limit the range of policy options. Decisions or policies are made largely to conform to existing SOPs and are often the result of compromise between various factions (usually competing) within the bureaucratic organization. Finally, as a result, policy follows a fairly pedantic, incremental course

that can be predicted based on precedent and on an analysis of the decision-making mechanism itself.

One of the classic works of theory using this framework is Graham T. Allison's study of the Cuban missile crisis. In the excerpt, taken from Allison's article "Conceptual Models and the Cuban Missile Crisis," the author isolates three distinct models for explaining foreign policy decisions: the rational actor model, the organizational process model, and the bureaucratic politics model. According to the **rational actor model**, decision makers carefully define and identify foreign policy problems, gather all available information about the foreign policy options, weigh all possible alternatives, and select policies that are most likely to promote the state's national interests.

By contrast, the **organizational process model** focuses on the routines, standard patterns of behavior, and institutional perspectives of particular agencies and their impact on foreign policy decisions. It assumes that all governments generally rely on standard operating procedures, are relatively predictable, and favor only marginal changes in existing policy. The **bureaucratic politics model** emphasizes the struggle between various agencies of the government and its impact on the decision-making process. This model contends that the formulation of policy is largely the result of the competition among government agencies, representing diverse views. Such a competitive process means that foreign policy is often based more on domestic political struggles than on objective calculations of the national interest.

The point of Allison's highly regarded study is that each of the three models produce different explanations and each provides its own unique insights into the foreign policy decision-making process. While each model has particular strengths and weaknesses, Allison concludes that a complete understanding of any foreign policy situation must take into account several different institutional, political, and international factors.

### **A Critique of Decision-Making Process Theory**

Certainly, it would be difficult to charge proponents of decision-making process theory with overlooking the details and minutiae of government that are a part of how decisions might be made. In fact, realists have criticized the inclusive approach of decision-making process theory for focusing too much on the details of the foreign policy-making process, thus losing the broader analytical and theoretical implications of history and events. By attempting to incorporate such a broad range of factors into their analysis, decision-making process theorists are often accused of describing the interaction of states, as opposed to providing a true theory of international relations—or, as the classic argument goes, not seeing the forest for the tress.

In response, Allison and other decision-making theorists challenge the realist assumption that states base their foreign policy decisions on a rational cost-benefit analysis of the relative risks and potential gains associated with particular policy options as too narrow. They argue that while the rational actor model is valuable, it is also limited on its own and fails to provide an adequate explanation of international relations.

For example, the rational actor model suggests that decision makers behave in a similar fashion, seeking to maximize strategic goals and objectives. The implication here is that governments use the best information available and select the policy that is most likely to maximize the national interests. Decision-making theory proceeds several steps farther, suggesting that all decisions must be analyzed and understood within the context of how governments really operate. Government bureaucracies function under conditions that often involve limited time, resources, and information—all of which are incompatible with the realist's rational-actor model. If we wish to understand why particular policies were selected over others, decision-making theorists insist we must first understand the process by which these choices were made. In short, process affects outcome.

Decision-making theory has also been attacked for being western-centric. Critics contend that decision-making theory is useful primarily for explaining the pluralistic foreign policy process of western democratic governments. It does not, however, present an accurate model for studying the more centralized, hierarchic decision-making process of non-western, non-democratic states.

Decision-making theorists counter that every type of government, from the most rigid authoritarian regime to pluralistic democracies, have large bureaucratic structures with competing interests. Bureaucratic politics and adherence to standard operating procedures are not limited to democratic regimes but represent vital parts of the decision-making process in any type of government.

In the end, the manner in which governments make decisions about relations with other nations, particularly regarding decisions on war and peace, are basic to the study of international politics. It is critical, therefore, to understand how those decisions are reached and how they are actually implemented. In order to do this, we must examine the relationship between the process and the decisions that are produced from it. Decision-making theory focuses on the complex policy-making process and the governmental and bureaucratic settings in which those decisions are made.

## **Key Concepts**

**Bureaucracy** is a network of interconnected departments and organizations designed to manage and administrate the operations of a state.

**Bureaucratic politics model** is one of three conceptual models devised by Graham Allison to explain and predict the foreign policy behavior of states. The bureaucratic model focuses on the struggle between various agencies of the government and its impact on the decision-making process. This model contends that the formulation of policy is largely the result of the competition among government agencies, representing diverse views. Such a competitive process means that foreign policy is often based more on domestic political struggles than on objective calculations of the national interest.

**Decision making** is the process of identifying problems, devising alternative policy options, and selecting which one of the alternatives to pursue.

**Incrementalism** is a tendency of decision makers to make only incremental or marginal alterations in existing policy in order to prevent major changes from established norms.

**Organizational process model** is the second of the three models devised by Graham Allison to explain and predict the foreign policy behavior of states. The organizational process model focuses on the routines, standard patterns of behavior, and institutional perspectives of particular agencies and their impact on foreign policy decisions. It assumes that all governments generally rely on standard operating procedures, are relatively predictable, and favor only marginal changes in existing policy.

**Rational actor model** is associated with the realist theory of decision making and the first of three models used by Graham Allison to explain and predict the foreign policy behavior of states. According to the rational actor model, decision makers carefully define and identify foreign policy problems, gather all available information about the foreign policy options, weigh all possible alternatives, and select policies that are most likely to promote the state's national interests.

**Standard operating procedures (SOPs)** are accepted routines or patterns used by bureaucracies to organize and simplify the decision making process. Standard operating procedures are utilized to handle problems or make decisions on a wide array of issues that confront governments on a daily basis—from internal personnel decisions to matters of international trade and diplomacy.

## Chapter 8

### Individual Level International Relations Theories – Human Nature Theory

We have now reached the third and final of our levels of analysis for international relations theory: the individual level. This section includes theorists who view the foreign policy and interaction of states as a result of the nature, characteristics, and values of either people in general or individuals in leadership roles. Proponents of these theories emphasize that systems, countries, and governments don't necessarily dictate the behavior of states—people do.

Each theory differs significantly, however, in its approach to the role of the individual. The first theory presented in this section, human nature theory, and the last, peace studies theory, both focus on the broad characteristics of humans as a race, but from vastly different perspectives. Human nature theorists view the more violent tendencies of the human race as unavoidable and, therefore, an essential and integral part of our relationships with one another. Scholars dedicated to the theory of peace studies suggest that people can overcome this kind of aggression and learn to live and work together peacefully.

If we look at the individual level of analysis as a spectrum, with human nature theory and peace studies theory at one end emphasizing a broad, all-encompassing look at the human race in general, then the second theory presented in this section, cognitive theory, stands at the opposite end of that spectrum. Cognitive theorists believe that the personalities of specific leaders and the personality traits characteristic of those who hold leadership positions often have a significant impact on the course and implementation of a state's foreign policy. Certainly in the first instance, Adolf Hitler played a key role in the rise of Nazi Germany and is often used as a glaring historic example of the power of one individual to dictate, quite literally, the policies of a nation. In the second instance, we might view the pursuit and attainment of leadership positions as somewhat self-selecting. For example, not everyone wants to be president, and those individuals who aspire to that level usually have certain personality traits in common: drive, ambition, willingness to lead, ability to compromise, and so on. Whether the topic is a specific person or simply "a leader," cognitive theorists argue that when it comes to making a decision that could affect the course of a nation and the course of history, the key component in the equation is the man or woman facing that decision.

So, we see that the individual level of analysis looks at the distinctive characteristics of people within our society to specific individuals. We will begin with the fairly pessimistic view of human nature theorists, then take a look at cognitive perspectives, and end with perhaps a more optimistic analysis by the proponents of peace studies.

#### Introduction

In looking at the individual level of international relations theory, we begin with the fairly broad interpretation of "individual" that actually encompasses all of humanity—human nature theory. **Human nature** refers to the qualities and traits shared by all people, regardless of ethnicity, gender, culture, and so forth. Human nature theorists assert that the behavior of states is fundamentally patterned after the behavior of humans themselves. Human nature, then, can provide clues about when and why states might behave in a particular fashion.

Human nature theorists argue that, on a basic level, human nature—and, indeed, the nature of other species as well—is often guided by instinct. **Instinct** could be defined as an innate impulse that is prompted in response to specific environmental conditions. It is almost as if humans and other species are preprogrammed to respond in a certain manner when confronted with a particular set of circumstances. Just as the antelope of the African plains have an instinctive fear of lions and other predators, these scholars suggest it is basic human nature that makes states fearful of a neighboring country's perceived military strength and defensive of their territorial rights.

In the excerpt by the Greek scholar and philosopher Aristotle, it is indicated that the nature of man is essentially divided into two parts (good and evil) and, therefore, life and the relations

between people are also divided. That is, one cannot know or understand the bounty and tranquility of peace without having experienced the hardship and terror of war. Although the human race can, according to Aristotle, emphasize one facet over the other (presumably peace over war), this exercise does not negate the presence of the less desirable side of existence. He also extends this theory of human nature to the nature of governments formed by humans, asserting that the government of "freemen" is nobler than that of authoritarian rule. Here we might go so far as to say that what is good for individuals (citizenry) is also good for the state.

In the excerpt taken from Thomas Hobbes' classic work *Leviathan*, the author asks us to imagine the wretchedness of human existence in a "**state of nature**" when there was no central government able to control the baser instincts of humans and to provide order. Hobbes points to three specific causes of conflict that are endemic to human nature: competition, diffidence, and glory. It is important to understand the context in which he uses these terms. **Competition**, as Hobbes views it, represents the perpetual struggle between humans for resources, power, or anything else that might represent some sort of gain. We might presume that at some point relative parity is achieved between individuals or that a person could be content with the fruits of his or her individual labors in a civilized world.

This path, however, leads to diffidence in Hobbes' estimation. **Diffidence** arises from a perception of equality or a sense of self-satisfaction that occurs when individuals attain a particular set of goals or ends. Hobbes suggests conflict arises from the need to protect these gains from other humans who, because of their very nature, cannot help but try to subdue, conquer, and master another's holdings. So, whether you look at the individual attempting to seize another's possessions or the individual protecting his or her assets, both will likely be moved to violent means.

The quest for glory in human nature is the third portion of Hobbes' trilogy about the unavoidable violence of existence. He defines **glory** as the quest for and preservation of honor, respect, or reputation as it refers to the individual or, indeed, as it reflects on the family, friends, name, and so forth, associated with that individual. Under these conditions, Hobbes appears far less certain than Aristotle of man's capacity to avoid conflict. It is, in essence, impossible for an individual to be a pacifist, content with the status quo, because others will strive to change this balance. Humans seek to master others who present, may present, or are perceived as presenting a threat. It is not surprising, given this overall perception of human nature, that Hobbes declares that, in the state of nature, the "life of man was solitary, poore, nasty, brutish, and short." Later in his book, Hobbes concludes that life becomes bearable only when humans subjugate themselves to the control of a strong central authority that can enforce law and order.

Though we might hypothesize that these base traits are inevitably passed from the nature of humans to the nature of the states and other institutions that humans create, the last article by twentieth-century psychologist Sigmund Freud suggests otherwise. Freud argues that the natural violence of the human animal can actually be "overcome by the transference of power to a larger unity" or group. The group comes together and is linked by the emotional ties (belief in democracy and freedom, protection from a common threat, etc.) of its members. In his letter to Albert Einstein addressing the scientist's query about how future wars could be avoided, Freud states that transferring power to a central authority mitigates the possibility of violence. He suggests further that although humans have an instinct for hatred and destruction, this is only half of the essential dichotomy of human instincts. In pairings of seemingly opposite characteristics, humans also have instincts for love and cooperation, which might be promoted and enhanced by such an overarching group authority.

Despite this more hopeful acknowledgment, the enduring theme linking the three articles in this section is that humans are by nature—and can generally be counted upon to be—violent and aggressive. Human nature theorists suggest that these traits, so instinctive to men and women, are thereby carried over to our relations on an international level. Just as the saying suggests that an apple doesn't fall far from the tree, the behavior of states does not stray far from the behavior of the people within them.

## A Critique of Human Nature Theory

The use of psychology and examination of human behavioral patterns that characterize human nature theory have made some insightful contributions to the study of states and international relations. Classical realist theory is itself based in part on the assumption that man is inherently aggressive, and, as we noted earlier, represents a popular and widely accepted theory among contemporary scholars.

The critics of human nature theory argue, however, that it does not delve deeply enough into the driving forces of foreign policy and global politics. Proceeding on the assumption that the human animal is by nature competitive and prone to violence leads to a number of questions. First, does human nature theory provide a sufficient explanation of the complex character of international relations? We might also wonder whether this theory has the analytic depth necessary to understand international relations in our world today. The disintegration of the Soviet Union and its communist ideology, the integrated world economic structure, and the ever-expanding global communications network are just three of the many significant events and processes that have changed and are changing our planet. Can we assume that human beings' natural aggression and lust for power or even Aristotle's notion of the conflict between good and evil in individuals, represent the driving forces behind not only the behavior of states but behind all of these other events, as well?

It appears that human nature theory alone does not offer a sufficiently detailed framework to address these issues. Certainly, however, proponents of this theory can point to a number of instances throughout history where human instincts toward aggression and domination affected the course of international relations. Nazi Germany of the 1930s and 1940s, Iraq's invasion of Kuwait in 1990, and the rampage of the Mongols across the Asian continent in the thirteenth century are examples that come readily to mind. But, staying with an individual-level perspective in our examination of the behavior of states, is the driving force actually human nature as we have defined it here? Or should we take a closer look at individual leaders, their particular features, and unique ambitions?

### Key Concepts

**Competition** is a term used to represent the perpetual struggle between humans for resources, power, or anything else that might represent some sort of gain. According to Thomas Hobbes, competition is one of the three specific causes of conflict that are endemic to human nature. The other two causes are diffidence and glory.

**Diffidence** is one of the three causes of conflict, according to Thomas Hobbes, that are endemic to human nature. Diffidence arises from a human's perception of equality or a sense of self-satisfaction and occurs when individuals attain a particular set of goals or ends.

**Glory** is defined by Thomas Hobbes as the quest for and preservation of honor, respect, or reputation as it refers to the individual or as it reflects on the family, friends, name, and so forth, associated with that individual. According to Hobbes, glory is one of the three causes of conflict that are endemic to human nature.

**Human nature** refers to the qualities and traits shared by all people, regardless of ethnicity, gender, culture, etc. Human nature theorists assert that the behavior of states is fundamentally patterned after the behavior of humans themselves. Human nature, then, can provide clues about when and why states might behave in a particular fashion.

**Instinct** is an innate pattern of behavior characteristic of species, including humans. To varying degrees, humans and other species are preprogrammed to respond in a certain manner when confronted with a particular set of circumstances.

**State of nature** refers to Thomas Hobbes' pessimistic view of life prior to the creation of a central government or authority to control the baser instincts of humans and provide order. Under these conditions the life of humans would be "solitary, poore, nasty, brutish, and short."



## Chapter 9

### Cognitive Theory

In the course of growing up and learning to live with others, we have all probably heard the phrase, "Imagine how dull the world would be if everyone were the same." Dull, certainly, but such uniformity would make it easier for political scientists to predict people's behavior and put together theories of international relations. Doubtless, however, even most political scientists would thankfully acknowledge—along with the rest of us—that we are all unique individuals, with different personalities, beliefs, ambitions, skills, and so on. The theory presented in this chapter, which we will call cognitive theory, suggests that a leader's specific personality guides not only his or her own actions but the destiny of the state and its relations with other countries.

We can define the term **personality** as the package of behavior, temperament, and other individualistic qualities that uniquely identifies each of us. Cognition is one element of this personality package. **Cognition** is what an individual comes to know as a result of learning and reasoning or, on a more instinctual level, intuition and perception. All of these components combine to form a person's cognitive facility. In our daily lives, we are perhaps more familiar with the term *recognize*. When you recognize a person or place, for example, you identify him, her, or it using accumulated knowledge or experience.

Cognitive theorists believe that the personality traits of leaders can often define both the agenda and specific features of a state's foreign policy. In his article "World Politics and Personal Insecurity," Harold Lasswell suggests that, unconsciously, leaders actually superimpose their own sense of self over that of the state. That is, the line separating the leader from the state becomes blurred, with the personality of the leader—complete with flaws and insecurities—shaping the policy and perceptions of the state.

A leader's individual perception of reality is naturally conditioned by emotional attachments and aversions that he or she formed in life. In putting together a world-view, Lasswell asserts, people tend to displace emotions of those close to us onto symbols that are more removed, such as nations, classes, and rulers. For example, the frustration of a peasant in pre-revolutionary France was not solely directed at a single aristocrat, but at the entire aristocracy. Or, a neighbor's dispute with one who is from a foreign country might prejudice his view toward that country as a whole. According to Lasswell, in political personalities, these associations—however loose—are likely to have some conditioning effect on performance and, hence, policy.

Margaret Hermann provides a structure for analyzing the individual traits that might affect a leader's decisions and policy making. In "Explaining Foreign Policy Behavior Using the Personal Characteristics of Political Leaders," Hermann isolates four broad types of personal characteristics: beliefs, motives, decision style, and interpersonal style. Although other factors do come into play (interest in foreign affairs, diplomatic and foreign policy training), these can be combined with an assessment of a leader's basic characteristics to form a fairly complete profile.

From her analysis, Hermann concludes that leaders generally have one of two orientations toward foreign affairs: independent or participatory. An **independent leader** tends to be aggressive, with a limited capacity to consider different alternatives, and, not surprisingly, is willing to be the first to take action over a perceived threat. In regard to foreign policy, independent leaders seek to preserve a state's individual identity and tend to be somewhat isolationist, viewing contact with other nations as a slippery slope toward dependence and practicable only under their own specific terms or conditions.

By contrast, Hermann defines a **participatory leader** as generally conciliatory, with an inclusive nature that encourages relationships with other countries, considers various alternatives in problem solving, and rarely seeks to initiate action. Participatory leaders also have a different approach to foreign policy. They promote contact and ventures with other nations and are likely to be quite sensitive and responsive to the international environment.

Whether independent or participatory, cognitive theorists view leaders' perceptions of other states and other heads of state as key components of foreign policy. Robert Jervis' well-respected

work, *Perception and Misperception in International Politics*, discusses how decision makers perceive others' behavior and form judgments about their intentions. He actually focuses on several vital misperceptions that are common among people and often lead to disputes or even war. These misperceptions might be compared to the stereotypical images of "good guys" versus "bad guys" in an old Hollywood western. First, we tend to view the people of other nations as more hostile than we are. That is, we might represent ourselves as the peace-loving townspeople and the other side as a band of aggressive marauders. Second, we also view other countries as organized and integrated, behaving according to a coherent strategic plan. Returning to our old western movie analogy, the "bad guys" always seemed to operate within an accepted and rigid hierarchy and to have some sort of a plan to get what they wanted, whether it was robbing the town bank, getting control of the town, or capturing rights to the local water supply.

Finally, just as it is difficult to envision the gentle townspeople in this image intimidating the fierce band of marauders, we too find it difficult to believe that others might be afraid of or intimidated by us. But it is these kinds of misperceptions that can foster errors in judgment about the motives and aims behind the actions of other countries. We see, then, that the perceptions (and misperceptions) of leaders could affect the foreign policy of states and the international system as a whole.

If we accept that leaders are, in fact, conditioned by the unique features of their own personality, cognitive theorists would argue that we must also acknowledge that a leader's perception of policy, the state, and the system will be conditioned by these same features.

**Operational reality** refers to the picture of the environment held by an individual (usually a leader) as it is modified by his or her personality, perceptions, and misperceptions. Essentially, we all live and work within our own operational reality, but a leader's view of reality has an impact on policies and decisions that influence millions of people and could well affect the course of history.

At this point, we need to acknowledge that often these policies and decisions are made by an influential collective or group. Although this chapter and the other chapters in this section focus on individual level of analysis theories, we might expand the image somewhat to include such groups of like-minded individuals. These individuals' beliefs about, ideology of, and approach to foreign policy fall within sufficiently narrow confines as to be considered a single voice.

Cognitive theory is really about individual personalities and perceptions and how they can affect the behavior of states in the international system. These unique qualities are based on both a person's innate, instinctive reactions and learned or reasoned patterns that come from knowledge and experience. Cognitive theorists suggest that a leader's personality conditions how he or she makes decisions, implements those decisions, and judges the outcome within a global context. It would seem that the distinctions that make us who we are would quite likely have an impact on how we try to shape or control the world around us. But, should personality be the defining feature in an analysis of international relations?

### **A Critique of Cognitive Theory**

The notion that individuals make foreign policy and can shape the international system in which they exist is the most important contribution of the individual level of analysis. Cognitive theory, with its emphasis on studying the values, beliefs, and personal characteristics of leaders, forces us to recognize that all explanations of political behavior must take into account the role of the individual. Only by narrowing our focus to the level of the individual can we understand fully the actions of states.

Critics of cognitive theory might argue that focusing on personality profiles of individual leaders to determine an analytical framework for studying international relations is, indeed, limiting. In addition, one's assessment of any leader should be based on a sophisticated and complete psychoanalysis. Such a scenario is improbable, at best, since most leaders have not subjected and would not subject themselves to this type of scrutiny. Thus, it is left to the scholar to examine the background and behavior patterns of leaders or potential leaders, which would tend to produce both vague and problematic results.

Other criticisms of cognitive theory revolve around its limited scope. The emphasis of the theory (personality/cognition) is so narrow that it seems inappropriate to attempt a broad, all-encompassing application to international relations as a whole. The price of focusing on specific individuals is the danger of getting bogged down in a detailed analysis of the subject's idiosyncratic characteristics and losing sight of the broader picture. In addition, the principles of cognitive theory might lead us to believe that all wars are simply the result of misperceptions or misunderstandings between individual leaders. Cognitive theorists ignore the fact that wars often result from fundamental conflicting interests between states on larger issues, such as national security, competition over scarce resources, or dozens of other factors that affect global politics.

One final comment is similar to the critique used against human nature theory: Can cognitive theory provide a framework substantial enough to analyze contemporary issues of foreign policy in a contemporary context? Do personality, perceptions, and beliefs hold the key to understanding international monetary policy, the formation of interdependent trading blocs, or the changing nature of collective security? We would have to say under these circumstances that cognitive theory—though important and useful in understanding how and in what way individual leaders do play a role in the formulation and conduct of foreign policy—may not offer a complete understanding of the patterns and process for international relations today and in the future.

### **Key Concepts**

**Cognition** is an individual's knowing as a result of learning and reasoning or, on a more instinctual level, intuiting and perceiving. All of these components combine to form a person's cognitive facility.

**Independent leader** is one of the two major orientations of leaders according to Margaret Hermann. Independent leaders tend to be aggressive, have a limited capacity to consider different alternatives, and are willing to be the first to take action over a perceived threat. Independent leaders seek to preserve a state's individual identity and tend to be somewhat isolationist, viewing contact with other nations as a slippery slope toward dependence and practicable only under their own specific terms or conditions.

**Operational reality** refers to the picture of the environment held by an individual as it is modified by his or her personality, perceptions, and misperceptions.

**Participatory: leader** is a term used by Margaret Hermann to characterize a type of leader who is generally conciliatory and encourages relationships with other countries, considers various alternatives in problem solving, and rarely seeks to initiate action. Participatory leaders are likely to be quite sensitive and responsive to the international environment.

**Personality** is the package of behavior, temperament, and other individualistic qualities that uniquely identifies each of us. Cognition is one element of this personality package.

## Chapter 10

### Peace Studies Theory

We complete our look at the individual level of analysis with an examination of peace studies theory. Peace studies is a relatively new approach to the study of international relations and pushes boldly past many of the guiding principles that commonly characterize the study of foreign policy and the behavior of states. That is, peace studies theorists argue that the study of international affairs should reach beyond the more traditional evaluations and measurements of power, balance of power, and national security. Particularly in our increasingly interconnected world, issues such as poverty, social injustice, and environmental destruction, to name only a few, reach to the heart of our security as human beings. We might say that peace studies suggests there can be no national security in the traditional sense until there is social, economic, and political justice on a global scale.

These elements come together to form a foundation for a theory emphasizing nonviolence, equality, and working—both independently and together—for the collective good. As the name implies, peace studies involves the study of peace and ways to promote peace within the international community. Though proponents aspire to this global cause, we have included peace studies in our look at the individual level of analysis. The reason behind this classification, as we will discuss in greater detail later, is that profound change on an international level begins with personal transformation. **Personal transformation**, in this sense, is a change or shift in an individual's outlook, habits, or worldview in a way that makes that individual more socially conscious of the global effect of his or her actions. The implication is that each of us, working as individuals, can have a positive influence on a much larger, even global, scale—a positive energy "ripple effect," if you will. In this way, peace studies opens up some new possibilities about how we might view the world and our own role within the global community.

Any discussion of peace studies theory must begin with a brief examination of the impact of Mahatma Mohandas K. Gandhi. Gandhi remains the preeminent contemporary example of the nonviolent approach to resolving conflict. Gandhi was born in Western India in 1869. As a young man, his family sent him to study law in London. After he began practicing law, Gandhi moved to South Africa where he worked ceaselessly to improve the rights of immigrant Indians living in that country. It was there that he developed his creed of passive resistance against injustice. Mahatma Gandhi was a pacifist who sought political change through non-violent means. **Pacifism** is the rejection of the use of force for dealing with domestic or international conflicts. Gandhi's philosophy is encapsulated in his famous statement, "Nonviolence is the greatest force at the disposal of mankind. It is mightier than the mightiest weapon of destruction devised by the ingenuity of man." Staying true to his philosophy, Gandhi organized and led a passive resistance movement in South Africa. He was frequently jailed as a result of the peaceful protests that he led. Eventually, the South African authorities agreed to reform many of their laws and practices resulting in dramatically improved conditions for Indians living in South Africa.

Back in India, it was not long before Gandhi began leading India's long struggle for independence from Great Britain. From 1919 to 1947 Gandhi worked tirelessly to promote his strategy of nonviolent resistance to British rule. He never wavered in his unshakable belief in nonviolent protest and religious tolerance. When Indian Muslims and Hindus committed acts of violence he fasted until the fighting stopped. Mahatma Gandhi's unyielding commitment to nonviolent resistance represented a triumph of human will over violence and military might. The selection by Gandhi contains an outline of his nonviolent approach to resolving conflict.

## Peace Studies: An Interdisciplinary Approach to International Relations Theory

Though the study of international relations, with its theories and levels of analysis, generally falls in the realm of political science, peace studies is actually an interdisciplinary field. It incorporates information, analyses, and discourse from not only political science but also the traditional hard sciences (such as physics and mathematics), psychology, anthropology, sociology, and areas of the humanities (such as literature and Linguistics). This intellectual crossover is one of several key characteristics that distinguish peace studies theory from other paradigms found in the study of international affairs. Using this broad base of information, the theory can examine a full range of human activities and behavior—from peaceful to violent—and can analyze these activities from hard science and social science perspectives.

Another inclusive characteristic of peace studies as a theory and method for studying international relations is its broad historical look at human interaction. The historical reach of peace studies extends farther back than most other fields in examining the patterns and traditions in our relationships with one another. It also projects various scenarios for future world orders. These projected scenarios are based on alternatives to the traditional nation-state structure commonly used as a standard for analysis by other theorists in the international relations field. This means that links between individuals or groups might be based not simply on territorial boundaries or geographic proximity (states or blocs of states within a region), but on common interests, ideas, beliefs, or goals (religion, environmental concerns, etc.).

In addition to the inclusive approach of peace studies theory, this paradigm is also a prescriptive, rather than simply descriptive, paradigm. A prescriptive theory is a set of principles and guidelines that contain overt value judgments about how the world ought to be, rather than how the world actually is. A prescriptive theory actually contains specific recommendations with regard to foreign policy and the conduct of international relations. Consequently, peace studies offers policies, political agendas, and other criteria and conditions designed to promote nonviolence and achieve peace. Thus, just as a physician prescribes medicine to cure an illness, these theorists prescribe a particular course of action to attain a particular end.

Peace studies also evaluates existing policies made and actions taken by governments with an eye to their impact—both direct and indirect—on society. By assessing actions and motives in this way, peace studies is considered a value-based theory. A **value** is an ideal or principle that people generally consider worthwhile and desirable. Peace studies assigns value to the actions, policies, activities, and methods of governments and individuals based on their benefit or harm to society. We might say that rather than the end justifying the means, both the means *and* the end are judged with respect to values and moral appropriateness.

And the ideal end for proponents of peace studies is not simply peace but positive peace. **Positive peace** is the absence of war in combination with the establishment of broader, worldwide forms of social justice, economic prosperity, and political power-sharing. This notion is contrasted with what some peace studies theorists call "negative peace." **Negative peace** is defined only as the absence of war, a condition in which direct forms of organized violence are absent but the underlying reasons for war, such as social injustice and economic exploitation, are left unresolved. Peace studies theorists would point to the period just after World War I as an example of negative peace. Although military operations and violence had ended, broader social violence (widespread homelessness and hunger, for example), as well as political and economic retribution on the part of the victors continued, helping to sow the seeds for World War II. True peace, positive peace, could not be achieved under such conditions, according to the principles of peace studies.

It is important to point out here that advocates of peace studies differentiate between violence and conflict. Even in a situation of positive peace, peace is not necessarily the absence of conflict. Conflict—as opposed to violence—is viewed by peace studies theorists as healthy debate, disagreement, or dialogue and an integral part of life and growth in human existence. The key, according to some theorists, is to manage and resolve conflict and prevent an escalation to violence, while preserving justice and freedom within society.

Part of prevention, according to peace studies theorists, is to look at the tools of violence. Here, we see the crossover between various fields of study that was discussed earlier. In peace studies, scientists and researchers are asked to look at the consequences (environmental, social, economic) of their work. The invention of the atomic bomb, chemical weaponry, and other such devices cannot be disassociated from their violent purpose. Peace studies encourages scientists, scholars, and social activists from all fields to work together in assessing the potential political, social, and environmental ramifications of these instruments, as well as future technologies and innovations. In short, the variety of work under the rubric of peace studies seeks not only to understand the many causes of war and conflict but also to go beyond them in its quest for possibilities of peace building.

As Robin J. Crews points out in her article "A Values-Based Approach to Peace Studies," the search for complete knowledge or "truth" cannot be conducted in separate inquiries among divergent parts of the scientific community. An interconnected inquiry is the only way to reach this goal. Crews emphasizes that epistemological issues—issues dealing with the nature and roots of knowledge—need to be addressed as part of reducing society's violent tendencies. Learning changes our experience as humans in numerous ways, and peace studies, as part of that process, is geared to help channel an individual's search for knowledge, enlightenment, and "truth" in positive directions. She suggests that we need to instill love in our search for truth, make appropriate changes in the curricula of our schools and universities, and take social responsibility for what knowledge brings to, and can do, in our lives. We can begin this process by analyzing current values, norms, standards, and practices within society in order to understand how and what must be done to improve our future.

As we touched on earlier, this kind of global improvement begins with the person's potential for growth and deeper understanding. The next article, "The Individual and Global Peace-Building: A Transformational Perspective," by Arthur Stein, focuses on the transformational approach to peace studies. The transformational, or transformative, approach examines the relationship between thought and deed, and seeks to reconcile the two. For example, concern for the preservation of our environment and natural resources must be accompanied by actions that promote this goal. One might begin by recycling on an individual basis, then take action to help develop a comprehensive town or county program. Besides ecological awareness, Stein highlights several key areas as targets for personal transformation, including human rights, civic responsibilities, shared economic well-being, and nonviolent social change. He illustrates the potential of each individual not only to change himself or herself but, through example, to make a positive contribution in transforming family, friends, neighborhoods, states, and the international community. Stein emphasizes the importance of the qualities of inclusiveness, civility, and empathy to the development of truly participatory democracies.

The final reading, "A Nonviolent Approach to the Intifada," by Raed Abusahlia is an excellent example of the application of the philosophy and principles promoted by peace studies. The author, a Palestinian priest and Chancellor of the Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem, wrote this article in an attempt to persuade Palestinians to adopt a strategy of nonviolence in their struggle to achieve statehood for Palestine.

Certainly, the transformational perspective of peace studies—or peace building— theory clearly shows the proactive nature of this paradigm. Peace studies theorists are not content simply to describe the behavior of states and its impact on the international system. They begin by ascribing value to this behavior and proceed to make recommendations on how it might be improved. There is, as we have seen, a significant amount of thought, effort, and research behind such an innovative approach to international relations. We must now ask where peace studies theory excels and where it might fall short.

## A Critique of Peace Studies Theory

Peace studies outlines specific goals and offers underlying principles and, in some instances, courses of action designed to fulfill them. The prescriptive, interdisciplinary, value-oriented nature of this theory is actually one of its primary strengths.

The goals are noble and broad-based: social justice, human rights, building positive peace, and changing the fundamental way we view the world and ourselves. Peace studies theorists suggest promoting these goals by creating a more communitarian, global ethic in which the fundamental causes of violence might be overcome by better understanding human nature. Such understanding can be enhanced by person-to-person contact that crosses boundaries and builds bridges of knowledge and communication on an individual level, yet in a global context.

Another goal of peace studies looks for balance within these new relationships. That is, we should strive for global equilibrium between the powerful and the powerless, the wealthy and the poor. Personal and community security, which then translates to global security, can be achieved by providing food and shelter to those in need, justice to those who are persecuted, and a voice to those who have been politically silenced.

It may appear somewhat like bursting the proverbial bubble to point out that a critique of peace studies can legitimately question its idealistic worldview, which some might even call Utopian. Peace studies theorists, indeed, have developed such an optimistic outlook that some critics argue it could be potentially dangerous in real-world situations. Though noble in intent, the policies fostered by peace studies could subtly weaken the resolve of people and states to resist or combat a nation bent on extending its power or influence through aggressive actions.

On a theoretical level, peace studies has been similarly criticized for underestimating the inherent conflict between nation-states. Certainly, a realist would describe the international environment as anarchic and characterized by the violence of an ongoing struggle for power between states. Under this scenario, peace studies falls short in explaining present conditions and projecting future behavior. As a theoretical construct, critics consider it disjointed and lacking a coherent framework for analyzing international relations.

Peace studies theorists respond to these arguments by stating that the only way to change the international environment is to build bridges (through both person-to-person and government contacts), which, in turn, will reduce the fear and insecurity that lead to war. They recognize that this kind of change comes about incrementally but believe it is a logical, productive course of action. By focusing on disparities of wealth and power, individuals, communities, nongovernmental organizations, and governments can formulate effective policies to redress these imbalances and create greater stability within the system. If these global disparities continue in a world of growing environmental, economic, and political instability, even powerful nations will no longer be safe.

The peace studies path to this kind of change is long and gradual. Proponents suggest, though, that the prescriptive nature of the approach and the transformational aspects may offer the only realistic route for long-term, positive change in our world. This transformational process generally proceeds upwards, from individuals to states to the global system, and relies on the idea that people's attitudes and actions can affect international relations. Within its value-based, moral context, peace studies theory emphasizes positive change, social justice, and greater balance between the weak and the powerful.

We might question, however, how successful such a social contract might be. The goals of peace studies contain what are many traditional leftist elements: to more equitably redistribute wealth, to empower the poor and powerless, and to equalize the distribution of power. At a time when we see more and more developing nations turn to capitalism and a free-market system, peace studies theory could face some significant challenges. Then again, peace studies theorists might suggest that we can change the world only by changing ourselves, and that effort begins with one individual at a time.

## Key Concepts

**Negative Peace** is the absence of war. Direct forms of organized violence are absent, but the underlying reasons for war, such as social injustice and economic exploitation, are left unresolved. This term is contrasted with what peace studies theorists refer to as positive peace.

**Pacifism** is the rejection of the use of force for dealing with domestic or international conflicts.

**Personal Transformation** is a change or shift in an individual's nature, outlook, habits, or worldview in a way that makes that individual more socially conscious of the global effect of his or her actions.

**Positive Peace** is the absence of war in combination with the establishment of broader, worldwide forms of social justice, economic prosperity, and political power-sharing. This notion is contrasted with what peace studies theorists call negative peace.

**Value** is an ideal or principle that people generally consider worthwhile and desirable. Peace studies assigns value to the actions, policies, activities, and methods of governments and individuals based on their benefit or harm to society.