1 HOW TO THINK ABOUT INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

Perspectives, Levels of Analysis, and Causal Arrows

THE ATTACKS OF SEPTEMBER 11

On September 11, 2001, Muslim terrorists, mostly from Saudi Arabia belonging to the Al Qaeda terrorist organization, hijacked four commercial airliners and flew them into the twin towers of the World Trade Center in New York, the north façade of the Pentagon in Washington, D.C., and an empty farmland in Pennsylvania (because brave passengers diverted the plane from its intended target in Washington, the White House or U.S. Capitol building). Three thousand Americans died, more than at Pearl Harbor in 1941, some by leaping from the twin towers to their deaths a hundred stories below. What caused these attacks? Here are four possible explanations:

1. A struggle for power between weak states and strong states caused the attack.
2. A failure to resolve the Arab-Israeli conflict caused the attack.
3. Nondemocratic, religious governments in the Middle East caused the attack.
4. America's relentless military presence and imperialism around the world caused the attack.

Commentators at the time, looking at the same facts, emphasized all of these causes. Their reactions illustrate how the four perspectives developed in this textbook—realist, liberal, identity, and critical theory—operating at the three principal levels of analysis—individual, domestic, and systemic—generate debates about international affairs even when the facts are all the same.

Realist: Weak versus Strong at Different Levels of Analysis

Three days after 9/11, Ronald Steel, a professor at the University of Southern California, characterized the attacks in the *New York Times* as "a war in which the weak turned the guns of the strong against them . . . showing . . . that in the end there may be no such thing as a universal civilization of which we all too easily assume we are the rightful leaders."[1] Steel interprets the attacks by Al Qaeda as weak actors rebelling against strong actors, with the weak actors rejecting the notion that the strong ones can dictate what is right and therefore universally valid in international affairs. Steel is applying the **realist perspective**, which sees the world largely in terms of a struggle for power between strong actors seeking to dominate weak ones

realist perspective
a perspective that sees the world largely in terms of a struggle for relative power in which strong actors seek to dominate and weak actors seek to resist.

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Why did Al Qaeda attack the United States on September 11, 2001? Was it the weak balancing the strong, a reaction to U.S. diplomacy in the Middle East, or a rejection of Western values?
AP Photo/Carmen Taylor

and weak actors resisting strong ones to preserve their interests and independence. He does not ignore ideas or the identity perspective. He simply argues that relative power limits the role of ideas, that there "may be no such thing as a universal civilization," no universal right and wrong. The causal arrows run from the realist perspective to the identity perspective, with power factors determining for the most part what we can expect from the role of ideas or values.

Steel is emphasizing the systemic level of analysis because the cause is coming from a global struggle for power between the United States and smaller powers. This struggle, however, may be emphasized at other levels of analysis. If we focus on the Al Qaeda terrorists, we are emphasizing the individual level of analysis. Al Qaeda's leader, Osama bin Laden, personifies the 9/11 attacks. However, if we emphasize the Taliban government in Afghanistan, where Al Qaeda trained, we might be thinking of weak or failed states that have been taken over internally by terrorists and conclude that the cause is coming from the domestic level of analysis. At each level, the cause is the same—namely, the struggle for power between the weak and the strong. But depending on which level of analysis we emphasize, we respond differently to the attacks. At the individual level, we focus on getting rid of Osama bin Laden. At the domestic level, we seek to democratize Afghanistan. And at the systemic level, we address problems in broader international relationships between Muslim and Western countries.

Figure 1-1 summarizes realist explanations for the causes of the 9/11 attacks.

FIGURE 1-1 ■ The Causes of the 9/11 Attacks: From the Realist Perspective

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Liberal: Failed Relationships at Different Levels of Analysis

Writing two days after Steel in the *Washington Post*, journalist Caryle Murphy saw the attacks differently. September 11, 2001, was a result not of the weak striking back against the strong but of unresolved diplomatic disputes, such as the Israeli–Palestinian conflict, that created unfairness and grievances between the feuding parties. She argued that "if we want to avoid creating more terrorists, we must end the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in a way both sides see as fair."[2] Murphy is using the **liberal perspective**, which emphasizes relationships and interdependence among actors in international affairs, how groups interact, communicate, negotiate, and trade with one another. She is saying that the cause of the 9/11 attacks stems from the absence of a negotiated agreement that includes all parties—terrorists and nonterrorists, Palestinians and Israelis—one that is considered fair and legitimate. Note how diplomacy and cooperation trump power. The liberal perspective holds out the prospect that solutions to international conflicts are not determined primarily by a balance of power but derive instead from common rules and institutions that include all actors regardless of their relative power or idas.

liberal perspective a perspective that emphasizes repetitive relationships and negotiations, establishing patterns or institutions for resolving international conflicts.

Murphy is emphasizing the systemic level of analysis because international negotiations are, in her mind, a more important cause of and, therefore, solution to the problem of terrorism than the internal characteristics of countries (domestic level) or the specific behavior of individual leaders (individual level). But failed relationships or negotiations can also occur at the domestic or individual level of analysis. For example, in 2007, the Palestinian government broke up into two factions (domestic level), which stymied negotiations with Israel. And, in 2001, a new hard-line leader (individual level) took power in Israel, which derailed the Camp David peace accords.

Figure 1-2 summarizes liberal explanations for the causes of the 9/11 attacks.

FIGURE 1-2 ■ The Causes of the 9/11 Attacks: From the Liberal Perspective

Identity: Democratic Reform of Governments at Different Levels of Analysis

Writing a year after the 9/11 attacks, as prospects of war against Iraq loomed, Jim Hoagland, a columnist for the *Washington Post*, suggested still a third way to think about the attacks. He was skeptical of finding a solution to terrorism through a better balance of power between the weak and strong or through a negotiated solution of the Arab–Israeli dispute. He felt that the problem was one of nondemocratic governments in the Middle East: "The removal of Saddam Hussein [then Iraq's leader] and Yasser Arafat [then leader of the Palestinian Authority] are

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Palestinian (Yasser Arafat, left) and Israeli (Shimon Peres, right) leaders meet in late September 2001 to discuss an end to the conflict between Israel and Palestine. Liberalism emphasizes international cooperation and interdependence and views unresolved misunderstandings between the two states as a critical factor precipitating 9/11.
AP Photo/Pool/Ahmed Jadallah

necessary but not sufficient conditions for stabilizing the Middle East. . . . The administration cannot rely . . . on a now discredited peace process. . . . Only a level and clarity of American commitment to democratic change . . . will calm an ever more deadly conflict."[3] Hoagland is emphasizing the **identity perspective**, the causal importance of the ideas and identities of the actors, which motivate their use of power and guide their behavior in international organizations. Note how Hoagland de-emphasizes the negotiation process as "discredited" (liberal) and says that the mere removal of Saddam Hussein and Yasser Arafat from power (realist) is not enough. Instead, what is needed, he maintains, is a change in the ideological nature of Arab governments. They need to reform and, with U.S. help, become more democratic—in short, change their basic political ideas and identities.

identity perspective
a perspective that emphasizes the causal importance of the ideas and identities of actors, which motivate their use of power and negotiations.

Hoagland is emphasizing the domestic level of analysis, He is suggesting that democratic reforms are more important than forcefully removing individual leaders or relying on negotiations. He is calling for America to shift its focus from systemic-level negotiations to domestic-level democratic reforms. Until Arab identities become more democratic and their identities converge with that of Israel, negotiations (the liberal solution) will not be successful, and shifts in power such as removing Hussein and Arafat (the realist solution) will not change much.

Figure 1-3 summarizes identity perspective explanations for the causes of the 9/11 attacks.

Critical Theory: Pervasive Violence at Different Levels of Analysis

From a **critical theory perspective**, the cause of 9/11 is the pervasive and deep-seated violence in the present international system, reflected in the aggressive behavior of the United States. As the preeminent power, the United States contributes to if not creates terrorism through its military presence and imperialism throughout the world and the suppression of alternative

FIGURE 1-3 ■ The Causes of the 9/11 Attacks: From the Identity Perspective

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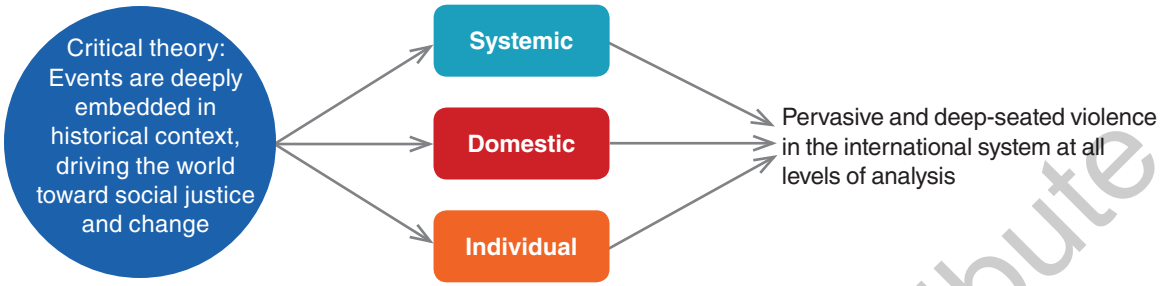
FIGURE 1-4 ■ The Causes of the 9/11 Attacks: From the Critical Theory Perspective



cultures and political ideas. It invites radicalism and apocalyptic outcomes. As one radical critic puts it, "The probability of 'apocalypse soon' . . . is surely too high . . . because of Washington's primary role in accelerating the race to destruction by extending its historically unique military dominance."[4] American power, ideas, and institutions permeate the system at all levels of analysis, systematically excluding minority groups and driving the system toward violent upheaval and change.

critical theory perspective a perspective that focuses on deeply embedded forces from all perspectives and levels of analysis.

Figure 1-4 summarizes critical theory explanations for the causes of the 9/11 attacks.

Our task in this chapter is to develop the logic of these different perspectives and levels of analysis as they explain in many cases the very same facts by drawing the causal arrows differently. At the end of the chapter, revisit these explanations of the 9/11 attacks and determine which one makes most sense to you or what further research you might want to undertake to make that decision.

PRISONER'S DILEMMA

How can you reach different conclusions even when you start with the same facts? Let's illustrate this point with the classic prisoner's dilemma story. The perspectives, we will see, emphasize different aspects of the same story. The realist perspective emphasizes the external circumstances beyond the control of the prisoners (power), the liberal perspective emphasizes how the prisoners interact (institutions), and the identity perspective emphasizes how the prisoners think about each other (ideas or identities). In this discussion we exclude the critical theory perspective since the prisoner's dilemma is a rational choice exercise in which variables are separated and cause one another in sequence.

The basic **prisoner's dilemma** story is simple. Two individuals are caught with illegal drugs in their possession. Police authorities suspect that one or both of them may be drug dealers but do not have enough evidence to prove it. So the head of the prison, let's call him the warden, creates a situation to try to get them to squeal on one another. The warden tells each prisoner separately that if he squeals on the other prisoner he can go free; the accused prisoner will then be put away as a drug dealer for twenty-five years. If the other prisoner also squeals, each prisoner gets ten years in prison. On the other hand, if both prisoners remain silent, each will get only one year in prison because there is no further evidence to convict them. The prisoners do not know one another and are not allowed to communicate. Table 1-1 illustrates the choices and outcomes.

prisoner's dilemma a game in which two prisoners rationally choose not to cooperate in order to avoid even worse outcomes.

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Now, let's look at how each perspective analyzes this situation and how it applies to international affairs.

The Prisoner's Dilemma from the Realist Perspective

The individual prisoner's dilemma as seen from the realist perspective is the following. The prisoners have separate and self-interested identities, and they are concerned primarily with their own interests in going free. If actor A remains silent, in effect cooperating with his fellow prisoner, he gets either one year in prison if the other prisoner also remains silent (see upper-left box in Table 1-1) or twenty-five years if the other prisoner squeals (lower-left box). On the other hand, if actor A squeals, he may either go free if the other prisoner remains silent (see upper-right box) or get a sentence of ten years in prison if the other prisoner also squeals (lower-right box). Given that each prisoner's top priority is to go free, it would be logical for both to squeal. But if both squeal, they get ten years each in jail, a worse outcome than if both remain silent (one year in jail for each) but not as bad as the outcome for one prisoner who remains silent while the other squeals (twenty-five years). The point of the story is that each prisoner cannot achieve either his preferred outcome of going free or his second-best goal of only one year in prison because circumstances outside the control of the prisoner—the actions of the other prisoner and the rules set by the warden—make squealing the less risky alternative. Each settles for a second-worse outcome (ten years) to avoid the worst one (twenty-five years).

The realist perspective argues that this sort of dilemma defines the logic of many situations in international affairs. Countries that are independent and self-interested desire peace (analogous to cooperating) and do not want to arm or threaten other countries (analogous to squealing). They prefer less risky or more peaceful strategies such as mutual disarmament (analogous to cooperating and staying only one year in prison). But one country cannot disarm

TABLE 1-1 ■ Prisoner's Dilemma: A Realist Game

		Actor A: Cooperate (C) (silent)	Actor A: Defect (D) (squeal)
Actor B: Cooperate (C) (silent)		Both get 1 year	**A** goes free **B** gets 25 years
Actor B: Defect (D) (squeal)		**A** gets 25 years **B** goes free	Both get 10 years (outcome of game)

A and B can get their best outcome (go free) only if one prisoner squeals and the other remains silent (DC).

They settle for their third-best outcome (10 years) in order to avoid their worst outcome (25 years) (DD).

They can get their second-best outcome (1 year) only if they both remain silent (CC), but by remaining silent each gets the worst outcome (25 years) if the other squeals (CD).

Notice how the outcomes are ordered for each actor: DC > CC > DD > CD. If this order changes, the game changes. See subsequent tables.

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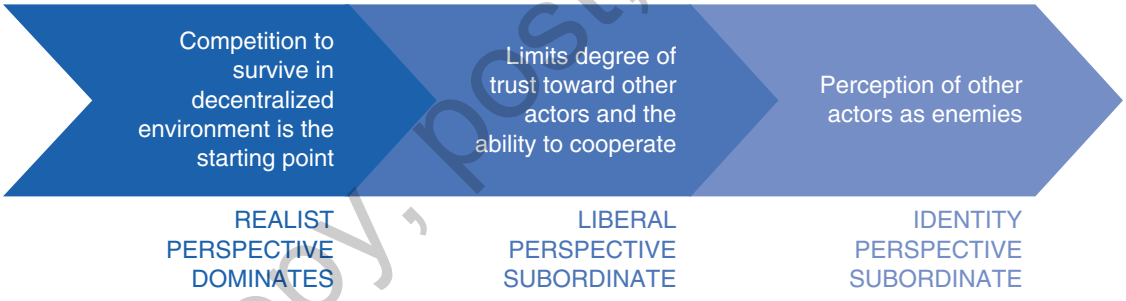
(cooperate) without risking the possibility that the other country may arm (squeal or defect) and perhaps seize territory or take away the first country's sovereignty, eliminating its independence and, if it is a democratic state, its freedom as well (analogous to the maximum penalty of twenty-five years). The countries face what the realist perspective calls a security dilemma. Neither country is aggressive. It is just looking for the best outcome, and if it arms and the other country does not, it is safer than it would be otherwise. The situation is set up such that each party cannot have peace (going free or spending one year in prison) without risking loss of territory or sovereignty (twenty-five years in prison). If both countries arm, on the other hand, they can protect their territory and sovereignty but now risk the possibility of mutual harm and war. Because the possibility of war is less risky (equivalent to ten years in prison) than the actual loss of territory, let alone sovereignty (or democracy), they defect.

Thus, from the realist perspective much of international relations is about mutual armaments and conflict. As Figure 1-5 shows, the causal arrows run from competition to survive (go free) in an environment that is decentralized and largely outside the control of the actors, to increasing distrust and inability to cooperate, to self-images of one another as enemies. Notice that it is possible to reverse the two subordinate perspectives. For example, competition to survive creates competing identities, which increases distrust. But the realist perspective is the dominant one in both cases.

FIGURE 1-5 ■ Causal Arrows: The Realist View



The Prisoner's Dilemma from the Liberal Perspective

The liberal perspective argues that situations described by the prisoner's dilemma do exist in international affairs but that these situations are not the only or even most prevalent ones and can be overcome. Three factors that realism de-emphasizes help surmount these situations and change the prisoner's dilemma to a more cooperative game: repeated reciprocal interactions or communications, common goals, and technological change. In the original game, the prisoners are not allowed to communicate and build trust; they play the game only once. What if they were allowed to play the game over and over again, the equivalent of meeting regularly in the prison yard to exchange moves and perhaps make small talk? It's not so much the content of what they say that produces trust (after all, familiarity may breed contempt, not cooperation, as a realist perspective would argue) but, rather, the mere fact that they play the game over and over again. In game theory, this is called creating the shadow of the future, that is, the expectation that the prisoners will have to deal with one another again and again—tomorrow, the day after, and every day in the future. As long as the prisoners can avoid the

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expectation that they will not meet again—what game theory calls the last move, equivalent to playing the game only once—they might gain enough trust in one another over time to discount significantly the possibility that the other prisoner will defect if the first prisoner remains silent. Now, as Table 1-2 shows, they end up in the upper-left box—the second-best outcome of a one-year sentence—rather than the lower-right one. The liberal perspective expects that if countries develop habits of regular interaction and communication through diplomacy, membership in common institutions, trade, tourism, and other exchanges, they can overcome the security dilemma that drives mutual armament and conflict.

What is more, according to the liberal perspective, many goals in international relations are common and mutually beneficial, not self-interested and conflicting. So what if we change our assumptions about the goals of the prisoners in the original version of the prisoner's dilemma? Let's say the prisoners are less interested in going free than they are in frustrating the warden by reducing the total number of years the warden is able to hold the prisoners in jail. Now the prisoners have a common goal, not a self-interested one. As Table 1-3 shows, the logical choice that meets the goal of both prisoners is now to remain silent (upper-left box). That gives the warden only two prisoner years (one year for each prisoner), while squealing by one or both prisoners gives the warden twenty-five or twenty (ten years each) prisoner years, respectively. The prisoners still can't influence the warden. He is outside their control. But now both prisoners can get their second-best outcome simultaneously by cooperating.[5] An example of this situation from the real world may be two countries trading to increase wealth for both (a win-win, or non-zero-sum, scenario) rather than fighting over territory where one country's gain equals the other country's loss (a win-lose, or zero-sum, scenario). Look at how the countries of the European Union have overcome historical disputes over territory by building a common trade and economic union (liberal), which reduces the significance of relative military power (realist) and engenders a common European identity (identity).

Further, what if the warden changes the payoffs, or consequences, of the original game? For example, if both prisoners squeal, that should give the warden enough evidence to convict them both as drug dealers and now, let's say, put them to death. Table 1-4 shows the new game. All

TABLE 1-2 ■ Situation of Prisoner's Dilemma from Liberal Perspective: Repeated Communications

		Actor A	
		Cooperate (C) (silent)	**Defect (D) (squeal)**
Actor B	**Cooperate (C) (silent)**	Both get 1 year (outcome of game)	**A** goes free **B** gets 25 years
	Defect (D) (squeal)	**A** gets 25 years **B** goes free	Both get 10 years

A and B gain one another's trust and choose to cooperate. They both get 1 year.

In this game, the prisoners face the same payoffs and goals as in the original game, but we assume A and B can communicate repeatedly. This interaction becomes patterned and institutionalized and establishes a "shadow of the future."

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TABLE 1-3 ■ Situation of Prisoner's Dilemma from Liberal Perspective: Change Goals (Frustrate the Warden)

		Actor A	
		Cooperate (C) (silent)	**Defect (D) (squeal)**
Actor B	**Cooperate (C) (silent)**	Both get 1 year (outcome of game)	**A** goes free **B** gets 25 years
	Defect (D) (squeal)	**A** gets 25 years **B** goes free	Both get 10 years

By cooperating, A and B can limit gains to the warden to two prisoner years, one year for each prisoner (upper left). This is their best outcome.

If either or both defect (that is, choose upper-right or lower-right or lower-left boxes), the warden gets more prisoner years (25 or 20).

In this game, the prisoners face the same payoffs as in the original game, but the goals have changed. Notice that the new goal of frustrating the warden rather than going free is win-win because both prisoners can now get their best outcome simultaneously.

TABLE 1-4 ■ Situation of Prisoner's Dilemma from Liberal Perspective: Change Payoffs (Increase Costs of Defection/Conflict)

		Actor A	
		Cooperate (C) (silent)	**Defect (D) (squeal)**
Actor B	**Cooperate (C) (silent)**	Both get 1 year	**A** goes free **B** gets 25 years (outcome of game)
	Defect (D) (squeal)	**A** gets 25 years **B** goes free (outcome of game)	Both get death

A or B gets the best outcome only if one defects (squeals and goes free) and the other actor cooperates (remains silent). Each has a greater tendency to cooperate but still prefers to defect, because that is the only way he can go free, assuming the other cooperates.

If both A and B defect, they risk getting their worst outcome (death).

The warden increases the cost of defection and hence changes the order of preferences for each of the prisoners: DC > CC > CD > DD (different from the original order: DC > CC > DD > CD).

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we have done is increase the most severe cost of defecting from twenty-five years to death. That might be the equivalent in international affairs of a technological change, such as developing nuclear weapons, that raises the penalty of arms races and war. Nuclear weapons increase the dangers of mutual armament by states just as the death penalty increases the cost of mutual defection by the prisoners. If the prisoners prefer freedom to survival, they will still squeal since that is the only way they can go free. But the change in consequences may lead them to search for more common goals, such as mutual survival with less freedom. While the prospects of both cooperating and ending up in the upper-left-hand box are not assured, they have improved somewhat over the original game. The scale tips toward cooperation. The cost of twenty-five years in prison if the other prisoner does not cooperate is still less than that of death.[6]

Technological change may work the other way, of course. It may reduce the costs or increase the benefits of cooperating rather than increase the costs of defecting. Let's go back to the original game and reduce the cost of remaining silent if the other prisoner squeals, from twenty-five to five years. Now, as Table 1-5 illustrates, the prisoners risk less if they cooperate (five years) than if they squeal (ten years). Their preferred strategies again are the upper-right and lower-left boxes. But now, because they risk only five years in prison if they guess wrong about what the other party will do, the prospects of cooperating are better than in the original game. A real-world example of reducing the costs or increasing the benefits of cooperation might be technological advances that make the prospects of ballistic missile defense more feasible. If all countries possessed such defenses, they may be more willing to cooperate in a nuclear crisis. Then, if the other country defects and attacks, the first country can still defend itself and not lose as much (the equivalent of getting five years) as it might if it also attacked (the equivalent of getting ten years).

TABLE 1-5 ■ Situation of Prisoner's Dilemma from Liberal Perspective: Change Payoffs (Reduce Costs of Cooperation)

		Actor A	
		Cooperate (C) (silent)	**Defect (D) (squeal)**
Actor B	**Cooperate (C) (silent)**	Both get 1 year	**A** goes free **B** gets 5 years (outcome of game)
	Defect (D) (squeal)	**A** gets 5 years **B** goes free (outcome of game)	Both get 10 years

A or B gets the best outcome (freedom) if one defects and the other cooperates. Each has a greater tendency to cooperate but still prefers to defect, because that is the only way he can go free, assuming the other cooperates.

If both A and B defect, they risk getting their worst outcome (10 years).

The warden reduces the costs of cooperation and hence changes the order of preferences for each actor: DC > CC > CD > DD (different from the original order: DC > CC > DD > CD).

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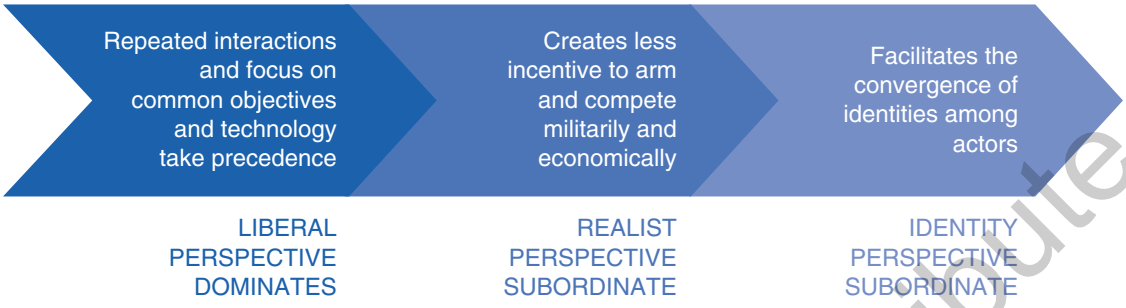
FIGURE 1-6 ■ Causal Arrows: The Liberal View



In all these ways—repeated communication and diplomacy, focusing on common rather than conflicting goals, and exploiting technological changes that alter payoffs in favor of cooperation—the liberal perspective argues that realist logic can be overcome. As Figure 1-6 shows, the causal arrows run from repeated interactions and a focus on common objectives and technology, to less incentive to arm and compete using relative military and economic power, to increasing trust and converging identities among the actors. Again, the subordinate perspectives may be reversed. Repeated interactions may create closer identities that diminish the incentive to arm. But in both cases the liberal perspective is dominant.

The Prisoner's Dilemma from the Identity Perspective

The identity perspective takes still another tack on the situation described by the original prisoner's dilemma game. It challenges the implicit assumption that the prisoners have self-interested identities and do not care about the consequences for the other prisoner. If the identities and payoffs were shared, the two prisoners might behave differently even if the circumstances remained the same. What if, for example, the two prisoners were both members of the Mafia and knew it? Members of the Mafia, an underground criminal organization, take a blood oath that they will never squeal on other members of the organization or reveal anything about its criminal activities. This oath becomes part of their identity. The prisoners now remain silent because of who they are, not because they pursue a common goal, as in the liberal case of frustrating the warden, or because they fear certain payoffs, such as someone else in the Mafia killing them if they squeal (a realist situation because their behavior is now determined by external circumstances they cannot control). In the case as seen from the identity perspective, they do not squeal because their obedience to the Mafia code has been internalized and is now part of their identity. If each prisoner knows that the other prisoner is also a member of the Mafia, he is unlikely to squeal on the other. No feature of the game has changed except that the prisoners now know they have similar or shared identities. Yet, as Table 1-6 shows, the outcome of the game changes substantially from the realist scenario. It is now logical for the two prisoners to remain silent and get off with only one year each in prison.

In the same way, the identity perspective argues that two countries may behave differently depending on their identities. They may see one another as enemies, rivals, or friends, depending on the way their identities are individually and socially constructed. Or their identities may converge or diverge with one another depending on how similar or different these identities

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TABLE 1-6 ■ Situation of Prisoner's Dilemma from Identity Perspective: Change Identity

		Actor A	
		Cooperate (C) (silent)	**Defect (D) (squeal)**
Actor B	**Cooperate (C) (silent)**	Both get 1 year (outcome of game)	**A** goes free **B** gets 25 years
	Defect (D) (squeal)	**A** gets 25 years **B** goes free	Both get 10 years

Because of their shared identity, the prisoners both know that the other will not squeal. Hence, they can choose to cooperate without fear that the other will defect.

In this game, the prisoners are back to the original payoffs and goals and share no communications except knowledge of the other's identity. Assume that A and B are not self-interested actors but members of a common organization—such as the Mafia—and know that about one another.

are. Thus, democracies behave more peacefully toward one another than they do toward autocracies, and countries that identify with common international norms and ideas behave differently than those that see themselves struggling over the balance of power. As Figure 1-7 shows, the causal arrows in the identity perspective run from converging or conflicting self-images (identity), to more or less cooperation (liberal), to the need or lack of need for military and economic power (realist). Again, the subordinate perspectives may be reversed. Converging identities may lessen incentives to arm that in turn increase cooperation. But the dominant perspective remains the identity perspective.

Let's leave the prisoner's dilemma story and develop these three perspectives in the real world. The sections that follow introduce numerous concepts, many of which will be new to you. Don't despair. We revisit these concepts again and again and use them throughout the rest

FIGURE 1-7 ■ Causal Arrows: The Identity View

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of the book to help you see how they work in our understanding of historical and contemporary international affairs.

THE REALIST PERSPECTIVE

Refer to Figure 1-5. It depicts the direction of the causal arrows in the realist perspective. They run from competition to arm and survive in a decentralized environment (realist), to increasing distrust and inability to cooperate (liberal), to the perception of other nations as rivals or enemies (identity). As already noted, the subordinate liberal and identity perspectives may be reversed, but the dominant perspective remains realist. In this section, we break down the causal chain of this realist logic. The italicized words below denote concepts that are more fully explained in subsequent sections.

The realist perspective focuses on conflict and war, not because people adopting this perspective favor war or believe war is necessary, but because they hope by studying war they might avoid it in the future. War, according to the realist perspective, is a consequence of *anarchy*, the decentralized distribution of power in the international system. In anarchic situations, actors have to rely on *self-help* to defend themselves; they must act unilaterally or with coalitions of the willing (minilaterally) because there is no reliable central, multilateral power they can appeal to. So, throughout history, wherever anarchy existed, individuals, tribes, clans, villages, towns, and provinces had to provide for their own security. Today *states* are the principal actors in the international system. They enjoy *sovereignty*, meaning no other actor can exert legitimate power over them or intervene in their domestic affairs. They are the only actors authorized to use military and other forms of *power* to protect security.

In pursuing sovereignty and power to defend themselves, however, states inevitably threaten one another. Is one state arming to defend itself or to attack another state? States cannot be sure about other states' intentions. They face a *security dilemma* similar to the prisoner's dilemma. If one state arms and another doesn't, the second one may lose its security. To cope with that dilemma, both states defect—or squeal—and pursue a *balance of power*. They form *alliances* against any country that becomes so strong it might threaten the survival of the others. The number of great-power states or alliances involved in the balance of power constitutes the *polarity* of the system. Two great powers or alliances form a bipolar system, three form a tripolar system, and four or more form a multipolar system. Different system polarities produce different propensities toward *war*.

Anarchy and Self-Help

From a realist perspective, the distribution of power is always decentralized. This fact of international life is referred to as **anarchy**. The word means there is no leader or center of authority that monopolizes coercive power and has the legitimacy to use it. Anarchy is opposed to monarchy (or empire), which means one leader or center, and polyarchy, which means several overlapping leaders or centers, such as the shared authority of the individual states and the European Union in contemporary Europe. The United States may be the only world superpower, but, as the Iraq War suggests, the rest of the world does not recognize its legitimacy to use that power as a world government, not in the same sense that citizens of a particular country recognize the legitimacy of the domestic government to monopolize and use coercive power. No world government exists with the authority of a domestic government, and no world police force exists with the authority of a national police or military force. In

anarchy the decentralized distribution of power in the international system; no leader or center to monopolize power.

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short, there is no world 911. If you get in trouble abroad, there is no one to call for help, no one except your own clan, tribe, or state. If a student from the United States is arrested in Singapore, for example, the student calls the U.S. embassy in Singapore, not the United Nations in New York. Similarly, if a country is attacked, it provides its own defense or calls on allies. It is not likely to depend on international organizations.

self-help the principle of self-defense under anarchy in which states have no one to rely on to defend their security except themselves.

Anarchy places a premium on **self-help**, which means that whatever the size or nature of the actor—whether it is a tribe, city-state, or nation-state—it has to provide for its own protection or risk succumbing to another actor. The size or nature of the actor may change over time. Some states unite into a larger state like Germany in the nineteenth century, while others break up into multiple states like the Soviet Union in 1991. But the condition of anarchy and the need for self-help do not change. Unless the world eventually unites under a single government that all the peoples of the world recognize as the sole legitimate center of military power, decentralized actors will be responsible for their own security. Realist approaches, therefore, often favor unilateralism or minilateralism—action by one or several states—rather than action by all states (multilateralism).

State Actors and Sovereignty

state actors units in the contemporary international system that have the largest capabilities and right to use military force.

Because the realist perspective is especially interested in conflict and war, realist scholars find it more important to study states than nonstate actors. **State actors** command the greatest military and police forces to make war. Nonstate actors such as corporations, labor unions, and human rights groups do not. Where groups other than states use military-style force—for example, terrorists or private security forces defending corporate properties overseas—these groups command far less military power and are not recognized by domestic authorities or international institutions as having the right or legitimacy to use that power. Only states have that right. They possess what is called sovereignty. **Sovereignty** means that there is no higher authority above them abroad or beneath them at home. It implies self-determination at home and nonintervention abroad—that is, agreeing not to intervene in the domestic affairs or jurisdictions of other states.

sovereignty an attribute of states such that they are not subordinate to a higher power either inside or outside their borders and they agree not to intervene in the domestic jurisdictions of other states.

How do actors acquire sovereignty? When territorial states emerged in Europe during the period from 1000 to 1500 C.E.,[7] they had to demonstrate that they could establish and defend their borders. Once a state monopolized force within its borders and used that force effectively to defend its borders, it was recognized by other states. As power changes, therefore, the principal actors in international politics change. Nonstate actors can become state actors, and state actors can dissolve or evolve. For example, in recent decades, the Muslim population in Kosovo, formerly a minority nonstate actor in the country of Serbia, became an independent state, recognized by the United Nations and more than one hundred other states. Conversely, the Soviet Union disappeared, and the former republics of the Soviet Union, such as Estonia, became independent. The European Union replaced independent European states in certain specific areas of international negotiations, such as trade and monetary policy. Yet in 2016 Great Britain exercised its national sovereignty and voted to withdraw from the EU. Even if the EU eventually becomes a fully sovereign actor, the realist perspective will view it as simply another separate and independent actor and therefore, as long as other independent actors exist, subject to the same imperatives of anarchy and self-help.

Power

power the material capabilities of a country, such as size of population and territory, resource endowment, economic capability, and military strength.

States monopolize power, but what is power? For the most part, **power** from the realist perspective is concerned with material capabilities, not influence or outcomes. Normally,

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we define power and influence as getting others to do what they would not otherwise do. Power does that by coercion, influence by persuasion. But how do we know what others might intend or otherwise do in the absence of our attempt to influence them? Their intentions may be manifold and hard to discern. And outcomes that might have occurred if we had not sought to influence them are part of that counterfactual history we can only speculate about. As the realist perspective sees it, it is too difficult to measure power and influence in terms of intentions or outcomes. It is better to measure power in terms of material inputs or capabilities. Military and economic capabilities are paramount. It is then assumed that these capabilities translate roughly into commensurate influence and outcomes.

Former child soldiers march with flags in July 2017 to celebrate the sixth anniversary of South Sudan's independence. Although South Sudan achieved the sovereignty it had sought after decades of conflict with Sudan, the country was soon engulfed in its own civil war as a result of a power struggle between its first president and a former deputy.
ALBERT GONZALEZ FARRAN/AFP/Getty Images

How does the realist perspective measure capabilities? Kenneth Waltz, the father of what is known in international political theory as neorealism or structural realism (a realist perspective based primarily on the systemic structural level of analysis), identifies the following measures: "size of population and territory, resource endowment, economic capability, military strength, political stability and competence."[8] Population, economics, and military might are obvious elements of state power. Territory and resource endowment are, too. They involve geography and contribute to what realist perspectives call more broadly **geopolitics**. Some countries have more land than others, some have more natural resources, and some have more easily defended geographic borders. For example, Switzerland is protected on all sides by mountains, while Poland sits in the middle of the great plains of northern Europe and, as a result, has been more frequently invaded, conquered, and even partitioned. Island nations have certain power advantages by virtue of being less vulnerable to invasion. England was never defeated by Napoleon or Hitler, while states on the European continent succumbed to both invaders.

geopolitics a focus on a country's location and geography as the basis of its national interests.

Waltz also mentions capabilities such as political stability and competence, which are not, strictly speaking, material capabilities. These political capabilities involve institutional and cultural or ideological factors that are more important in liberal and identity perspectives, what some analysts call soft power. But he does not emphasize such political capabilities. He focuses more on material power than on the domestic political institutions and ideologies that mobilize that power. Realists may care about prestige and reputation, which are elements of soft power, but they value such factors mostly because these factors derive from or are caused by the credibility to use force.[9] The direction of the causal arrows runs from the use of force to enhanced reputation. From a realist perspective, it is not good to have a reputation for not using force.

Another version of the realist perspective, known as classical realism, pays more attention to domestic values and institutions. Power is used to protect American democracy or Russian culture. But at the international level, realists give primary emphasis to relative power, not common values such as the spread of democracy or human rights. As Professor Hans Morgenthau, the father of classical realism, tells us, "The main signpost . . . through the landscape of international politics is the concept of interests defined in terms of power."[10]

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The realist perspective differentiates states primarily based on relative power. Identity follows from power. Great powers, middle powers, and small powers acquire different interests or goals depending on the size of their capabilities, not the characteristics of their institutions or the political ideas (identities) they espouse. Great powers have the broadest interests. They make up a good part of the international system and therefore have an interest in the system as a whole. When states fade from great-power to middle-power status, as Austria did after the seventeenth century, their interests shrink. By the time of World War I, Austria was interested only in its immediate surroundings in the Balkans. Small powers often remain on the sidelines in realist analysis or succumb to the power of larger states, as happened to Poland through repeated invasion and conquest.

Security Dilemma

security dilemma the situation that states face when they arm to defend themselves and in the process threaten other states.

When states pursue power to defend themselves, they create a security dilemma from which the possibility, although not the inevitability, of war can never be completely excluded. The **security dilemma** results from the fact that, as each group or state amasses power to protect itself, it inevitably threatens other groups or states. Other states wonder how the first state will use the power it is amassing: Will it just defend its present territory, or will it seek to expand its territory? A case in point today is Russia's intervention in Ukraine. It amassed troops on the border allegedly to defend itself and then proceeded to invade eastern Ukraine. How can the other states be sure what the first state intends? If it is only seeking to defend itself, other states have nothing to worry about. But if it has more ambitious aims, then the other states too must arm. Senator Hillary Clinton asked an aide in 2002 what Saddam Hussein's intentions were. The aide replied, "I'm sorry, senator, I wish I knew the answer to that. No one other than Saddam Hussein knows the answer."[11]

States may signal their intentions by diplomatic means. For example, a state acquires military capabilities that are useful for defense, not offense. But military technologies may have both uses (think of machine guns). It may be hard to read such signals. When do states become revisionist or greedy—that is, seek more power than they need to defend themselves? And who decides what that threshold is between enough and too much power? Because no state can be sure, other states arm too, and in this process of mutual armament, states face all the uncertainties of what exactly constitutes enough power to be safe. Ronald Reagan once said that the United States was seeking a "margin of safety" vis-à-vis the Soviet Union, but the Soviet Union probably assumed that the United States sought "superiority." Scholars who emphasize the realist perspective have never agreed on whether states seek just "security"—that is, enough power to balance and defend themselves—or whether they seek "maximum power," on the assumption that more power always makes them more secure. Theories of defensive realism say states seek security and manage most conflicts by diplomacy without using force directly; theories of offensive realism say states seek maximum or dominant power and often use diplomacy to disguise the aggressive use of force.[12] Notice how the realist perspective does not exclude diplomacy, but the causal arrows run from power (realist) to diplomacy (liberal), not the other way around.

Balance of Power

balance of power the strategy by which states counterbalance to ensure that no single state dominates the system, or an outcome that establishes a rough equilibrium among states.

The best states can do then, according to the realist perspective, is to pursue and balance power. The **balance of power** is both a strategy by which states seek to ensure that no other state dominates the system and an outcome that provides a rough equilibrium among states. In balancing power, it does not matter what the rising state's intentions are. Does the United States today seek to dominate the world? Many would say no. But the European states, Russia,

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or China may have reasons for concern. From the realist perspective, they cannot worry about America's intentions; they have to worry about America's power.

As a strategy, the balance of power focuses on the formation of alliances and requires that states align against the greatest power regardless of who that power is. The greatest power is the state that can threaten another state's survival. So it does not matter if that greater power is a former ally or a fellow democracy; the smaller state must align with others against that power. After all, a growing power may change its institutional affiliations or values. Hence, states align not against the greatest *threat*, determined by a state's institutions and values, but against the greatest *power*, determined by a state's capabilities whatever its institutions and values. Realism does not rule out other strategies such as bandwagoning or buckpassing. Bandwagoning calls for aligning *with* rather than against the greatest power to share the spoils of conquest. Buckpassing seeks to let other states do the fighting to minimize casualties. Realism just warns that these strategies are dangerous. Stalin bandwagoned with Hitler in 1939 and Hitler attacked him in 1941. The United States buckpassed to Great Britain in 1940, but Germany declared war on the United States anyway in 1941.

As an outcome, the balance of power may involve equilibrium or hegemony (dominance of one state over others). Defensive realists argue that states seek equilibrium or **power balancing**—that is, relatively equal power that offsets the power of other states and thus lessens the risk of attack and war. They see danger when one state moves away from equilibrium toward hegemony, dominating other states. President Richard Nixon, a well-known realist, once put it this way: "It is when one nation becomes infinitely more powerful in relation to its potential competitor that the danger of war arises. . . . I think it will be a safer world and a better world if we have a strong healthy United States, Europe, Soviet Union, Japan, each balancing."[13] Offensive realists argue that states seek empire or **hegemony** because more power is always better than less, and other powers have no chance of defeating the dominant power. From this point of view, equilibrium is not stabilizing but destabilizing. The danger comes, as Robert Kagan writes, "when the upward trajectory of a rising power comes close to intersecting the downward trajectory of a declining power."[14] This is the moment of **power transition** when war is most likely to occur. As we shall see, that may have been the case when Germany passed Great Britain at the beginning of the twentieth century (see Chapter 2), and, according to some realists, it may be the case in the twenty-first century if China surpasses the United States as the world's dominant power (see Chapter 5).

power balancing a school of realism that sees hegemony as destabilizing and war as most likely when a dominant power emerges to threaten the equilibrium of power among other states.

hegemony a situation in which one country is more powerful than all the others.

power transition a school of realism that sees hegemony as stabilizing and war as most likely when a rising power challenges a previously dominant one and the balance of power approaches equilibrium.

In subsequent chapters, we refer to the power balancing and power transition schools to capture this difference among realist perspectives about which configuration of power—equilibrium or hegemony—is most conducive to stability.

Alliances and Polarity

How do states balance power? It depends on how many states there are. We call the number of states holding power in a system the **polarity** of the system. If there are many states or centers of power, the system is multipolar. In a multipolar system, states balance by forming **alliances** with other states to counter the state that is becoming the greatest power. These alliances have to be temporary and flexible. Why? Because the balance of power is always uncertain and shifts, sometimes quickly. States must therefore be ready to shift alliances. Remember that the purpose of alliances is to balance power, not to make permanent friends or permanent enemies. Winston Churchill, Britain's prime minister during World War II, once said that "if Hitler invaded Hell, I would at least make a favorable reference to the Devil in the House of Commons."[15] Alliances in a multipolar realist system are expedient, not emotional attachments.

polarity the number of states—one (unipolar), two (bipolar), three (tripolar), or more (multipolar)—holding significant power in the international system.

alliances formal defense arrangements wherein states align against a greater power to prevent dominance.

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What if there are only two great powers? After World War II, the United States aligned with western Europe and Japan, while the Soviet Union aligned with eastern Europe and, until the 1960s, China to create a bipolar system. Now the two superpowers could not align with other states because there were none, except small and inconsequential ones that could not contribute much to the balance of power. The superpowers had to balance internally. They competed by mobilizing internal resources to establish a balance between them. Once China broke away from the Soviet Union, the system became tripolar. Now the United States maneuvered to bring China into the Western coalition because whichever superpower captured China would have an advantage. The contest before World War II may have also been tripolar. Hitler, Stalin, and the United States/Great Britain competed to control Europe. Because in a contest of three powers a coalition of two powers wins, some scholars believe that tripolarity is uniquely unstable.[16] Polarity determines the propensity of different international systems for war. Here again, realist scholars don't agree on what distributions of power or numbers of powerful states—polarities—contribute to greater stability. Kenneth Waltz and John Mearsheimer argue that bipolar worlds are the most stable because two bigger powers, such as the United States and the Soviet Union, have only each other to worry about and will not make many mistakes.[17] But Dale Copeland, a professor at the University of Virginia, contends that multipolar systems are more stable because a declining power, which is the one most likely to initiate war, has more partners to ally with and is therefore more inclined to deter than fight the rising power.[18] So far, the statistical evidence from large-scale studies of war has yielded no definitive answer to this disagreement.[19]

War

No state seeks war, but the possibility of war is always inherent in the situation of anarchy. Although the costs of war are high, the costs of losing sovereignty or freedom may be even higher. Diplomacy and other relationships help clarify intentions but never enough to preclude the possibility of military conflict. Ultimately, states have to base their calculations on capabilities, not intentions. That is why the realist perspective notes that even democracies, which presumably are most transparent and accessible to one another and best able to know one another's intentions, still cannot fully trust one another. Many European countries opposed U.S. intervention in Iraq, and some European leaders call for a united Europe to act as a counterweight or military counterbalance to the United States, despite the fact that Europe and the United States share similar democratic institutions and values. As realist scholar Charles Kupchan concludes, "Even if all the world's countries were democratic, . . . democratic powers may engage in geopolitical rivalry [and] . . . economic interdependence among Europe's great powers did little to avert the hegemonic war that broke out in 1914."[20] Notice again from Figure 1-5 how the causal arrows run in a realist perspective; power competition (realist) overrides the influence of economic interdependence (liberal) and divides countries even if they share similar democratic values (identity).

Wars result from the dynamics of power balances or polarity and especially from shifts in power balances. Technological change, especially military innovations, and economic growth, especially trade, produce such shifts.[21] Because realist perspectives focus more on relative than absolute gains, they worry more about the zero-sum effects of technological change than they do about the non-zero-sum effects. Military innovations may alter the balance between offensive and defensive technologies, giving one side a crucial military advantage over the other. Similarly, trade gains may benefit one country more than others. Rising powers such as the United States in the nineteenth century, Japan after World War II, and China today generally favor protectionist

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policies toward trade because they are seeking to close the relative power gap. Technological change and modernization may offer mutual benefits, but realist perspectives worry about how these benefits will be distributed, especially if they fall into the hands of opposing powers.

Defensive realist perspectives emphasize **defense**, the use of actual force after an attack, and **deterrence**, the use of threatened force to deter an attack before it occurs. Offensive realist versions envision the use of force to achieve outcomes beyond defense: compellence, preemptive war, and preventive war. **Compellence** is the use of force to get another state to do something (as opposed to deterrence, which aims to get them to refrain from doing something). The threat of force to get Iraq in the past or Iran today to give up its nuclear program is a case of compellence. The strategy to get Iran to refrain from using nuclear weapons once it has acquired them would be a case of deterrence.

defense the use of force to defend a country after an attack.

deterrence the use of threatened retaliation through force to deter an attack before it occurs.

compellence the use of force to get another state to do something rather than to refrain from doing something.

Preemptive war is an attack by one country against another that is preparing to attack first. One country sees the armies of another country gathering on its border and preempts the expected attack by attacking first. Israel initiated a preemptive war in 1967 when Egypt assembled forces in the Sinai Peninsula and Israel attacked before Egypt might have. Preventive war is an attack by a country against another that is not preparing to attack but is growing in power and is likely to attack at some point in the future. War is considered to be inevitable. And so a declining power, in particular, may decide that war is preferable sooner rather than later because later it will have declined even further and be less powerful. As we note in Chapter 2, some realists believe that was why Germany attacked Russia in 1914.

It is often difficult to distinguish between preemptive and preventive wars. In the Iraq War in 2003, if you believed—based on imperfect intelligence—that Saddam Hussein had weapons of mass destruction (WMDs) and might use them or pass them on to terrorists, the war was preemptive, even though Iraq's WMDs were not as visible and verifiable as Egyptian armies amassing on the border of Israel. If you believed Saddam Hussein did not have WMDs but would surely get them in the future, the war was preventive, because the United States attacked before Iraq actually got the weapons. If the United States had waited until Iraq acquired the weapons, the United States might have been less willing to attack at all because Iraq could now retaliate with its own weapons. For realists, this same dilemma faces U.S. policy makers today in Iran. Do you stop Iran's nuclear program before (preventive) or after (preemptive) it becomes apparent? Or do you let it emerge and then contain it by deterrence, the threat of mutual nuclear retaliation?

One thing is certain: the balance of power does not prevent war. Over the past five centuries, there have been 119 major wars in Europe alone, where most of the great powers have been located. (A major war is defined as one in which at least one great power was involved.) Many of these wars were horrendously destructive. How do we defend a way of thinking about international relations that accepts such destructive wars? Well, remember, realist scholars are trying to see the world as it has been and, in their view, remains. They don't favor or want war any more than anyone else. But if any leader anywhere in the world intends war, the quickest way to have war is for others to assume that it cannot occur. Antiwar advocates made such assumptions both before and after World War I, and the world paid a heavy price for it.

Wars within states, or intrastate wars, are more common today than wars between states, or interstate wars.[22] So far, intrastate wars, such as the war against ISIS in Syria and Iraq, have not ignited global interstate wars. But there is no guarantee they won't do so in the future, and intrastate wars have caused devastation and suffering in specific areas on a scale comparable to the damage done by interstate wars across wider areas. Thus, the realist perspective advocates constant vigilance regarding power and power balancing as the only path to peace. As Morgenthau explains, the transformation of the world system into something better "can

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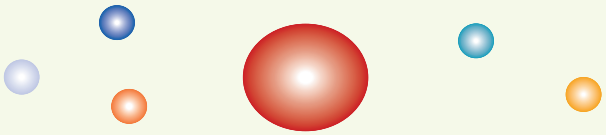
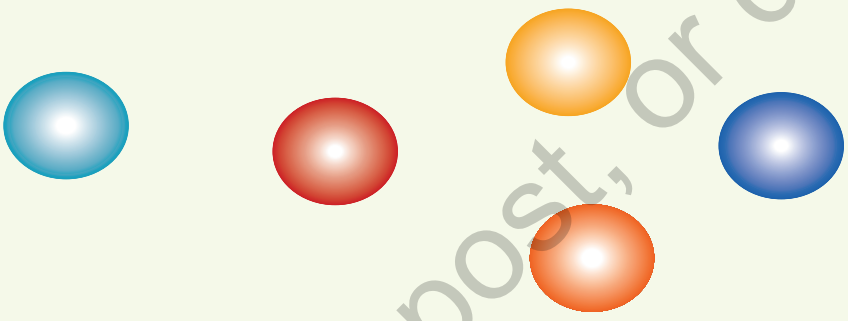
FIGURE 1-8 ■ The Realist Worldview

To realists, the world system is fundamentally anarchic—there is no other higher power governing states. Each state is sovereign, but some have more power than others. States pursue power to defend themselves, creating a security dilemma wherein states become threatened as other states amass power. The best solution is to balance power.

The greatest threat comes from the most powerful states. The number of states holding power determines the polarity of a system. Sometimes just one large state exists, a condition called unipolarity.



Often, however, several great powers exist, a condition called multipolarity.



Two powerful states may balance out power in the international system in a condition called bipolarity. Less powerful states may enter into alliances with those more powerful states.

be achieved only through the workman-like manipulation of the perennial forces that have shaped the past as they will the future."[23]

Figure 1-8 depicts graphically some of the features of the realist perspective.

THE LIBERAL PERSPECTIVE

Refer to Figure 1-6. It depicts the direction of the causal arrows in the liberal perspective. They run from repeated interactions and a focus on common goals and technology (liberal), to more trust and less incentive to arm among participants (realist), to greater mutual understanding and convergence of identities (identity). While the subordinate perspectives may be reversed, the dominant perspective remains liberal. In this section, we break down the causal chain

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of this liberal logic. Italicized concepts are further explained in subsequent sections.

The liberal perspective focuses on cooperation rather than conflict, not because it is naïve but because it is impressed by the extent to which individuals and societies over time have overcome violence and war by centralizing and legitimating power in common institutions at higher and higher levels of aggregation. The state is but the most recent manifestation of this consolidation from smaller villages, towns, city-states, provinces, and kingdoms. Why is it not possible for legitimate governments to emerge eventually at the regional (EU) or international (UN) level?

The liberal perspective emphasizes diplomacy and getting together repeatedly to solve problems. In one of many trips to China, Secretary of State Henry Kissinger shakes hands with Mao Zedong, chairman of the Chinese Communist Party, during a visit to the chairman's residence, as President Gerald Ford looks on.
Photo 12/UIG via Getty Images

The liberal perspective assumes that individuals and groups behave more on the basis of how they interact with one another than based on how much relative power they possess (realist) or what their cultural or ideological beliefs may be (identity). Just as anarchy and independence are central concepts in the realist perspective, *reciprocity* and *interdependence* are central concepts in the liberal perspective.[24] *Technological change* and *modernization* increase interdependence and multiply nongovernmental organizations, encouraging more *diplomacy*, *cooperation*, and *bargaining*. Proliferating contacts, in turn, shift attention away from competitive or zero-sum goals, such as territorial disputes, toward the provision of *collective goods* or non-zero-sum goals, such as clean air or collective as opposed to national security. Collective goods are available for everyone if they are going to be available for anyone. Through repetition and path dependence (unintended consequences), therefore, the habit of cooperation and compromise leads inexorably toward consolidation of authority in *international institutions* and *international law*. Countries learn to resolve their disputes peacefully through negotiations without resort to military conflict and the balance of power.

Some approaches identify the liberal perspective with democracy. But that biases the application of perspectives. All mainstream perspectives support democracy. In the realist perspective, for example, one can support democracy at the domestic level but still believe that the spread of democracy should not be an objective of foreign policy at the international level. In the liberal perspective, one can study the domestic groups that participate in the democratic process at home but then focus primarily on economic, social, and institutional (not ideological) interactions at the international level.[25] And in the identity perspective, democracy is one but not the only way (another might be religion) to define ideological differences and similarities among countries. As Professor Robert Keohane, a liberal scholar, suggests, we should separate to the extent we can our political preferences from our analytical ones:

> Liberalism associates itself with a belief in the value of individual freedom. Although I subscribe to such a belief, this commitment of mine is not particularly relevant to my analysis of international relations. One could believe in the value of individual liberty and remain either a realist or neorealist in one's analysis of world politics.[26]

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Let's look more closely at the key (italicized) concepts that provide the logic of the liberal perspective. Again, the concepts appear in boldface below where they are most succinctly defined.

Reciprocity and Interdependence

reciprocity the behavior of states toward one another based largely on mutual exchanges that entail interdependent benefits or disadvantages.

From the liberal perspective, reciprocity and interdependence among states matter more than anarchy and independence. **Reciprocity** means that states behave toward one another largely based on mutual rather than individual calculations of costs and benefits. Outcomes depend not only on the choices of one state but on how those choices interact with the choices of other states. The focus on reciprocal behavior places greater emphasis on how countries communicate, negotiate, trade, and do business with one another than on how much power they have or what they believe. It also places great emphasis on compromise—swapping objectives (for example, trading territory for peace in the Arab–Israeli dispute) or splitting the difference between objectives (for example, drawing territorial borders halfway between what disputants claim).

interdependence the mutual dependence of states and nonstate actors in the international system through conferences, trade, tourism, and the like.

Professors Daniel Deudney and John Ikenberry argue that "in thinking about world order, the variable that matters most for liberal thinkers is interdependence."[27] **Interdependence** refers to the frequency and intensity with which states interact. How often states interact with and interdepend (i.e., mutually depend) on one another increases the opportunities for reciprocity and, hence, cooperation. Cooperation is not automatic. It requires repetition and time to emerge. But, in the end, it is not a product of relative power or shared ideas; it is a product of the cumulative practice through which power and ideas are reshaped. How countries relate to one another changes the ways they perceive one another and use their relative power toward one another. Interactions are doing the heavy lifting, acting as primary causes changing ideas and power relationships.

From a liberal perspective, therefore, international relations is more about *relational* (interactive) power than it is about *positional* (relative) power. Hierarchy becomes more important than anarchy. Professor David Lake makes the case for relational authority:

> Because [in realism] there is no law superior to that of states themselves, there can be no authority over states in general or by one state over others. Through the lens of relational authority, however, we see that relations between states are not purely anarchic but better described as a rich variety of hierarchies in which dominant states legitimately rule over greater or lesser domains of policy in subordinate states. The assumption of international anarchy is not only ill suited to describing and explaining international politics but also can be positively misleading.[28]

Technological Change and Modernization: Nongovernmental Organizations

technological change the application of science and engineering to increase wealth and alter human society.

modernization the transformation of human society from self-contained autarchic centers of agrarian society to highly specialized and interdependent units of modern society.

The imperative from the liberal perspective, then, is not to balance power but to increase interdependence. Two forces, in particular, accelerate interdependence. The first is **technological change**, the application of science and engineering to increase the scope and capacity for interaction; think of the consequences of the automobile and internet revolutions alone. The second force is **modernization**, the transformation of human society from self-sufficient centers of agrarian society to highly specialized and interdependent units of modern society that cannot survive without coordinated exchanges at the national and now international levels.

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As the liberal perspective sees it, technological change and modernization bring more and more actors into the arena of international affairs. This pluralization of global politics broadens and deepens the context of international relations. **Nongovernmental organizations (NGOs)** are nonstate actors such as student, tourist, and professional associations that are not subject to direct government control. They include economic actors such as multinational corporations, international labor unions, private regulatory bodies, and global financial markets. They also involve international humanitarian, foreign assistance, and environmental organizations such as the International Red Cross. In all these areas, nonstate actors expand the nongovernmental sector or **civil society** of international relations and engage in what are called **transnational relations**—that is, relations outside the direct influence of national governments and international institutions set up by governments.

nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) nonstate actors such as student, tourist, and professional associations that are not subject to direct government control.

civil society the nongovernmental sector.

transnational relations relations among nongovernmental, as opposed to governmental, authorities.

The liberal perspective emphasizes nonstate actors. Through the broadening and deepening of international relations, nonstate actors change the nature of security. International relations are no longer just about the security of states; they are also about the security of people within states. **Human security** takes precedence over national security and focuses on weak actors, not just the strongest or most capable ones emphasized by the realist perspective. Human security is concerned with violence within states as well as among them. Such intrastate violence includes family violence, especially against women and children; genocide; diseases; pollution; natural disasters; and large displacements of populations. Since the end of the Cold War, liberal perspectives point out, human security issues have become more prevalent than great-power or traditional national security issues.

human security security concern that focuses on violence within states and at the village and local levels, particularly violence against women and minorities.

Diplomacy

Diplomacy is the business of communications, negotiations, and compromise and thus looms large in the liberal perspective. From this perspective, talking is always better than not talking, especially with adversaries. Whatever the differences among countries, whatever their relative power or beliefs, they can profit from discussions. Discussions encourage cooperation and bargaining, which produce trade-offs and compromises. Compromise consists of splitting the difference between interests in an issue area, while trade-offs involve the swapping of interests in one issue area for interests in a second. To reach arms control agreement with the Soviet Union, for example, the United States backed off its interest in promoting human rights in the Soviet Union. An identity perspective, which emphasizes values over institutions and power, might oppose this type of compromise, whereas a liberal perspective, which emphasizes cooperation over power and ideas, might approve it.

diplomacy discussions and negotiations among states as emphasized by the liberal perspective.

Cooperation and Bargaining

Cooperation facilitates the provision of better outcomes for some while not harming others. The idea is to focus on absolute gains, not relative gains. As in the prisoner's dilemma story, if countries focus on common rather than conflicting goals (the prisoners frustrating the warden rather than going free), they can achieve non-zero-sum outcomes in which all gain. One country does not have to win and the other lose. The overall pie grows, and everyone's slice grows in absolute terms. Economists often talk about cooperation in terms of moving toward a Pareto optimum or frontier (after the Italian economist Vilfredo Pareto who developed the idea). Up to that frontier, outcomes can be improved without harming anyone. More employment, for example, harms no one if unemployment exists. If full employment exists, however, wages and inflation go up advantaging some and disadvantaging others.

cooperation working to achieve a better outcome for some that does not hurt others.

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bargaining negotiating to distribute gains that are zero-sum (that is, what one side gains, the other loses).

In situations beyond the Pareto optimum, **bargaining** is necessary to sort out issues of relative gains. Liberal perspectives generally assume that such bargaining can be done peacefully. From a liberal perspective, war is always the most costly option, in human as well as financial terms.[29] Hence, given the chance, countries will look for lower-cost peaceful ways to resolve their differences. If they fail, the primary causes are to be found in the bargaining process (liberal), not in the inevitable constraints of power balances (realist) or types of regimes (identity). For example, countries fail to make credible commitments to signal their interests and intentions, they misread the shifting balance of power, they bluff, or they have inadequate information about the other country's intentions. They are not compelled (caused) to do these things by factors outside the bargaining context; rather, they make less-than-optimal choices within the bargaining context. Bargaining approaches place heavy emphasis on miscalculation. Yet leaders may miscalculate because they harbor prior beliefs that distort information (identity) or because they face an unfavorable balance of power at home and abroad (realist). Saddam Hussein, for example, failed to signal credibly that he had no WMDs either because he worried about exposing his weakness to Iran as well as to domestic opponents or because he thought the United States was bluffing and would not intervene.[30]

Collective Goods

collective goods benefits, such as clean air, that are indivisible (they exist for all or for none) and cannot be appropriated (their consumption by one party does not diminish their consumption by another).

Cooperation also facilitates the provision of collective goods. **Collective goods** have two properties: they are indivisible (they exist for everyone or for no one), and they cannot be appropriated (they do not diminish as one party consumes them). The classic example of a collective good is clean air. It exists either for everyone or for no one. And breathing by one person does not diminish the air available for another person.

The liberal perspective sees peace and security in large part as collective goods, especially in today's nuclear and globalized world. If peace and security exist for one member of a society, they exist for all members, because the use of nuclear weapons would destroy peace for everyone; and the benefits to one member do not diminish the amount of peace and security available to other members. **Collective security** does just what it says—it collects military power together in a single global institution, such as the United Nations, that provides peace and security for all countries at the international level, just as national governments do for all citizens at the domestic level. This global institution sets up rules that states must follow to resolve disagreements and then creates a preponderance of power, a pooling of the military power of all nations, not a balance of power among separate nations, to punish aggressors who violate the rules. Because the global institution monopolizes military power, it can reduce military weaponry to a minimum. Arms control and disarmament play a big role in the liberal perspective, just as the opposite dynamics of mutual armament and competitive arms races play a key role in the realist perspective. Collective security becomes an alternative way to organize and discipline the balance of power.

collective security the establishment of common institutions and rules among states to settle disputes peacefully and to enforce agreements by a preponderance, not a balance, of power.

Wealth is another collective good. It is not quite as pure a collective good as clean air because it may be appropriated and consumed unequally by one party compared to another and, unlike air, it does not exist in infinite supply. But the liberal concept of comparative advantage and trade, which we examine in detail in Chapter 8, makes it possible to increase wealth overall and therefore, at least theoretically, increase it for each individual or country, although some individuals and countries may gain more than others. Trade is a classic non-zero-sum relationship in which two parties can produce more goods from the same resources if they specialize and exchange products than if they produce all goods separately. The liberal perspective emphasizes such absolute rather than relative gains because absolute gains shift the focus away from conflicting goals and demonstrate that, even under conditions of anarchy, cooperation is not only possible but profitable.

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International Institutions

The liberal perspective sees the pursuit of diplomacy, cooperation, bargaining, and collective goods as culminating in international institutions. **International institutions** include **intergovernmental organizations (IGOs)** as well as NGOs. IGOs are set up by national governments (hence the label *intergovernmental*) to increase efficiency and control. Unlike contacts among village neighbors, international contacts take place between strangers separated by wide distances. IGOs develop and spread information to reduce the costs of such contacts. Greater information decreases asymmetries in the bargaining process generated by secrecy, uncertainty, miscommunications, and misperceptions.

international institutions formal international organizations and informal regimes that establish common rules to regularize international contacts and communications.

intergovernmental organizations (IGOs) formal international organizations established by governments.

Governments create international institutions to serve their common interests, defined as areas where their national interests overlap. But once these institutions exist, they may take on a life of their own and constitute a system of **global governance**, or networks of IGOs, that override national interests and make up a kind of nascent world government. They constitute the hierarchies or authority relations that Professor Lake speaks about. In some cases, these institutions supersede national interests by defining and implementing broader supranational interests, as in the European Union. To the extent that such institutions are not completely under the control of national governments, they become quasi-independent actors in the international system.

global governance the system of various international institutions and great powers, groups that in a loose sense govern the global system.

A network of institutions may come together to form an international regime. An **international regime** creates a set of rules, norms, and procedures around which the expectations of actors converge in a particular issue area, such as finance or trade policy.[31] It provides a mechanism of coordination without constituting a single overarching institution. For example, the annual economic summits held by the major industrialized countries (Group of Seven, or G8 when it includes Russia) and now also by industrialized and emerging market countries (G20) coordinate global economic expectations but do not represent a specific centralized institution like the International Monetary Fund (IMF) or World Trade Organization (WTO).

international regime a network of international institutions or groups not under the authority of a single organization.

International institutions evolve through feedback and **path dependence**, a process in which later outcomes are shaped by previous outcomes, unintended consequences, and learning.[32] A prominent example of path dependence, institutional learning, and growth is provided by the European Union. When European integration was launched, the founders created the European Commission, which focuses on community not just national interests. It is the only institution in the EU that had the right to initiate legislation independently. The idea was to force individual states to take into account community as well as national needs. In time, they might think differently about their own needs and identify more with the European Union.

path dependence a process emphasized by liberal perspectives in which decisions in a particular direction affect later decisions, accumulating advantages or disadvantages along a certain path.

Thus, like the European Union, international institutions alter the relationships through which people interact and pursue common interests. Through repeated interactions, participants acquire different habits and change their perceptions as they exchange better information and gain trust in one another. They get caught in the labyrinth of cooperation and can't get out or remember the original purposes for which they started the process. As Professor John Ikenberry writes, "Conflicts would be captured and domesticated in an iron cage of multilateral rules, standards, safeguards, and dispute resolution procedures."[33] Over the longer run, countries may even change their material interests and identities.

Notice how, in this case, process influences thinking and eventually loyalty. States identify with supranational rather than national goals. Eventually they identify more with Europe than with France or Germany. In the case of the United States, citizens identify more with the national than the fifty state governments. But identities are not the cause of this development; they are the result. Habitual and routine contacts do the heavy lifting and material power and self-images adapt. The liberal perspective does not ignore power or identity; it just concludes that these variables are shaped more by institutions than institutions are shaped by them.

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The liberal perspective generally expects that repetitive interactions and compromise mostly benefit pluralist or democratic values. And that is often the case. But compromising with nondemocratic countries may also produce less efficient and nondemocratic outcomes. International institutions can be just as corrupt and oppressive as domestic ones.[34] After all, they are directly accountable only to national governments, and many of these governments in authoritarian states are not accountable to their own people. Moreover, as realist perspectives might emphasize, interactions may lead not only to peace but also to the last move or defection, when countries fear that the game is over and they face a last move to go to war or lose their sovereignty or freedom. As we discuss in Chapter 2, World War I is thought by some scholars to have resulted from the deleterious, not beneficial, effects of reciprocal interactions.

International Law

international law the customary rules and codified treaties under which international organizations operate; covers political, economic, and social rights.

human rights rights concerning the most basic protections against human physical abuse and suffering.

International regimes and institutions create **international law**, the customary rules and codified treaties under which international organizations operate. International law covers political, economic, and social rights. Historically it developed to protect the interests of states and their rights of sovereignty and self-defense. Today, however, it also addresses the rights of individual human beings. If nations abuse their citizens, international institutions have the "responsibility to protect" those citizens and intervene in a state's sovereign affairs to prevent genocide, starvation, and the like. **Human rights** involve the most basic protections against physical abuse and suffering.

The hope is that someday international law will become as legitimate and enforceable as domestic laws, enabling disputes to be resolved by peaceful means, as they are in most national systems. But international law and human rights are more controversial than national law. Nations disagree about the sources, making, and enforcement of laws. Democratic countries, for example, believe that certain basic rights such as life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness derive from nature, not government; that laws are made by legislatures through democratic procedures, not by government fiat; and that laws are enforced with protections for citizens' rights to access impartial courts and receive fair trials. Nondemocratic countries see government as the source and administrator of laws and place the rights of society, such as political order and social solidarity, above the rights of any individual citizen. The liberal perspective does not ignore these differences but argues that the more nations resolve their differences by treaties and international law, the more they acquire the habit of obeying central norms and guidelines and move eventually toward greater consensus at the international level similar to that which characterizes domestic politics.

From the liberal perspective, the essence of international law is multilateralism, to include all actors, often nonstate participants as well, and to encourage compromise regardless of the ideologies or beliefs participants hold. All countries and points of view are respected. Tolerance and coexistence are the most important virtues. As Michael Steiner, a UN representative in Kosovo, has argued, "The United Nations wields unique moral authority *because* its members represent a wide spectrum of values and political systems. Most of the world trusts the United Nations more than it trusts any single member or alliance, . . . not because of the inherent virtue of any individual member but because the United Nations' temporizing influence imposes a healthy discipline on its members."[35] Notice how **legitimacy**, or the right to use power in international affairs, derives from participation by actors of widely differing values in a common universal system, not from any specific actor's values, such as democracy. There is an implicit faith that participants will learn from one another and that, whatever results emerge, all participants will be better off. Diplomacy ultimately produces the same outcome as trade: everyone gains.

legitimacy the right to use power in international affairs.

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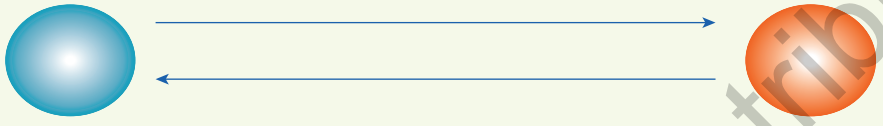
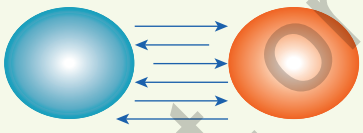
FIGURE 1-9 ■ The Liberal Worldview

In the liberal worldview, the best way to overcome the problem of violence in the international system is to promote interactions and create the habit among states of cooperation and compromise. This is based on the idea of reciprocity, wherein states behave according to how other states behave toward them. The goal of reciprocity is to create an interdependent world with institutions and rules for solving disputes peacefully.

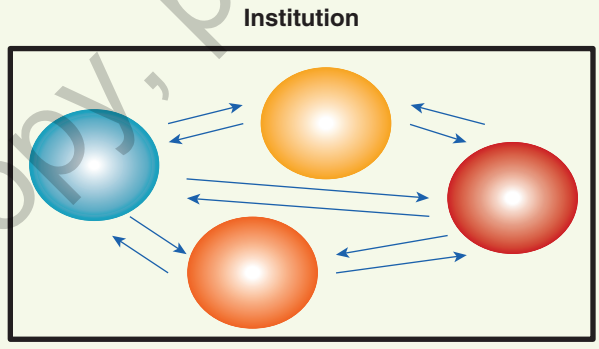
As states begin interacting by trading, engaging diplomatically, or through social interactions, they are more likely to begin to cooperate.



Over time, their repeated cooperation draws states into a closer relationship of interdependence.



As cooperation becomes increasingly routine among multiple states, those repeated interactions give rise to international institutions and regimes that facilitate the peaceful resolution of international disputes.



In many situations, according to the liberal perspective, international institutions, regimes, law, and diplomacy become the most important facts determining outcomes. They are the independent variables that cause other events (the dependent variables) to occur. Over time, international actors may gradually become more important than states.

Figure 1-9 depicts graphically features of the liberal perspective.

THE IDENTITY PERSPECTIVE

Refer to Figure 1-7. It depicts the directions of the causal arrows in the identity perspective. They run from the construction of identities among participants (identity), to the tendency to

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cooperate or conflict (liberal), to the need to use less or more military force to be safe (realist). Although the subordinate perspectives may be reversed, the dominant perspective remains the identity perspective. In this section, we break down the logic of this causal chain.

The identity perspective is primarily interested in how ideas define the identities of actors and these identities in turn interpret and give meaning to the material capabilities (realist) and institutional interactions (liberal) of actors. If anarchy and reciprocity are key concepts in the realist and liberal perspectives respectively, *construction of identities* (hence *constructivism*) is the key concept in the identity perspective. Behavior is determined more by who the actors are than by their relative power (realist) or bargaining relationships (liberal).

Identities are not given or exogenous—that is, taken for granted—as in realist or liberal perspectives but are themselves aspects of reality that have to be accounted for. Realist perspectives assume that states are self-interested and potentially antagonistic; liberal perspectives that they are other-directed and potentially cooperative. Identity perspectives, by contrast, focus on how actors acquire these identities and how the identities in turn shape interests, interactions, and institutions and change material circumstances. Power and institutions are not objective but subjective or intersubjective realities. They have no meaning on their own; their meaning depends on the interpretations that actors (subjects) confer on them.

The identity perspective emphasizes shared ideas and truthful opinions, such as those, according to some analysts, exchanged between Ronald Reagan and Mikhail Gorbachev while they were in office in the 1980s. They are shown here later, in 1992, on the arrival of Gorbachev and his wife, Raisa, for a two-week tour of the United States.
AP Photo/Bob Galbraith

For example, nuclear weapons in the possession of France does not mean the same as nuclear weapons in the possession of North Korea. For the United States France is a friend and North Korea an enemy. Is that because France is an ally and North Korea is not, a liberal or interactive interpretation? Or is it because France is a democracy and North Korea totalitarian, an identity interpretation? Interests are not defined just by anarchy or geopolitical circumstances, as the realist perspective highlights, or by institutional relationships and rules, as the liberal perspective argues. They are also defined by actor identities.

Some identities are constructed socially. They are collective or shared, not autonomous and individual. *Social constructivism* sees identities emerging from social interactions such as communications, dialogue, and discourse. The focus is on words and language, the content of interactions not just their physical occurrence (liberal). Through verbal or substantive interactions actors define who they are and how they think about their power and physical connections.[36] Other identity perspectives see identities emerging from separate rather than shared experiences. Sometimes called *agent-oriented constructivism*, this approach is interested in the identity of actors before they come together, influenced by their distinct cultures, histories, and experiences. Actors have internal or individual as well as shared or external identities.

However constructed, identities determine how actors behave. Anarchy is *what states make of it*, not a fixed material condition that lies outside the control of states; and reciprocity is governed more by *relative identities* and the *distribution of identities* than by bargaining or institutional

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rules. The content (identity) of anarchy and institutions matters as much as the context (realist) and connections (liberal). Words, language, and dialogue shape identities that cause different kinds of anarchy and reciprocity. If internal and external identities diverge, actors share less in common and compete as realism predicts. The United States and the Soviet Union waged a Cold War between communism and capitalism. If identities converge, actors share more in common and cooperate as liberalism predicts. Culturally similar countries like the United States and Great Britain develop a special relationship, while politically similar states create the *democratic peace*. Democratic states do not fight or use military threats to resolve their disputes; they overcome the security dilemma of anarchy by being more open to one another and developing sufficient trust to know the intentions of other democratic states. State behavior is not defined by the position states hold in the relative distribution of power or by reciprocal interactions in international institutions but, instead, by the shared or external identities they construct.

There are *other identity perspectives* besides constructivism. Some focus on values or what some today call soft power. Others explore belief systems that shape worldviews and psychological studies that emphasize subconscious influences on identity and behavior. Finally, feminism highlights the role of gender in studying world affairs.

Once again, we explore the italicized concepts above in the subsections that follow. We boldface key terms where they are most clearly defined.

Ideas and the Construction of Identities

Ideas come in many forms. **Values** reflect deep moral convictions, such as individual freedom and equality. **Norms** guide how groups and states interact and what they jointly prefer; there are procedural or regulatory norms, such as sovereignty, and substantive norms, such as human rights. **Beliefs** constitute comprehensive views about how the world works, such as communist or capitalist ideologies. Ideas, norms, values, and beliefs are not physical entities, as military capabilities and some institutions may be. We cannot touch sovereignty the way we can a tank or a building. But it is still real. Sovereignty exerts a powerful influence on international behavior and outcomes. Other ideas do so as well. Democracy, capitalism, fascism, religion, and human rights all play powerful roles in shaping history and international affairs.

values ideas that express deep moral convictions.

norms ideas that govern the procedural or substantive terms of state behavior, such as reciprocity and human rights.

beliefs ideas about how the world works as emphasized by identity perspectives.

Idealists have always argued that ideas shape reality. Fifty years ago, idealism and realism were the two main schools of thought in international studies. After the failure of the League of Nations and the disastrous results of World War II, realism dominated. By the early 1970s, however, some scholars "became increasingly concerned that the postwar aversion to idealism . . . had gone too far [and] . . . was responsible for the discipline's poor grasp of the role of ideational factors of all kinds in international life—be they collective identities, norms, aspirations, ideologies, or ideas about cause-effect relations."[37]

Two decades later, **constructivism** emerged as an approach to international relations that revived the role of ideas or identity as a primary driver of world events. It argues that actors behave based on how they identify themselves and others. The **construction of identities** involves a process of discourse by which actors define who they are and therefore how they behave toward one another. This approach follows in the idealist tradition because it sees ideas as more influential causes than institutions or power. But it also emphasizes cumulative practices such as repetitive communications. These practices are not primarily procedural, as the liberal perspective emphasizes. Rather, they are verbal practices or substantive narratives to substantiate and construct identities. For example, discourses involving class, modernity, nation, and the new Soviet man defined the identity of the Russian people in the early stages

constructivism a perspective that emphasizes ideas, such as the content of language and social discourse, over institutions or power.

construction of identities a process of discourse by which actors define who they are and how they behave toward one another.

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of the Cold War.[38] Such verbal practices constitute who the actors actually are, which in turn defines how they express their interests, whether emphasizing power or reciprocity, and how those interests play out through alliance or institutional processes.

Some political scientists do not consider constructivism to be a perspective on the same level as the realist or liberal perspectives.[39] They see it merely as a method rather than a theory. As discussed in the introduction of this volume, realist and liberal perspectives rely primarily on causal reasoning: *X* precedes and causes *Y*. Many constructivist approaches rely on constitutive reasoning: *X* and *Y* constitute or mutually cause one another rather than one factor causing the other sequentially. In constitutive reasoning, causes emerge from cumulative practices and narratives, not from independent and sequential events.

But other constructivists do consider their approach to be a theory. They seek to explain and interpret events just like other perspectives but do so by a logic of appropriateness rather than a logic of consequences. Discourse makes certain events possible. An event occurs because it fits a particular narrative, not because it is caused by a specific preceding event. Today, for example, it is considered increasingly appropriate that when countries intervene to protect human rights, they do so multilaterally.[40] No specific event caused this behavior, but one hundred years ago unilateral intervention was much more common. Constructivists predict outcomes as possible or plausible rather than caused.

In this book, we treat constructivism as a perspective (theory) equivalent to the realist and liberal perspectives. But we recognize that constructivism comes in different varieties and that there are identity approaches other than constructivism such as feminist studies (see below).

Constructivism

Ideas play the dominant role in constructivism, but they operate at different levels of analysis in the two types of constructivism. Social constructivism operates at the systemic structural level, what Professor Alexander Wendt, one of the fathers of social constructivism in international affairs, calls "structural idealism." The joint dialogue, not individual participants, shapes and changes identities. Agent-oriented constructivism operates more at the domestic and individual levels of analysis, where an individual or group can come up with ideas based on internal reflection and imagination and change the external social discourse.

social constructivism an identity perspective in which states and other actors acquire their identities from intersubjective discourses in which they know who they are only by reference to others.

Social constructivism stresses social or collective identity formation. According to Wendt, "Structures of human association are determined primarily by shared ideas rather than material forces," and these ideas are social—that is, not reducible to individuals.[41] The master and slave together constitute slavery; one cannot be recognized without the other. Similarly, states recognize one another only by association. A state does not exist separately in an objective condition of anarchy, as realist perspectives argue, but defines the condition of anarchy by subjective or intersubjective dialogue with other states. This dialogue between states creates structural social categories, such as friends or enemies, that cannot be reduced to the existence of two or more separate states. States, in short, construct anarchy; anarchy is not a situation outside the control of states.

agent-oriented constructivism an identity perspective that attributes greater influence to independent rather than collective actors.

Agent-oriented constructivism allows for greater influence on the part of independent actors. As Professor Thomas Risse tells us, actors "are not simply puppets of social structure" but "can actively challenge the validity claims inherent in any communicative action."[42] Through "pure speech acts," meaning a discourse free of material power or institutional constraints (notice the relative deemphasis of material power and institutional constraints that are important from realist and liberal perspectives), actors persuade one another that their ideas are valid. They change their interpretations of reality by a logic of argumentation, not a logic of appropriateness, as social constructivists contend, or a logic of consequences, as realist and liberal perspectives propose.

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Some constructivist accounts see this happening at the end of the Cold War, when Mikhail Gorbachev changed his mind in the middle of a meeting about German membership in the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). He was persuaded by the arguments of other participants. In this case, negotiations between the Soviet Union and Western countries were not just instrumental to achieve a compromise of interests. Compromise would have probably meant reunifying Germany, the Western preference, but keeping it neutral, the Soviet preference. Instead, Germany was reunited and stayed in NATO. Gorbachev changed his mind on the spot and accepted a united Germany in NATO because he no longer saw NATO as an enemy and believed that Germany had the right to make alliance decisions for itself.[43] An ideational logic of argumentation and persuasion prevailed over a negotiating logic of bargaining and compromise emphasized by liberal perspectives.

Anarchy Is What States Make of It

Thus, ideational structures and agents interact continuously to shape international realities. Anarchy, or the decentralized distribution of power, is not a given or fixed situation. States define it depending on how they think about and engage rhetorically with other states. If we learn to see one another as friends, we act one way; if we see one another as enemies, we act another way. Hence, in challenging the realist and liberal perspectives, social constructivists argue that "anarchy is what states make of it."[44] International relations can be either competitive and full of conflict, as the realist perspective contends, or cooperative and institutionalized, as the liberal perspective argues. It depends, says the social constructivist, on how the actors imagine or construct these relations socially. In short, it depends on shared and collective identities.

Social constructivists emphasize the shared or social elements of communications and identity. For some, such as Professor Wendt, almost all identity is collective or shared, not autonomous or sovereign. These constructivists speak of "ideas all the way down," meaning that identity is mostly ideational, not material or geopolitical. Notice here how the causal arrows run between levels of analysis as well as between perspectives. In social constructivism, ideas dominate material power, and the structural level dominates over the domestic and individual levels. States and all actors constitute their identities socially, not individually. A state's **external identity** is primary. This external identity is a function of historical dialogue and interaction with other countries, shaping images through trade, alliances, and other international associations. For many years, France and Germany shared a social history of enmity and war. Over the past sixty years, however, they developed another history of friendship and peaceful integration. Crucial to this convergence was the evolution of common democratic self-images and of external associations with one another and other democracies, such as the United States, as they aligned to confront the totalitarian Soviet Union.

external identity the identity of a country that is determined by its historical and external dialogue with other states.

Relative Identities

More agent-oriented constructivists emphasize the separate or individualistic, not just social, aspects of identity. They insist that "actors' domestic identities are crucial for their perceptions of one another in the international arena."[45] After World War II, for example, the Soviet Union insisted that eastern European countries be communist internally, not just allies externally. The Soviet Union did not see these countries as friends unless they had domestic identities similar to its own. As Michael Barnett observes, "States apparently attempt to predict a state's external behavior based on its internal arrangements."[46] In other words, independent domestic identities influence the way states perceive one another and socially construct their external

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internal identity the identity of a country that derives from its unique national self-reflection and memory.

identities. This independent or **internal identity** of states creates different types of regimes, which converge or diverge in terms of their domestic experience and national memory.

Countries may be democratic or nondemocratic, secular or religious, ethnically homogenous or diverse. Within countries some groups may identify with liberal or conservative ideologies. All interact with one another based on these internal identities. Professor Mark L. Haas examines the history of great-power relations from this perspective. Focusing on different as well as shared identities he develops the concept of relative identities between actors or "ideological distance."[47] Ideological distance measures "the similarities and differences of . . . ideological beliefs" among leaders, groups, or nations. How far apart are countries in terms of identity as well as power? Before World War II, for example, communist parties in France preferred to cooperate with the Soviet Union, because the Soviet Union was also communist, while conservative parties in France preferred to cooperate with Italy, because the government in Italy was also conservative. The split made it difficult for France to cooperate with either the Soviet Union or Italy (see Chapter 3).

At the systemic level of analysis, similarities and differences of identity aggregate to form a distribution of relative identities. Relative identities, not relative power or institutional roles, determine whether countries behave as friends, rivals, or enemies toward one another. Converging relative identities create a common international culture that moderates behavior.[48] The Christian monarchs of eighteenth-century Europe shared both religious and political similarities that moderated the balance of power. Diverging relative identities, such as the dissimilar fascist, communist, and liberal governments of Europe in the 1930s, created a more virulent balance of power.

Notice how in Professor Haas's perspective compared to Professor Wendt's approach the domestic level of analysis dominates. Shared identities arise from converging or diverging separate identities. By contrast, Wendt's approach is structural, ideas all the way down. Shared identities cannot be reduced to individual identities.

Professor John Owen deploys a similar approach to show how domestic identities played as big a role in the historical behavior of states as power balances and institutional evolution. States intervened to change the domestic regimes in other states, not just to balance power (realist) or expand trade with them (liberal). Historically, there have been four waves of forcible regime intervention reflecting ideological polarization and conflict among existing states: the conflict between Catholicism and Protestantism set off by the Reformation; the conflict among republicanism, constitutional monarchy, and absolute monarchy set off by the French Revolution; the conflict among communism, fascism, and liberalism set off by World War I and continuing through World War II and the Cold War; and today, according to some analysts, the conflict among Christian, Muslim, Confucian, and other civilizations and between secular and religious worldviews.[49] These internal ideas or identities of states differ, and the "ideological distance" between identities creates a threat, either because one state fears that the other's ideology may spread or because the ideologies of the states impose impediments to their communicating with one another.[50] Thus, after World War II, France and Britain did not see the United States as threatening because they shared a democratic ideology with it, even though the United States was very powerful and American troops were stationed on their soil. On the other hand, they did see the Soviet Union as threatening because its domestic identity was different, even though Soviet forces were not physically located on their territory.

Actors therefore have both internal and external identities, one shaped by discourses at home and the other by discourses in the international arena. As Professor Peter Katzenstein concludes, "The identities of states emerge from their interactions with different social

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environments, both domestic and international."[51] Individuals and nations reflect critically on their experiences and come up with new ideas that society has never known before. That's how the slave stops being a slave or the master a master. Someone in society comes up with an alternative idea about the relationship. Even if the alternative ideas are ultimately also social, they have to originate somewhere. For example, Gorbachev allegedly got his idea that NATO was no longer an enemy from peace research institutes in western Europe.[52] Social constructivists would say such ideas originate in repetitive social practices; more individualistic constructivists trace them back to agents, norm entrepreneurs or self-reflective individuals, and their capacity for critical thinking and independence.[53]

Distribution of Identities

Just as the realist perspective focuses on the distribution of power and the liberal perspective highlights the division of organizational roles and specialties, the identity perspective emphasizes the **distribution of identities**. This includes both internal and external identities.

distribution of identities the relative relationship of identities among actors in the international system in terms of their similarities and differences.

These identities distribute themselves across the international system to establish relative and shared identities among actors. They define the "ideological polarity" of the system, the number of separate ideological poles in the system (analogous to poles of power in the realist perspective). At one level, **relative identities** position the self-images of actors with respect to one another as similar or dissimilar, just as relative power positions the capabilities of actors with respect to one another as bigger or smaller. But at a higher level, identities overlap and fuse to constitute **shared identities**, or norms and images that cannot be traced back to specific identities or their interrelationships. The degree of convergence or divergence of identities defines the prospects of cooperation and conflict. Professor Alastair Iain Johnston explains:

relative identities identities that position actors' self-images with respect to one another as similar or dissimilar.

shared identities identities that overlap and fuse based on norms and images that cannot be traced back to specific identities or their interrelationships.

> The greater the perceived identity difference, the more the environment is viewed as conflictual, the more the out-group is viewed as threatening, and the more that realpolitik strategies are considered effective. Conversely, the smaller the perceived identity difference, the more the external environment is seen as cooperative, the less the out-group is perceived as fundamentally threatening, and the more efficacious are cooperative strategies. Most critically, variation in identity difference should be independent of anarchy.[54]

Notice the last sentence of Professor Johnston's quote. The differences in identity must be independent of anarchy; otherwise the identity differences are being caused by anarchy, and the perspective then is realist not identity. See how even sophisticated scholars have to decide which perspective dominates when they draw their conclusions.

Table 1-7 offers one example of how we might map the convergence or divergence of relative and shared national identities. In this example, the internal dimension of identity is measured in terms of domestic political ideologies, whether countries are democratic or not. In other examples, this internal dimension might be measured in terms of cultural or religious similarities and differences. The external dimension of identity is measured in terms of how cooperative or conflictual historical relations have been among the countries. Again, in other cases, this external dimension might be measured in terms of trade or common membership in international organizations. Identity is multifaceted, so measuring it requires choice and presents difficulties.

In Table 1-7, countries that have strong similar democracies and historically close relations, such as the United States, France, the United Kingdom, and Canada, cluster in the upper-left

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TABLE 1-7 ■ Relative and Shared National Identities

		Internal dimension of identity (measured in terms of political ideologies)	
		Democracy	**Nondemocracy**
External dimension of identity (measured in terms of historical memories)	**Cooperative**	Strongest convergence: U.S.–UK U.S.–Canada U.S.–France	Weak convergence: U.S.–China (Cold War) U.S.–Russia (today?)
	Conflictual	Strong convergence: France–Germany U.S.–Japan	Weakest convergence: U.S.–China (today?) U.S.–Russia (Cold War)

box. In this box, identities converge so strongly they take on a collective character and common culture that we call the democratic peace. As discussed in the next section, strong democracies, even though they remain separate, seem to escape anarchy altogether and do not go to war with one another. In the lower-left and upper-right boxes, countries converge on one dimension of identity but diverge on the other. For example, in the lower-left box, France and Germany, and the United States and Japan are all strong democracies today, but they have been enemies of one another more recently than have the United States, the United Kingdom, France, and Canada. Given that history, their relationships with one another may not be as close as those of countries in the upper-left box. Similarly, in the upper-right box, China during the Cold War was not a democracy like the United States, but China did have friendly historical ties with the United States before it became communist, and after it became communist it worked closely with the United States to balance the Soviet Union in the later stages of the Cold War. In the lower-right box, countries diverge on both dimensions of identity, and the common culture is weakest. This box approximates the situation of anarchy, such as that characterizing U.S.–Soviet relations during the Cold War and, as some might argue, U.S.–Chinese relations today.

Democratic Peace

A powerful example of how identities influence international relations is provided by the phenomenon of the democratic peace. Studies show that as countries become stronger and stronger democracies, they appear to escape the security dilemma. They do not go to war with one another or engage in military threats. If this behavior is a result of converging or shared democratic identities, it suggests the importance of looking at identities as well as at power and institutions. It may be that other shared identities—for example, between Muslim states or between fascist states—also produce behavior different from what would be predicted by liberal or realist perspectives. As Professor Michael Barnett observes, "A community of Saddam Husseins is unlikely to father a secure environment, while a community of Mahatma Gandhis will encourage all to leave their homes unlocked."[55] We refer to the democratic peace several times in the following chapters. And we use it in the conclusion to summarize and pull together the various concepts developed throughout this book.

Figure 1-10 depicts graphically some of the main features of the basic identity perspective.

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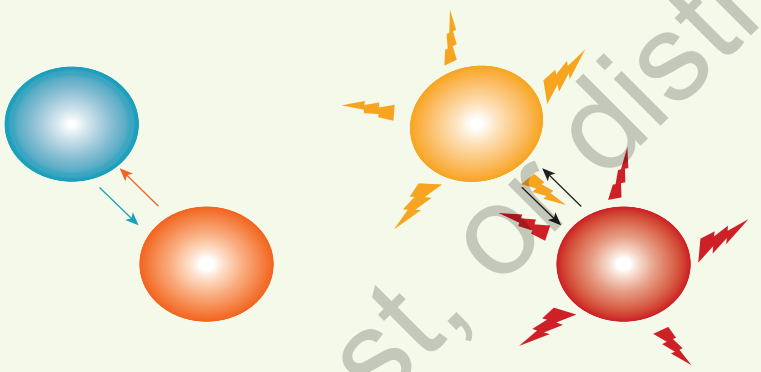
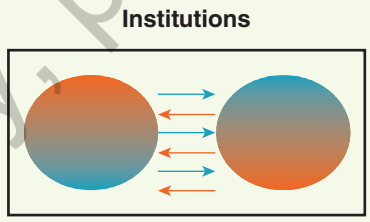
FIGURE 1-10 ■ The Identity Worldview

Identity perspectives assert that a state's norms, values, and beliefs, taken together, construct the basis of its identity.

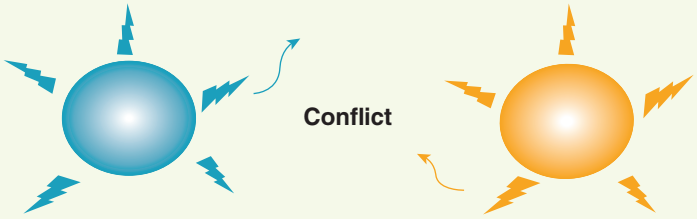
States' identities shape what their interests are and how they behave toward one another. If identities converge, states cooperate more. If identities diverge, they act more adversarially.



Shared identities lead to repeated interactions and common institutions, which in turn lead to more peaceful behavior.



Conflicting identities create distrust, which hampers interactions and produces defensive behavior.



Other Identity Approaches

Other identity approaches emphasize the causal role of ideas but are less concerned with how ideas construct identities. Some scholars might not include these approaches under identity perspectives. But remember that identity perspectives share one big thing in common—they

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focus on the causal or constitutive role of ideas more than the causal role of institutions or power. In this sense, the approaches described below are identity perspectives.

soft power the attractiveness of the values or ideas of a country as distinct from its military and economic power or its negotiating behavior.

Professor Joseph Nye has popularized the concept of **soft power**, by which he means the attractiveness of the values or ideas of a country as distinct from its military and economic power or its negotiating behavior.[56] Countries influence one another not so much by force (the realist perspective) or compromise (the liberal perspective) but, often, by just being who they are and attracting other countries to accept their policies through the magnetism of their values and moral standards. A good example may be the way the prospect of membership in the democratic communities of the European Union and NATO encouraged the countries of eastern Europe and the former Soviet bloc to reform their domestic systems—military, economic, and political institutions—to meet the democratic requirements of joining the EU and NATO (such as civilian control of the military). While this process involved lots of negotiations to modify regulations and institutions, it may have been motivated in the first instance by the attractiveness of the values and institutions of the Western democratic countries. The negotiations did not split the difference between eastern European and Western regulations; rather, they moved the former communist countries decisively toward the standards of the Western democracies. All the prospective members, for example, had to privatize industries and create mixed markets where previously state firms dominated. Relative identities converged, and shared identities deepened, all toward democratic ideals, not communist or socialist ones.

belief systems ideas about how the world works that influence the behavior of policy makers.

Still other identity studies focus on countries' **belief systems** and worldviews as ideas that influence their behavior as much as do power and institutions.[57] In this case, ideas do not cause or constitute identities, which then cause behavior, but, instead, suggest to leaders how the world works and point them in particular policy directions. Leaders embrace certain ideas as "road maps" telling them, for example, what causes prosperity, such as free-market economic policies. Or they conclude agreements that elevate certain ideas as focal points to help interpret issues when multiple outcomes are possible, such as the principle of mutual recognition that facilitated the creation of a single European market under the then European Community (more in Chapter 6). Or institutions themselves embody ideas that regulate state behavior, such as the laws of the European Union, which any state seeking EU membership must adopt. Ideas, in short, are pervasive throughout the international system, and they are not just reflections of material and institutional power. Rather, they guide or, in some cases, alter the use of power and institutions.

psychological studies studies that emphasize ideas that define actor personalities, although the ideas may be not conscious but subconscious and sometimes irrational.

Finally, **psychological studies** of international affairs emphasize ideas that define actor personalities. In this case the ideas may be not conscious but subconscious and not rational but irrational. Psychological studies emphasize the many ways in which our perceptions may mislead us.[58] Two leaders in the same situation may act differently not because they have different information but because they process the same information differently. One may associate a piece of information about the behavior of another state with a generally favorable view of that state and discount any possibility that the behavior indicates hostile intent. The second leader, with a different view of the other state, may be inclined to view the behavior as hostile. Psychologically, we like our views of others to be consistent, and we tend to avoid what psychologists call cognitive dissonance. Thus, in 1941, Stalin refused to believe British warnings that Hitler was preparing to attack Russia because Russia had just signed a nonaggression pact with Germany and the idea that Germany would attack Russia was inconsistent with Stalin's broader view of Germany.

Psychological factors may also explain why some actors behave like defensive realists while others behave like offensive realists. Defensive realists, for psychological reasons, fear losses more

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than they value gains; hence, they settle for security rather than conquest. Offensive realists do the reverse.[59] Other psychological studies focus on personality development and subconscious factors. Leaders had different formative experiences as children or young adults. Hitler and Stalin had abusive parents, and even Woodrow Wilson, some argue, was constantly trying to counter feelings of inadequacy branded into him as a child. There is also the psychological phenomenon known as groupthink, in which a group of decision makers reinforce a single way of thinking about a problem and rule out alternatives because they want to remain part of the group.

Feminism

Feminism is another important identity-based perspective on international relations. It focuses on gender as the primary determinant of an actor's identity. It argues that the field of international relations has been dominated by men and therefore has a masculine content and form. As Professor J. Ann Tickner writes, "The discipline of international relations, as it is presently constructed, is defined in terms of everything that is not female."[60] By that she means that all mainstream perspectives, but the realist perspective in particular, place too much emphasis on military struggle and war, on sovereignty and self-help, and on environmental exploitation. Relatively, they neglect the feminine virtues of peace, community, and environmental preservation. Mainstream studies celebrate differences and disaggregation. They emphasize individualism and competition. They underplay the exploitation and abuse of natural resources. And they privilege system and statist solutions while downplaying the local and private spheres of activity, especially those where more women than men are involved, such as homemaking, child-rearing, caregiving, and community service.

feminism a theory that critiques international relations as a male-centered and -dominated discipline.

Feminist perspectives, and there are many, call for more attention to comprehensive rather than national security, to protecting women and children in homes where they are often exposed to domestic violence rather than just safeguarding states. They emphasize the practices of mediation and reconciliation, peacemaking, and community building, as well as the nurturing of trust and goodwill in the private and public sector. Instead of large-scale corporate and state-run institutions, some feminists prefer small-scale and often self-reliant and self-sufficient economic solutions that demonstrate as much concern for reproduction and preservation as they do for growth and disruptive change. They assert that states may overcome past tragedies of war and violence by recognizing that they took place in a particular time and place when women did not enjoy full equality and social justice.

Some feminist outlooks see male domination as deeply rooted in the language and culture of international affairs and may be classified as critical theory. They note how diplomacy exalts masculine and denigrates feminine attributes. Alexander Hamilton accused Thomas Jefferson of a "womanish attachment to France and a womanish sentiment against Great Britain"; Walt Whitman talked about the "manly heart" of democracy; atomic bombs were given male names, such as Little Boy and Fat Man; and success in testing the first hydrogen bomb was reported as "It's a boy" rather than "It's a girl," as if the birth of a girl implied failure. These feminist accounts see men and women as fundamentally different, in some sense biologically hard-wired, and they seek a qualitative, not just quantitative, change in international life. It's not just a matter of adding a few more women to the military or diplomatic establishments; it's a matter of revolutionary change that converts a male-centered world of international affairs to the virtues of female culture.

Other feminist theories are rationalist. They seek simply equal rights and participation for women across the broad spectrum of domestic and international life. They note that women

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have played key roles in history since the beginning of time, and prominent women such as Cleopatra, Joan of Arc, Elizabeth I, and Catherine the Great have not so much changed the fundamental character of international relations as added to its diversity and richness. They acknowledge that men may act the way they do because of circumstances, not gender, and that once women are allowed to act in similar circumstances, they may act the same way. If women had been the hunters and men the homemakers, would there have been no conflicts over scarce food and territory? Women add talent, not magic, to human affairs. A world that subjects half its population to inferior status is a world that moves at half speed or achieves only half a loaf. Women need to be given a fair chance, and then the world will see not that women are inherently more virtuous or peace loving but that they are different and add immeasurably to the talents and treasure of the world community.

CRITICAL THEORY PERSPECTIVES

Critical theory perspectives offer broad critiques of international relations and generally advocate radical solutions such as revolution. They deny that we can study international relations by abstracting from historical circumstances and separating the observer from the particular time and period of which the observer is part. To critical theorists, all ideas, institutions, and power are historically bound and contingent. The individual, including the observer or social scientist, is never truly objective, and thought as well as behavior are consequences of specific historical structures. Critical theories refuse to separate ideas, power, and institutions; for them reality is a seamless web. This is also true for many constructivists who capture reality as narratives rather than as causal sequences. But critical theories do more than reconstruct the past; they also focus on the future. They look for the forces of change and evolution in history that define a future, usually more desirable, outcome. As Robert Cox, a well-known critical theorist, tells us, "Critical theory . . . contains an element of utopianism," but "its utopianism is constrained by its comprehension of historical processes."[61] Critical theory often has a teleological aspect to it; it tells us the direction in which history is moving and therefore what likely, although not certain, futures we may contemplate.

Let's look briefly at two critical theories: Marxism and postmodernism. We consider these theories from time to time throughout the rest of this book, especially in Chapter 10 when we examine deep material and social divisions in the contemporary international system.

Marxism

Karl Marx was a refugee from revolution in Germany when he met and collaborated in London with Friedrich Engels, the radical son of a German merchant. In 1845, Engels published a scathing critique of British industrial society, *The Condition of the Working Class in England*. In 1848, Marx and Engels together wrote *The Communist Manifesto*, and in 1867, Marx produced the first volume of his monumental work, *Das Kapital*.

Marxism a theory that emphasizes the dialectical or conflictual relationship between capitalist and communist states in the international system, leading to the triumph of communism, not democracy.

Marx, whose work became known as **Marxism**, foresaw permanent revolution on behalf of the oppressed working class. He based his understanding of this historical outcome on three factors: the underlying material forces shaping industrialization; the conflict that these forces ignited between social classes, specifically between the working classes, or proletariat, manning the factories of industrialization and the managerial classes, or bourgeoisie, directing and financing industrialization; and the superstructure of states and interstate imperialism that the struggle between social classes generated. The forces of production ensured that

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capitalism would expand. Industrialization exploited workers by limiting their wages, in the process ensuring that new markets would have to be found because workers could not consume all the products produced. Capitalism thus built up pressures to export surplus products and colonize other parts of the world. Here the superstructure of states and interstate competition played a role, inviting aggression and wars of imperial expansion. Wherever capitalism expanded, however, it built up its antithesis, namely working classes that resisted and rebelled against exploitation. Marx believed the workers of the world would unite and eventually break the chains of capitalism. Capitalism would gradually give way to communism, a future state of relations in which workers would control their own lives and destinies, and the state and traditional interstate relations would wither away.

Marxism evolved subsequently under Vladimir Ilyich Ulyanov Lenin in Russia and Mao Zedong in China. Lenin saw workers or the proletariat as the vanguard in the struggle against capitalism. Mao saw peasants, not workers, in this role. Today, after the collapse of the Soviet Union and the embrace of capitalism by China, the future envisioned by Marx and his followers seems unlikely. Still, Marx's diagnosis of global economic divisions retains its relevance for many analysts, even if his solutions have been overtaken by events. Globalization, while it has created an ever-larger middle class and spread economic gains to millions over the past century, has also carved deep divisions in the world between the upper and middle classes and the poorest classes, even in developing countries such as China and India. The new information era exacerbates these inequalities through the effects of the so-called digital divide.

In Chapter 10, we examine the critical theory perspective on globalization. How does one explain such persisting injustice? World systems approaches that borrow heavily from Marxism explain it in terms of country categories—core countries, such as those in the advanced world, that exploit semiperipheral (for example, the Middle East) and peripheral (for example, Africa) parts of the world. Other Marxist-related accounts, such as one developed by Antonio Gramsci, an Italian Marxist, explain it in terms of hidden social purposes that exercise a hegemonic grip on social consciousness and perpetuate material divisions.[62] Capitalism dominates not only production but also education and conscious thinking, precluding the possibility of liberating ideas. Critical theorists argue that the historical dialectic that Marx discovered is still at work, spawning inequalities and tensions that increase the need for a radical restructuring of the future global system.

Postmodernism

Some critical theories argue that all attempts at knowledge involve the exercise of power, particularly of words, language, texts, and discourses. They assert that commonplace dichotomies in the study of international relations—sovereignty and anarchy, war and peace, citizen and human—mask a power structure that marginalizes many peoples. Sovereignty, for example, legitimates state power and serves the agenda of state elites while delegitimizing domestic opposition by minorities, the poor, and indigenous peoples. Anarchy justifies war and imperialism, marginalizing the weak and non-Western cultures, all in the name of establishing world order and civilizing the "backward." The citizen or state is privileged over the human being or society, and citizens gain authority to murder human beings, or go to war, in the name of the state. Economic modernity is portrayed as politically neutral when, in fact, it legitimates Western economic oppression.

postmodernists theorists who seek to expose the hidden or masked meanings of language and discourse in international relations in order to gain space to imagine alternatives.

Much of this discriminatory language originates with modernization and the ascendance of Western elites to the apex of global power. Hence, critical theories that seek to unmask the rhetorical dominance of Western thought are often called postmodern. **Postmodernists** are associated

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with French theorists such as Jacques Derrida and Michel Foucault, who seek to expose the underlying meanings and hierarchies of power imposed by Enlightenment language and concepts.[63] They hope to find a more socially just form of discourse, and many of them hold a belief in causality, albeit a causality that is constructed rather than objective. However, other postmodernists want to go no further than to demonstrate that all social reality disguises power. They seek to deconstruct that power wherever they find it and show that all politics conceals oppression.

LEVELS OF ANALYSIS

Mainstream perspectives deal with the substantive content of the cause that makes something happen in international relations: power, institutions, or ideas. Levels of analysis deal with the origin of that cause: an individual, a country, or the international system as a whole. And just as we cannot describe everything of substance in the world, we also cannot describe everything from all levels of analysis. And even if we might, we would still have to decide which level to emphasize, or we would not know where to act to change the outcome. Levels of analysis interact, just as perspectives do. But the decisive question is which way the causal arrows run. Are domestic-level forces driving systemic-level forces, or the reverse? In Iraq, for example, are domestic divisions between tribes and religious sects causing war, or are Western colonialization and, more recently, U.S. intervention the primary cause? And if both are equally important, we may have an overdetermined outcome and, given limited resources, not know where to intervene to change it in the future.

The struggle for power may be the cause of war (a realist perspective). But the struggle for power may originate in the individual human being's lust for power (think of Adolf Hitler), the aggressive characteristics of a particular state (think of interwar Japan), or the uncertainties of a decentralized system of power (think of Germany's rise in relative power before World War I).[64] The individual's lust for power represents an *individual* level of analysis, an aggressive or warlike state represents a *domestic* level of analysis, and the uncertainties of the balance of power represent a *systemic* level of analysis. The systemic level of analysis is often broken down further into a *process* level, involving interactions among states, and a *structural* level, involving the relative positions of states before or independent of interactions. So, for example, war may originate from the failure of alliances (a process level) or the relative rise of a new power (a structural level).

There are, of course, unlimited numbers of levels between these three primary ones. A *regional* level falls between the systemic and domestic levels. For example, a cause may originate in the way power is exercised within the European Union rather than within a single state or the global system as a whole. Dissatisfaction with European Union policies, particularly on immigration, prompted "Brexit," the decision by Great Britain to leave the European Union. Another intermediate level, as we see below, is the *foreign policy* level of analysis. A leader tries to maneuver between the struggle for power among partisan groups domestically and the struggle among powerful countries internationally. The leader takes the country to war to avoid being thrown out of power at home. In all these examples, the substance of the cause is the same—namely, power—but in each case the cause comes from a different level of analysis. Can we conclude that causes from all these levels matter? Sure, but which level matters most? If the individual level is more important than the domestic level, we might change the leader; but if the domestic or systemic level is more important, changing the leader won't have much effect.

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Systemic Level of Analysis

The **systemic level of analysis** explains outcomes from a systemwide level that includes all states. It takes into account both the position of states (structure) in the international system and their interactions (process). The position of states constitutes the systemic structural level of analysis. This involves the relative distribution of power, such as which states are great, middle, or small powers, and geopolitics, such as which states are sea or land powers. The interaction of states constitutes the systemic process level of analysis. At this level, we are concerned with the way states negotiate and align with one another, more so than with their relative positions of power. From the systemic *process* level, for example, we might explain the 9/11 attacks as a failure to bring about successful peace negotiations between the Arabs and Israelis. America's dominance in the Middle East, a structural reality, may be an alternative explanation.

systemic level of analysis emphasizes causes that come from the system of states as a whole.

Another way to think about the difference between the structural and process levels of analysis is the analogy of a card game. The cards you hold constitute the structural level of the game; you can't win the game without a decent hand. This level is equivalent to the relative power states hold or the existence or nonexistence of a League of Nations. Playing the cards constitutes the process level. You can blow a good hand if you don't play your cards right. This level equates to whether a state forms an alliance with another state in a timely fashion.

The systemic level of analysis is the most comprehensive. If we emphasize this level of analysis, we are unlikely to leave out a significant part of the international situation we are looking at and therefore omit a particular cause. On the other hand, this level is also the most general; we will come up with explanations that lack specificity. To blame the 9/11 attacks on U.S. dominance in the Middle East is questionable because U.S. dominance did not change much during the postwar period. Why did American dominance not cause the attack earlier or later? But if we ignore American dominance, we miss a factor that clearly influenced the environment in the Middle East. Just because structural causes are remote does not mean they do not affect outcomes. In fact, they predict outcomes better than specific behaviors. American dominance in the Middle East, for example, precludes an outcome that is contrary to U.S. interests. But it does not predict when America might initiate a negotiation to resolve the Arab–Israeli conflict.

Certain perspectives emphasize the systemic level of analysis. Social constructivism, for example, sees identity shaped more by international relationships (systemic process level) and shared knowledge or culture (systemic structure level) than by separate country histories (domestic level) or specific leaders (individual level). Neorealism emphasizes the systemic level of relative power almost to the exclusion of domestic and individual factors.

Domestic Level of Analysis

The **domestic level of analysis** locates causes in the character of the domestic systems of specific states. Thus, war is caused by aggressive or warlike states (domestic level), not by evil, inept, or misguided people (individual level) or the structure of power in the international system (systemic level). War may also be caused by the failure of domestic institutions. In the case of World War I, the internal collapse of the Austro-Hungarian Empire and the brittle coalition inside Germany of agricultural (rye) and industrial (iron) interests are often cited as important causes. These are also explanations from a domestic level of analysis but now from a liberal perspective: the breakdown of institutional relationships at the domestic level led to war.

domestic level of analysis: emphasizes causes that come from general features inside a particular country.

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Domestic-level causes are more specific than systemic-level causes but not as specific as individual-level factors. We can point to a specific domestic political coalition, such as the iron and rye coalition in Germany, which led to the expansion of German power and caused World War I, rather than the relative rise of German power, which occurred over a longer time and does not tell us exactly when that power became sufficient to precipitate war. On the other hand, at the domestic level we now downplay causes that might come from other countries or the structure of international power. What if the buildup of military power in another country, such as Russia, was the principal cause of German armament, and the need to arm Germany brought together the iron and rye coalition? Now the iron and rye coalition is not a cause of World War I but a consequence of systemic factors and an intervening, not independent, variable causing war. Similarly, the iron and rye coalition had existed for some time, and war did not occur. Was there an even more specific cause that came from the individual level of analysis, such as the brinksmanship of German chancellor Theobald von Bethmann-Hollweg during the critical month of July 1914?

Domestic-level causes may come from various characteristics of the domestic system. Capitalist and socialist economies generate different attitudes and behaviors. The Muslim and Christian religions or democratic and nondemocratic political ideologies do as well. Stable and failed institutions are domestic-level factors affecting state behavior. A great worry today is the existence of failed states, meaning states whose domestic institutions have broken down, such as Libya, Syria, Yemen, and Somalia. Another worry is the existence of rogue states, such as North Korea, that may pass nuclear weapons on to other states or terrorists. Both failed and rogue states operate from the domestic level of analysis, but a failed state usually means an institutional breakdown, a liberal cause, whereas a rogue state often implies aggressive or ideological intentions, a realist or identity cause.

Individual Level of Analysis

individual level of analysis: emphasizes causes that come from an individual or a small group of decision makers within particular countries.

The **individual level of analysis** locates the causes of events in individual leaders or the immediate circles of decision makers within particular countries. Now the cause of World War I comes not from some general characteristic of the German domestic system as a whole—the iron and rye coalition—but from the particular leaders in power at the time. Kaiser Wilhelm II is considered to be the level from which the cause originated. It may have been his need for power to hide a sense of inferiority; this is a realist or maybe psychological explanation. Or it may have been his inability to understand the intricacies of statecraft as did Otto von Bismarck, the German chancellor until 1890; this is a liberal explanation. Or it may have been his ideas about the monarchy and German destiny; this is an identity explanation. But all three of these explanations are drawn from an individual level of analysis.

The individual level of analysis is the most specific level. Now we can see the proximate or most immediate cause of some action coming from a particular person or group. According to some analysts, President George W. Bush and a small group of neoconservative advisers made the decision to invade Iraq and cause war in 2003. This level of analysis has great appeal, especially among historians and the media. Much of history is written as the work of great men (and a few great women). The stories of Napoleon, Frederick the Great, Catherine the Great, samurai families in Japan, and the strongmen of Africa who led their countries to independence after World War II resonate with human interest and human tragedy. Newspapers sell better when they report personal peccadilloes or more serious evils that leaders are alleged to have caused. And the individual level of analysis is important, especially in democratic countries, where leaders are held accountable for their actions.

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Nevertheless, this level of analysis is the least general level of analysis. It soft-pedals all the domestic- and international-level factors that may have set up the situation in which leaders acted. For example, George W. Bush was not in office when Iraq invaded Kuwait in 1991 or throughout the 1990s when Saddam Hussein terrorized his own people and defied international sanctions. Maybe larger forces were at work that would eventually produce war. Working at the individual level of analysis is akin to concluding, after watching an entire baseball game, that a home run in the bottom of the ninth inning caused the final outcome without considering how the rest of the game set up the situation in the bottom of the ninth that made the home run decisive. Would World War II have occurred if Hitler had not been in power? Or would domestic and international circumstances have produced another leader similar to Hitler? It may stir our human imagination to exaggerate the role of an individual or small group, but that's not the same as proving it is so.

Foreign Policy Level of Analysis

Another important level of analysis, as we have noted, is the foreign policy level of analysis. This level captures the interplay between domestic politics and international politics. As Peter Trubowitz explains, it focuses on "how political leaders manage conflicting geopolitical [systemic] and partisan [domestic] pressures in making grand strategy . . . geopolitics and domestic politics [are] two faces of the same coin: the president could not respond to one threat without weighing the impact on the other."[65] The foreign policy level of analysis involves a "two-level game."[66] Sandwiched between the systemic process and domestic levels, foreign policy officials mediate between the two, as when a leader goes to war abroad to preserve or increase his or her power at home (Hitler?) or when a leader sacrifices domestic power rather than lead the country to war (Gorbachev?). At the foreign policy level of analysis, the primary causes come from the intersection of domestic and systemic factors, not from the individual leaders themselves. Individuals are intervening, not causal, variables. (If the primary causes come from the individual leader, let's say the leader's personality, the level of analysis is individual.)

A well-known foreign policy–level perspective in international relations is the rational choice approach. From this approach, as Professor Bruce Bueno de Mesquita tells us, "international relations is the process by which foreign policy leaders balance their ambition to pursue particular policy objectives [security, economic prosperity, and so on] against their need to avoid internal and external threats to their political survival."[67] In short, foreign policy leaders seek to survive in office; they implement this preference through the pursuit of power, they calculate the costs and benefits of various policy options based on their perceptions of relative capabilities abroad and political risk at home, and they decide which option maximizes their chance of political survival. Notice how leaders operating at the foreign policy level make connections between the domestic and international levels and act based on rational assessments of these connections, not based on factors purely internal to them, such as their like or dislike of a particular country.

CAUSAL ARROWS

Perspectives and levels of analysis lay out the various facts of an international event, but they don't explain it. To explain something we need to know which facts, namely which perspectives and levels of analysis, are more important than others. They are all important, to be sure, but not equally so. If that were the case, the explanation would be so "thick," that is, it

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would depend on so many facts, that we would not know which facts to change if we desired a different outcome. Critical theory perspectives and some constructivist perspectives embrace such "thick" explanations. They see causes as interrelated or mutually constituted. They explain events in terms of narratives, not specific causes. They seek understanding and "appropriate" responses to that understanding. But mainstream (or rationalist) perspectives seek "thin" explanations that identify specific causes of different outcomes. They seek to change certain facts to avoid undesirable outcomes. They hope to improve, not just understand, the situation.

Causal arrows help us to determine which perspective and level of analysis are the most important causes of the outcome. Think of causal arrows as hypotheses. We hypothesize, for example, that World War I was caused by a shift of relative power at the systemic structural level of analysis. In other words, the realist perspective and structural level of analysis dominate. Now we examine the evidence that power shifted at the systemic level. But that is only the beginning. We also need to examine the evidence that power shifted at the systemic process (failure of alliances), domestic (new governing coalitions), and individual levels of analysis (new leader). We have to look further at other substantive causes besides power shifts such as errors in diplomacy (liberal perspective) and the rise of militant nationalism (identity perspective). And we need to investigate those causes at different levels of analysis. Now we have to decide which explanation is most persuasive based on the evidence.

Here is where we draw the causal arrows. We decide that power shifts are indeed the primary cause and that mistakes in diplomacy and differences of ideology are mostly a consequence of power shifts, not the reverse. The causal arrows run from power (realist) to diplomatic (liberal) to ideational (identity) causes. Further, we decide that the power shifts are more important among countries (systemic) than within countries (domestic) or between leaders (individual). The causal arrows run from systemic structural to domestic to individual levels of analysis. Now we have a conclusion, but it is by no means definitive. There are always more facts to consider, and the evidence may shift. So we pay particular attention to those studies that draw the causal arrows differently and disagree with our conclusions. In this way we learn what we may have overlooked or underestimated.

Notice that all explanations are based on empirical evidence. We are not just making up arguments that suit our political purposes. But we do not start with a blank sheet. We start with a perspective and level of analysis that points us toward certain facts and hypotheses. We then test our hypothesis against other possibilities and draw conclusions with an open mind to learn from different conclusions that others might draw.

The causal arrow feature is a unique aspect of this textbook. As we identify an argument in the text, we illustrate the argument by a causal arrow diagram. The causal arrow shows the perspective or level of analysis being emphasized and how the other perspectives and levels of analysis are being affected by the dominant perspective and level of analysis. Don't skip over these illustrations. It may take some time to understand the causal arrow feature, but think of it as the secret code that unlocks the hieroglyphics of international affairs. If you master it, you will think systematically and critically about the world and be in a much better position to fulfill your responsibilities as a citizen. You will also be more courteous and considerate toward your fellow citizens, especially those who disagree with you.

* * *

This chapter has introduced a lot of concepts. The rest of the book illustrates how these concepts work in the real world, and we remind you of them as we see them at work in explaining historical and contemporary events.

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STUDY QUESTIONS

1. In what way does the prisoner's dilemma situation reflect the security dilemma of realism? If prisoners can communicate and become friendly or adopt common goals, how does that situation reflect the liberal perspective? And if prisoners are brothers or members of a common community, how does that situation illustrate the identity perspective?
2. What concepts does the realist perspective relatively emphasize? The liberal perspective? The identity perspective?
3. Can any perspective apply at any level of analysis?
4. Is constructivism both a theory and a method?
5. Do perspectives exclude each other or simply draw the causal arrows between power, institutions, and ideas differently?

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