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Chapter 9

International Relations

PLEASE NOTE: This book is currently in draft form; material is not final.

International relations—relations between states—is an important subfield of political science and a part of politics that nobody can ignore. The goals of international policy for most nations are fairly simple: peaceful and prosperous relations between nations. And yet, throughout human history, perhaps nothing has been more difficult to achieve. In this chapter, we'll try to understand why.

9.1 The Challenges of the State System

PLEASE NOTE: This book is currently in draft form; material is not final.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

In this section you will learn:

1. How the concept of sovereignty affects international relations.
2. The formal difference between a nation and a state.

In the world in which we live, the globe is divided up into sovereign nations. Remember that a **sovereign state**¹ is one in which the state in the form of the government is the highest earthly power—there’s no place to appeal a decision of the state except the state itself. So a sovereign state has defined borders that are respected by its neighbors, and control over its own territory. In this part of the discussion, when we use the term “the state,” we really mean a sovereign nation, not a political subdivision such as a U.S. or Mexican state. States in federal systems such as the U.S. and Mexico are formally referred to as sovereign states, but they are still ultimately dominated by national governments.

And this is where the challenges of international relations begin. In much of our discussion of politics, it is presumed that the state holds power and uses it as the people who control the state see fit. The power may be divided into different branches and levels of government, or not divided; through mechanisms such as elections different people may assume power and state policies may change as a result of those elections. This presumption of a kind of state and a kind of allocation of power casts the study and practice of politics in a certain light. There is a way to resolve disputes; ultimately, somebody has the power to say yes or no and, absent violent revolution, everybody has to go along. But in a world of truly sovereign states, which recognize no higher authority than themselves, the system is best described as **anarchy**²: Ultimately, nobody is really in charge. And that is a different ballgame.

1. The concept that a state has defined borders and is the ultimate political authority within those borders.
2. A situation where nobody is in charge, and actors such as states are in fact free to do what they want.

So first, let's be clear once again on the term sovereign: A sovereign state is said to be the ultimate authority within its own boundaries, borders that are respected by its neighbors. The government is legitimate in the eyes of the citizens, who generally obey the law. The United States is a sovereign nation; so are France and Indonesia. Most of the 192 recognized nations on earth are in fact sovereign nations.

Somalia, on the east coast of Africa, isn't quite. The nation is currently divided into three parts. First is the erstwhile legitimate government of Somalia, which controls very little of the country, mostly in the south, and is beset by various warlords and religious factions. In the middle is a functioning state calling itself Puntland, which does not seek independence from Somalia but, at this point, might as well be. In the north is a state calling itself Somaliland, which is largely functioning as a sovereign nation although few other countries currently recognize it as such.

This world of sovereign states came together in a treaty called the Peace of Westphalia in 1648. That treaty ended the 30 Years War, literally a three-decade-long conflict between Catholic and Protestant rulers and their subjects that tore apart what is now Germany and caused widespread suffering across Europe. Throughout history, people have found creative and largely pointless reasons for killing each other. But the upshot of the treaty was that states had a right to order their affairs, in this case the largely northern, Protestant principalities of Germany and what was then called the Holy Roman Empire. The treaty, in effect, created the notion of sovereignty as an acknowledged fact of international law and diplomacy, and the Europeans exported the idea from there to the rest of the world.

European colonialism, as when the European nation states carved up Africa at the end of the 1800s, forced sovereignty onto sometimes disparate groups of people that had previously been more or less sovereign nations in their own parts of the continent. Only two African states—Liberia, which had been carved out earlier in the century by freed American slaves, and Ethiopia, which had been successfully fending off invaders for a thousand years—survived the onslaught. Although Africa had long been home to a number of substantial kingdoms and empires, the Europeans by the late 1800s had taken a technological leap forward that allowed them to conquer the continent in a few decades. The redrawing of the African map lumped together groups of people who had previously been part of different states, creating political challenges when the Europeans were forced out after World War II.

A world comprising sovereign states means that there is no overarching world power that can tell them what to do. Why not, then, a world government to sort everything out? First, most if not all the sovereign states would have to agree, and

both political leaders and ordinary citizens tend to dislike having someone else tell them what to do. The farther away that someone is, the less they like it. Visions of black helicopters and invading U.N. troops were the stuff of many Americans' paranoid nightmares in the 1970s and 1980s, despite the lack of any reality to this fear. Even if such a government could be established, the variety and diversity of the world would make it very difficult to rule, even in a highly democratic state. A world government would have to keep control and settle local and regional disputes, becoming, in the process, as despotic as the states it replaces, if not more so.

So, what we are left with are a lot of sovereign states, and a world system that is based on that single fact. And as there is no referee or overarching power, one state can erase another, as when Prussia and Russia effectively erased Poland, once the biggest state in Europe, from the map in 1795. The Poles, and their language, culture and traditions remained, but the Polish state did not reappear until 1918. This does not mean that a state can act without consequence. When Iraq invaded Kuwait in 1990, states from around the world united in the effort to drive the Iraqis out and re-establish Kuwaiti sovereignty. Later in the same decade, Europeans and Americans joined to end ethnic cleansing in what was then Yugoslavia. So no state operates in a vacuum.

What remained of Poland after its 18th century partition, and what most defines a place such as Somalia today, is a nation. In the precise terminology of international relations, a state has defined borders, but a nation has a cultural, linguistic or ethnic similarity among a group of people. A **nation**³ is a sense of community among a group of people; that group of people may want to control themselves politically and become a nation as well. So, for example, the Kurds, of whom around 30 million live in the Middle East, are a nation but not a state. They are divided chiefly between Turkey, Iraq, Syria, Iran, comprising the largest single ethnic group in the world without its own state. Kurdish separatists have fought for independence in Turkey, and all but carved out a sovereign state in the north of Iraq. But at the moment, the Kurds remain a nation, and not quite a state.

3. A group of people united by common cultural, linguistic or ethnic similarities.

4. An ideology that extols the virtue of one's nation, creating a sense of specialness and separateness from other groups and states.

5. The idea that the United States is unique among nations, and therefore has a special role to play in world affairs.

Sometimes, we speak of a nation-state, an entity which combines elements of both these things. The United States, perhaps alone among the states of the world, is a nation based on an ideology rather than an ethnicity. Still, the U.S. is sometimes given to **nationalism**⁴, a sense of how to act and think, a sense of right and wrong, and a sense of separateness from others that includes a sentimental attachment to one's homeland. Americans are not unique in this regard, but do tend to exhibit it more than others. This is sometimes called **American exceptionalism**⁵, or the belief that the United States is unlike other states and in fact has a special destiny in the world. In fact, all states are unique in their own ways. Whether the U.S. has a special role to play is for you to decide.

Sometimes the system is dominated by a hegemon—a single state that is powerful enough to exert some influence on world politics. **Hegemony**⁶ means leadership or dominance of one person or state over others. In the case of international relations, Great Britain exercised a degree of global hegemony in the 1800s; the United States has exercised a similar role in the late 20th and early 21st centuries. But a hegemon is not all-powerful, and the price of maintaining hegemony can be very high. Consequently, states are either striving for hegemony, or for a balance of power, so that no hegemon arises. The anarchic system of world politics is in fact anti-hegemonic, as it resists attempts by any one power to take over the whole world.

States interact through diplomacy, international law and war. The Prussian military strategist Carl von Clausewitz (1780–1831) referred to war as “War is merely the continuation of policy by other means.” Clausewitz wasn’t completely a warmonger, so his famous quote probably shouldn’t be taken to mean that he thought it was OK to go on the warpath. However, in contemporary international politics, war can be seen as the failure of policy, given the extraordinarily high cost of modern warfare.

To that end, states often prefer to find other ways to solve disputes. For that reason states pay some attention to international law, which seeks to constrain the behavior of states. International law exists through treaties and agreements negotiated by states, and through rule-making mechanisms in multinational agencies and groups. They also attempt, through diplomacy, to try to convince other states to make choices that will be beneficial to the state, the region or the world. Diplomacy works when both sides are rational, in the sense that they each have some understanding of their own self-interest. We will see examples of efforts to achieve change in this way later in this chapter.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- The world is a collection of autonomous, sovereign states, which creates a world system that is effectively anarchic in nature.
- States interact with each other through international law, diplomacy and, sometimes, war.

6. Leadership and/or dominance of a group of agents, such as states, by another single agent, said to be the hegemon.

EXERCISES

1. What makes a state sovereign? The world has a number of states that want to be sovereign but are not universally recognize by other states. Why not?
2. Consider the idea of American exceptionalism. Is the United States truly different from other countries, with a special destiny? Why or why not?

9.2 Theories of International Relations

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LEARNING OBJECTIVES

In this section you learn about:

1. Realism, liberalism, constructivism, feminism and neo-Marxism as ways of explaining international relations.
2. Considering other factors to explain why states behave the way they do.

The study and practice of international relations has led international relations scholars to suggest different ways that states might and should behave with regard to their neighbors around the world.

Realism

Realism⁷ suggests that states should and do look out for their own interests first. Realism presumes that states are out for themselves first and foremost. The world is therefore a dangerous place; a state has look out for No. 1 and prepare for the worst. When George W. Bush convinced the U.S. Congress that he should send in U.S. soldiers into Iraq in 2003 and take out Saddam Hussein, this was realism in action. Realism suggests that international relations is driven by competition between states, and states therefore do and should try to further their own interests. What matters, then, is how much economic and especially military power a state has. When your neighbor misbehaves, you can't call the police.

Classical realists say this is just human nature. People, by nature, are at some level greedy and insecure and behave accordingly. So even if you're not greedy and insecure, you have to behave that way, because that's the game. Structural realists say it's more about how the world is organized—an anarchic system creates the Hobbesian state of nature, referring to the 16th century English philosopher who justified the existence of the state by comparing it to a somewhat hypothetical

7. The approach to international relations theory that says that states must look out for their own interests first, and that military and economic power are the keys to security.

“state of nature,” a war of all against all. So states should seek peace, but prepare for war.

This tends to make national security look like a zero-sum game: Anything I do to make myself more secure tends to make you feel less secure, and vice versa. A realist might counter that a balance of power between states in fact preserves the peace, by raising the cost of any aggression to an unacceptable level.

Realists argue that war, at some point, is inevitable. Anarchy persists, and it isn't going away anytime soon.

Liberalism

Liberalism⁸ suggests in fact states can peacefully co-exist, and that states aren't always on the brink of war. Liberal scholars point to the fact that despite the persistence of armed conflict, most nations are not at war most of the time. Most people around the world don't get up and start chanting “Death to America!” and trying to figure out who they can bomb today. Liberalism argues that relations between nations are not always a zero-sum game. A zero-sum game is one in which any gain by one player is automatically a loss by another player. My gains in security, for example, don't make you worse off, and your gains in anything don't make me worse off. Liberal theory also points to the fact that despite the condition of anarchy in the world, most nations are not at war, most of the time. So the idea that international relations must be conducted as though one were always under the threat of attack isn't necessarily indicative of reality.

8. A theory of international relations that says that cooperation is possible to build global security.
9. The theory that world and regional structures such as the United Nations can be used to create global security.
10. The idea that economic growth and trade ties between states can foster global security.
11. The belief that as more states become democracies, war will be less likely to occur.
12. Immanuel Kant's belief that the combination of liberal institutionalism, commercialism and internationalism together will produce a more stable, prosperous world.

There are different flavors of liberalism. **Liberal institutionalism**⁹ puts some faith in the ability of global institutions to eventually coax people into getting along as opposed to going to war. Use of the United Nations, for example, as a forum for mediating and settling dispute, will eventually promote a respect for the rule of international law in a way that parallels respect for the law common in advanced democracies. **Liberal commercialism**¹⁰ sees the advance of global commerce as making less likely. War isn't actually very profitable for most people, and it really isn't good for the economy. **Liberal internationalism**¹¹ trades on the idea that democracies are less likely to make war than are dictatorships, if only because people can say no, either in legislatures or in elections. Consider that public protest in the U.S. helped end U.S. involvement in Vietnam—that kind of thing doesn't always happen in non-democratic states. Although it can. Argentina's misadventures in Las Malvenas—the Falkland Islands—led to protests that brought down a longstanding military dictatorship and restored democracy to the nation in 1982. Together, these three are sometimes called the **Kantian triangle**¹², after the

German philosopher Immanuel Kant (1724–1804), who outlined them in a 1795 essay, *Perpetual Peace*.

Figure 9.1 [To Come] Prisoner's Dilemma Chart

The liberal argument that states can learn to get along is somewhat supported by the work of Robert Axelrod, *The Evolution of Cooperation*. New York: Basic Books, 2006., who used an actual experiment involving a lot of players and the prisoner's dilemma game to show how people and perhaps states could learn to cooperate. The prisoner's dilemma is a fairly simple game that is useful for understanding various parts of human behavior. In this game, you have two players, both prisoners. Each player has two choices: Defect to the authorities and rat out the other player in exchange for a reduced sentence, or cooperate with the other player and go free. If the players each defect they get 1 point apiece; if they cooperate they get 3 points apiece. If, however, one player cooperates and the other defects, the defector gets 5 points and the cooperator gets zero. Given that set of constraints, in a realist world, both players defect and score only 1 point each. The best result would be for both to cooperate, go free, and generate the most points between them. In the Axelrod experiment, the game was iterated or repeated, so that in a round-robin featuring dozens of players, each player played the other player multiple times. The players were all notable game theorists, and each devised a particular strategy in an attempt to win the game. What Axelrod found was the player in his experiment who used a strategy called "tit-for-tat" won. Tit-for-tat simply began by cooperating, and then did whatever the other player did last time in the next round. In a repeated game, which certainly describes relations between states, players eventually learned to cooperate. Axelrod cites real world examples of where this kind of behavior occurred, such as the German and Allied soldiers in the trenches of World War I, who basically agreed at various times not to shoot each other, or to shell incoming shipments of food. As the soldiers came to understand that they would be facing each other for some time, refraining from killing each other meant that they all got to live.

Constructivism

Constructivism¹³ is another and also interesting way of looking at international relations. It may tell us more about why things are happening the way they do, but somewhat less about what we should do about it. Constructivism argues that culture, social structures and human institutional frameworks matter. Constructivism relies in part on the theory of the social construction of reality, which says that whatever reality is perceived to be, for the most part people have invented it. Of course, if the theory were entirely true, then the very idea of the social construction of reality would also be socially constructed, and therefore

13. The international relations theory that suggests that people create their own reality, making the decision to go to war or remain at peace a matter of choice.

potentially untrue. To the extent that reality is socially constructed, people can make choices. Hence the constructivist argument is, in part, that while the world system is indeed a form of anarchy, that does not demand a realist response to foreign policy. People can choose to otherwise. So constructivists might argue that the end of the Cold War between the U.S. and the Soviet Union was at least in part a decision by Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev to change his thinking. He attempted then to ratchet down tensions with the U.S., and to liberalize Soviet society. Bova, 2012, p. 26. The fact that the Soviet Union promptly disintegrated doesn't change that.

2.4 Combining theories to explain: The Cuban missile crisis

Although constructivism can be a bit mushy, some clear versions of it are quite interesting and useful in helping to understand why states behave the way they do. Realism tends to treat states as single, rational actors—as though the state were a single being, behaving in a consistent fashion with a constant eye to its own interest. As detailed by the scholar Graham Allison, *Essence of Decision*, 1971., the rational actor model of analysis sees states nearly as single organisms, pursuing policies with some planning and coherence. Allison used the 1963 Cuban missile crisis, in which the United States and the Soviet Union nearly came to blows over the Soviets' efforts to put nuclear-armed missiles in Cuba, to explain how other factors could explain why states behave the way they do. Allison suggests two other models. In the organizational process model, the regular behavior and processes of government agencies (bureaucracies) tends to dictate how and why things happen in government. So, for example, one of the ways in which U.S. officials were able to figure out that the Soviets were building missile sites was from aerial reconnaissance and satellite photos of the sites. Despite the fact that the Soviets were trying to keep the missiles a secret, so they could be set up and ready to go if the Soviets should have to confront the U.S. in anyway, the sites they were building looked just like all the Soviet missile sites they'd ever built.

In the governmental politics model, internal political struggles can lead to decisions that may at least be questionable. In this case, Soviet President Nikita Khrushchev may have been pushed by internal political forces to put missiles in Cuba. President John F. Kennedy faced internal pressure for air strikes on the Soviet sites in Cuba, but resisted them.

In the end, the two sides were able to negotiate their way out of the standoff and ratchet down the rhetoric. The Soviets pulled the missiles out of Cuba; the U.S. pulled missiles out of Turkey—like Cuba for the U.S., right on the Soviets' doorstep—and promised not to invade Cuba. What's also useful and interesting about Allison's work is that it shows how using different theories together can

explain why states behave the way they do. Putting missiles in Turkey and Cuba was a realist approach to international affairs. A constructivist view can tell us why things happened the way they did: The culture and politics of the U.S. and the Soviet Union led them to make decisions, and respond to each other's decisions, in ways that can't be viewed as entirely rational. And, finally, the solution came from a somewhat liberal approach to policy: Sit down, talk it out, reach an agreement and pull back from the brink. Although in succeeding decades where the missiles were placed became less of an issue, as each side developed weapons that could hit any spot on the globe from anywhere else, despite all the weapons, nobody fired a shot. Despite more than five decades of nuclear tension, threats and military buildup, the world failed to blow itself up.

Feminism

Realism, liberalism and constructivism may be the three most prominent theories of international relations, but they are by no means the only ones or the most important. Feminist scholars look at international relations through the prism of gender relations, noting that for much of human history, women have been relegated to a sideline role in politics and government. This isn't wise: More than half the people in the world are women. Nonetheless, males have dominated both the study and practice of international relations, but feminist scholars note that women's roles as wives, mothers and workers have made all of that possible. Also, a female perspective on foreign policy might be different. **Feminist theory**¹⁴ sometimes argues that having more women in positions of power could change things, as women may be more likely to believe peace through international cooperation is possible.

Feminist international relations theory has variants, of course. Liberal feminism wants to ensure that women have the same opportunities in society as do men, so that means liberal in the broader sense of general support for democratic capitalism. Critical feminism, on the other hand, sees capitalism as the source of women's oppression, and seeks to create new structures for society. Cultural or essentialist feminism stresses the differences in how women view and think about the world. It argues that women's approach to the world would be more likely to bring peace and avoid conflict.

As usual, there's probably some kernel of truth in all of these ideas, and places where we could find cases that contradict these notions. Clearly, for example, women tend to be less involved in violent crime, and women in some parts of the world are being sold into slavery and prostitution, where their lives are largely controlled by men. On the other hand, it was a female politician, former British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher, who marshaled her country's military to go to war with Argentina and reclaim the Falkland Islands in 1982. But while history is

14. A body of theory that seeks to understand global politics through the prism of gender issues.

full of valiant female warriors and strong leaders—from the Trung sisters and Trieu Thi Trinh of Vietnam, to Joan of Arc, and Queen Elizabeth I—they are much less common than are men famous for their conquering exploits. And the women warriors, generally, are famous for having defended their homelands as opposed to conquering somebody else's. While some men have felt threatened by the rise of feminism in the last 60 years, it really is an opportunity to look at the world in a slightly different way, perhaps shedding some light on why things happen the way they do.

Neo-Marxism

Neo-Marxists look at international relations through the perspective of our old friend Karl Marx. Remember that Marx saw the world in terms of its productive relations, so that the way in which we organize production determines social and political relations as well. **Neo-Marxist theory**¹⁵ applies this to international relations, and tends to argue that capitalism drives states to compete and attempt to dominate each other.

For example, under the variant known as Marxism-Leninism, named after the Russian revolutionary leader, Vladimir Ilyich Lenin (1870–924), world relations are really defined by the desire for industrial nations to develop both sources of raw materials and markets for finished products (what Lenin called the core and the periphery). Lenin was writing at a time when most of Africa had been carved into colonies by the European powers, and the British Empire still stretched from Africa to India to Hong Kong, so there was some evidence for what he was saying. The collapse of the Soviet empire and China's turning away from purely Marxist economics has taken some of the steam out of the Marxian railroad of history, and we may not agree with Marx and Lenin's suggestion that a socialist dictatorship is a necessary step on the road to nirvana. But it could be wrong to completely reject their analysis. Economic problems and conflicts do continue to inform international relations, and states do continue to try to acquire raw materials as well as markets for finished goods. China, for example, is investing heavily in Africa to lock up supplies of minerals for its growing manufacturing sector. The Chinese apparently aren't always the best employers. To the extent that they mistreat African workers, the states where this happens will face the competing demands of a big country that is paying them a lot of money for resources, and the needs of its own citizens who work for the Chinese.

15. An application of Marxist principles to the understanding of global politics, in particular how the nature of production—capitalism—may drive states to act toward each other in certain ways.

Neo-Marxists might point to this an example of where liberal commercialism is really just the capitalist class protecting its own. China is nominally still a communist state, but its economic system is really much more a sort of state-sponsored capitalism. Capitalism, Neo-Marxists argue, in its relentless quest for rising profits, leads to the degradation and impoverishment of workers. The realist

explanation of U.S. policy with regard to Central America is that the U.S. propped up right-wing dictatorships there because they opposed communism. The other explanation was that U.S. commercial interests, such as the United Fruit Company, pushed to maintain their stranglehold on the banana industry. This helped lead, for example, to a CIA-sponsored coup in Guatemala 1954. The company had convinced the U.S. government that the democratically elected Guatemalan president was pro-Soviet. What is known for sure is that he was promising to redistribute land to Guatemalan peasants, which would have threatened the company's monopoly on the banana trade.

In the view of neo-Marxist analysis, the Cold war was about the threat to U.S. business interests. The same would be true for the first and second Gulf Wars, with the U.S. fighting Iraq in part to preserve access to Middle Eastern oil. The United States intervened when Iraq invaded Kuwait much more quickly than it intervened in the former Yugoslavia, when Serbs were killing Bosnian Moslems in much greater numbers than Iraqis were killing Kuwaitis. Neo-Marxism also is realist in its orientation, since it presumes that conflict and potential between states is the reality of international affairs. But in their eyes, that conflict is driven by the conflict between business interests and workers.

Combining Theories to Explain: Mexico and the Drug Wars

Let's look at these perspectives using Mexico as an example. Many of Mexico's foreign policy issues involve the United States. The U.S. is Mexico's biggest trading partner; Mexican workers in the U.S. send back a lot of money to their families still in Mexico; and U.S. drug policy has helped lead the Mexican government into an ongoing war with drug lords. That in itself raises a question: Why does Mexico persist in fighting the drug war when drug consumption is a much bigger problem for the United States than it is for Mexico?

From a realist perspective, Mexico is not in a position to go to war with the U.S., so working with the U.S. seems a much more likely alternative. As Mexico's overall economy is so dependent on sales to and from the U.S., Mexico will do what it can to protect and preserve an open trading relationship between the two nations. A liberal perspective might suggest that Mexico put pressure on the U.S. to address its own consumption problem, while continuing efforts to bring the drug lords to heel. A constructivist approach might suggest that the real problem for Mexico is poverty and the disparity of wealth in the country; it is generally not rich people who go out and decide to sell illegal drugs. It might also suggest that Mexico's leaders can and should make choices that differ from what realism or liberalism might suggest. A feminist analysis might suggest that Mexico's somewhat patriarchal society leads it to overlook more peaceful avenues to solving the problem. A neo-Marxist take on it all would suggest that the capitalist nature of Mexico's economy virtually ensures

an unequal distribution of wealth, leading the poor to seek other means of empowerment, and the rich to seek to maintain the system that helped them become rich in the first place. There may be some truth to all of these ideas; you will have to decide what makes sense to you.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Realism suggests that because of the condition of anarchy in the world, the world is a dangerous place, and states should prepare accordingly.
- Liberalism suggests that rather than focusing on war, states should seek to use diplomacy, international institutions, and commerce as ways of building peaceful relationships with other states.
- Constructivism suggests that human institutions often influence states to make certain choices, blinding them to other foreign policy options.
- Feminist theory looks at international relations with an eye to gender relations, stressing both the historical role and the potential role women can play in foreign policy.
- Neo-Marxist theory suggests that productive relations—capitalism—causes states to compete with each other for scarce resources, negatively affecting workers in the process.

EXERCISE

1. In 2001, following 9/11, the U.S. invaded Afghanistan. Which theory of international relations would account for this action? Using the other theories, what else might have been done instead?

9.3 The Problem of Morality

PLEASE NOTE: This book is currently in draft form; material is not final.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

In this section you will learn:

1. The difficulty of basing foreign policy on moral standards.

Another conundrum of international relations is that private **morality**¹⁶ and the morality of public policy may not always coincide. On a personal level, most of us wouldn't kill somebody. But with the state's exclusive legal franchise on violence, states do send their soldiers off to kill other people, without penalty back home. Rightly or wrongly, states view that use of force as serving a higher purpose—preserving the state—that outweighs the personal rejection of murder as a tool of policy.

Some would argue that public morality—how states behave—should match how people expect to behave all the time. So a state is never justified in supporting tyranny in another state just to serve its own interests, nor should it commit acts overseas that it would never tolerate at home. Others argue that since a state must provide security to its citizens, it may be compelled to take extraordinary actions to preserve that security.

Sometimes the morality question appears to be 50 shades of gray. In the early 1980s, U.S. policy toward El Salvador was a subject of much debate inside the United States. Vietnam was still fresh in people's minds, so it was a period when we were less likely to send in the Marines to try to clean things up. Nonetheless, the **Cold War**¹⁷ between the U.S. and the Soviet Union was still smoldering, and the U.S. found itself supporting a right-wing government that wasn't noted for its respect for human rights and liberties. The opposition appeared to have Marxist leanings, so the U.S. government presumed they would support the Soviet agenda and export revolution to other non-communist states in Central and South America. The Salvadoran government, meanwhile, allowed if not encouraged right-wing

16. The idea that there are standards of behavior that apply to all persons and should be practiced by all persons.

17. The general conflict between the United States and its allies and the Soviet Union and its allies, roughly 1947–1991, for dominance in the post-World War II world. Called a cold war because it didn't involve military conflict between the two superpowers, as opposed to a hot or shooting war.

paramilitary “death squads” to chase after the left-wing revolutionaries who opposed the government. So the U.S. found itself in the morally ambiguous position of supporting a government whose practices ran counter to much of what the United States says about itself.

A leftist professor at a seminar at the time emphatically declared that “A just person does justice,” implying that a good person would oppose the U.S. position and thereby support the rebels. But if you were to look carefully at the situation, may not have been as black-and-white as that professor tried to paint it. How does a just person do justice when justice in general appears to be in short supply?

In the case of El Salvador, it might have been possible for U.S. leaders to make other choices. The Salvadoran civil war, as it became to be known, was driven by poverty and extreme inequality of wealth. When civil unrest over extreme poverty and lack of economic opportunity grew, the government responded by violently cracking down on protests. The war lasted from roughly 1979 to 1992, with at least 70,000 people killed. Military successes by the rebels eventually led to peace negotiations and the rebel groups have since been allowed to participate in the political process.

From the U.S. point of view, the Carter and Reagan administrations saw evidence of the threat of Soviet and Cuban influence among the rebels. Now that the fog of the Cold War has cleared somewhat, that assessment may have been exaggerated; other accounts say that the main rebel groups were not interested in Soviet-style communism. The other issue for the U.S., operating from a realist perspective, was that failing to support the Salvadoran government would send the wrong message to both allies and to states on the fence amid the Cold War. A liberalist or constructivist approach to the problem, however, might have counseled putting pressure on the Salvadoran government to positively address the issues that were driving the rebellion in the first place.

The same ambiguity confronted U.S. citizens who opposed or supported U.S. efforts in Vietnam. While it was one thing to protest, say, the Vietnam War, it was quite another to argue that the Vietnamese communists were simply good-hearted revolutionaries along the lines of the American Founding Fathers. This was perhaps as nearsighted as blind support for the South Vietnamese government, which was also not a shining example of classical liberalism. But in the 1960s and 1970s, a number of opponents of the war tried to paint the Viet Cong as simple revolutionaries fighting to free their homeland. In fact, the war was as much about North Vietnam’s desire to reunite the country as it was about communism, and the north quickly marginalized the Viet Cong when they succeeded in defeating the south in 1975. The communist rulers of the reunited Vietnam proceeded to kill a lot of people, and sent a lot of people to camps for “re-education,” and generally

curtailed civil and economic liberties. Unless you were a diehard Marxist, these were not the good guys any more than the South Vietnamese government had been the good guys. Since then, while Vietnam's economy has since been liberalized, its political system has not. For example, journalists in Vietnam still get thrown for writing stories that are critical of the government.

Contrast El Salvador with Nicaragua, where at about the same time the U.S. pulled the plug on an oppressive, anti-communist dictator only to see a Marxist government take over and oppress different groups of people. This time the U.S. found itself supporting the rebels, while the new Nicaraguan government sought to limit civil and economic liberties of its citizens. One could argue that this was the right thing for them to do, or not. In any case, the resulting war eventually led to elections, and the somewhat Marxist Sandinistas were peacefully removed from power. an war; any close examination of the situation should have revealed a decided lack of white hats and good guys on either side. Again, the U.S. in this instance took a realist view of the situation and looked out for its own interests first. This happened even after Congress barred U.S. funding for the Contra rebels in Nicaragua; the Reagan administration began to secretly sell weapons to Iran, using the profits to fund the Contras. The U.S. ultimately got what it wanted—a non-Marxist government in Nicaragua—at a significant cost in human lives there.

The question remains, however, of how a “just person does justice” when justice is in short supply. So it can be a bit of a challenge to argue that foreign policy should be absolutely moral, because human beings can justify almost anything as moral. Any war probably looks like a just war to the people who are waging it. Granted, there is a line that we shouldn't cross. No sane person argues that something like the Holocaust is moral, and the assumptions that underlie arguments for “a just war” may be absurd. But what is unconscionable in one setting may appear necessary in another.

These are the kinds of choices policymakers face, although that doesn't mean that morality can't enter into their decisions. During the Bush administration, U.S. officials, working overseas in places such as the Guantanamo Naval Base in Cuba, used what amounted to torture to extract information from suspected terrorists being held there. International law forbids torture under any circumstances; Bush administration officials said it was justified so as to prevent further terrorist attacks on the U.S. In retrospect, many of the hundreds of detainees apparently were not terrorists, and the information gained from various forms of what amounted to torture was of questionable value. Bush administration officials argued otherwise, though the bulk of the evidence appears to be side with critics of the Guantanamo operation. It did put the U.S. the awkward position of appearing to ignore treaties, such as the Geneva Conventions, which protects the rights of war prisoners, to which the U.S. is a signee.

KEY TAKEAWAY

- Morality is not entirely absent as a concern in foreign policy, but can be difficult to define and apply.

EXERCISES

1. What do you think is justified in terms of foreign policy behavior? Are there situations where a state would be justified in taking extraordinary measures to protect its citizens?
2. To what extent should a powerful state such as the U.S. look out for itself first? Is that simply a wise policy, or simply a too-narrow definition of what U.S. interests are?

9.4 Post-Cold War International Relations

PLEASE NOTE: This book is currently in draft form; material is not final.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

In this section you will learn:

1. The role and function of intergovernmental organizations.
2. The role and function of actors outside of the formal state, such as non-governmental organizations and multinational corporations.

The end of the Cold War in the early 1990s changed the foreign policy equation radically. Gone, or at least greatly reduced, was the nuclear standoff between the United States and the Soviet Union. It has been replaced by a somewhat multipolar world, in which the United States is the dominant military power, but finds itself among competing power centers in Europe, China, India and Russia, with radical change occurring in the Middle East and North Africa, potential conflicts with Iran, and the threat of global terrorism a reality since the tragedies of 9-11.

So while this is a world still defined by anarchy, it is not a world that appears to sit on the edge of some version of World War III. The issues that define foreign policy may have more to do with resource allocation and environmental protection than with negotiating a nuclear standoff. So the end of the Cold War coincided with and perhaps accelerated the rise of other organizations who are now players in the field of international relations. While some of these institutions grew out of the end of World War II, their role in the world perhaps been magnified since the 1990s.

International Institutions

Even as the Cold War dragged on, the nations of the world created international forums for attempting to address disputes between nations. World War I, the war to end all wars, as it was known at the time, prompted the victors to create an international body known as the League of Nations. At its peak, it included 58 nations, and created a number of forums for addressing political and economic

issues. It lasted from 1920 to 1942, and suffered immediately from the failure of the United States to join. The U.S. became rather isolationist following World War I, the end of which created only an uneven peace and seemed to foster as many problems as it solved. Nonetheless, the league represented the high point of intrawar idealism, built on a belief that nations could talk instead of shoot, and that diplomacy would solve more problems than would bombs. Despite its best intentions, it was largely powerless, and the member nations failed to act when Italy invaded Italy unprovoked in 1935. The league effectively collapsed with the start of World War II.

Following the end of the war, however, the nations gathered to try it again, creating the **United Nations**¹⁸ in 1947. The U.N., headquartered in New York City, declared its support in its charter for a broad range of human rights, and attempted to provide a multilateral forum for talking things out. Although every member nation gets one vote, a certain number of decisions must be funneled through the 15-member Security Council, which consists of five permanent members, including the U.S., France, China, Russia and the United Kingdom. The other 10 members are elected by the General Assembly to two-year terms, with each region of the globe represented on the council.

The five permanent members each has veto power, and can block action by the council. And since the members are often taking what can only be described as a realist perspective on their approach to foreign policy, Russia may seek to block concerted action in war-torn Syria, where it has interests, just as the U.S. will block U.N. resolutions to condemn Israel's handling of the Palestinian question. Which is, in case you've missed it, whether there will ever be a fully sovereign Palestinian state. The Security Council's permanent membership is overwhelmingly white and western. One suggestion has been to add Brazil, India, Germany and Japan (sometimes called the G-4) as permanent members, plus perhaps one African and one Arab state. The existing permanent members haven't exactly jumped on that bandwagon, as doing so would reduce their power on the council. The U.S. supports adding Japan and perhaps India; the Chinese oppose adding Japan. Great Britain and France have supported adding the entire G-4.

The U.N., through its member nations and its various branches, has had some success. Member nations have contributed combat troops for peacekeeping missions, which attempt to separate belligerent groups in one country or region so as to forestall all-out war. It has in fact, since its inception, negotiated 172 peace settlements that have prevented all-out war in various parts of the world. U.N.-led efforts, via the World Health Organization, to stamp out various diseases have met with some success, as few nations will object to efforts to end deadly diseases such as smallpox. U.N. cultural efforts have probably also helped preserve important historical sites all over the world, and have at least underscored the importance of

18. Intergovernmental organization that seeks to promote peace and prosperity, settle disputes between nations, and provide alternatives to armed conflict.

preserving some of our shared past. So while the U.N. hasn't managed to end war, it has not been an abject failure.

The U.N. includes the International Court of Justice, which has been used to settle disputes between nations. It has 15 justices elected from the U.N. General Assembly, and while the Security Council has the ability to enforce its decisions, council members may also veto that action. Consequently, the court has acted with mixed success. In 1984, for example, the court ruled that U.S. efforts in Nicaragua in fact violated international law; the U.S. ignored the decision. In other instances, the court has been able to help solve border disputes between nations. Special courts also have been established by the U.N. to try war criminals from conflicts in Rwanda and the former Yugoslavia.

Other international organizations have had some impact globally, particularly in economic areas. The **World Bank**¹⁹ and the **International Monetary Fund**²⁰ have attempted to spur economic developments and end poverty, with decidedly mixed results. Critics abound on both the left and the right. Conservative critics say they waste too much money; liberal and left critics say it simply helps cement the economic dominance of the western world. Sometimes they fund projects that make sense, such as wastewater treatment projects around the world, while at other times, they support efforts, like digging a canal to flood a seasonal river in Africa to produce fish in the desert, manage only to produce the most expensive fish in the world. Similarly, the **World Trade Organization (WTO)**²¹, which is basically a forum for resolving trade disputes and for encouraging open trade, is neither all good nor all bad.

Not every **intergovernmental organization (IGO)**²² is global in scope. The world is peppered with regional organizations, ranging from the **European Union (EU)**²³ to the Organization for African Unity.

Figure 9.2 [To Come]: Intergovernmental Regional Organizations

The EU is particularly noteworthy. It grew out of the end of World War II, beginning with a customs union to ease trade between Belgium, the Netherlands and Luxembourg. From there it grew into trade agreements over coal and steel, to the European Common Market, and finally to the EU in 1993. It now has 27 member states in a political and economic union. While not quite the United States of Europe, it does have an elected parliament with the ability to make some common law for the entire group, and a common currency, the euro. Travel and trade over national borders is greatly eased, and crossing from one EU state to another is now little more complicated than crossing from one U.S. state to another.

19. An intergovernmental organization that seeks to help developing states through financial and technical assistance.

20. An intergovernmental organization that seeks to encourage monetary stability and economic growth.

21. Intergovernmental organization that attempts to set the terms of world trade, with the aim of encouraging free and open trade between nations.

22. Agreements between multiple states, globally or regionally, to cooperate on economic, political and/or military efforts.

23. Confederation of 27 states united for economic, political and military security.

No other intergovernmental organization is quite that extensive. For example, ASEAN, the Association of Southeast Asian Countries, has 10 member states and focuses on promoting economic development and shared expertise and resources. The **North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO)**²⁴ is a relic of the Cold War. Originally created to help forestall Soviet aggression in Europe, it remains a mutual defense pact between the U.S., Canada and much of Europe. An attack on one member is regarded as an attack on all, so that the U.S. response to 9.11 was in fact at NATO response.

To the extent that international institutions work at all, it is because nations adhere to what the institutions say. While a hard-line realist perspective would encourage ignoring the U.N. or the WTO, a liberal perspective would suggest that nations go along if only because it's in their interest for others to do the same. A nation can't very well expect another nation to observe the rule of law if it doesn't do so itself. International law therefore works because of reciprocity—each state expects the others to behave the same way, so it adheres to the law to encourage others to do the same.

Non-Governmental Organizations

Non-governmental organizations²⁵, or NGOs as they are often known, are essentially groups of citizens, often of multiple nationalities, who work together to try to achieve social change on a global scale. So in one way they are international interest groups, lobbying for change with the governments of the world. But they also often are groups who take action, working for better treatment for political prisoners (Amnesty International), better health care (Doctors Without Borders), or better access to clean water (Rotary International and WaterAid).

NGOs rely on moral suasion—compelling governments to do what is right and learning to see that as in their own self-interest. They also rely on fund-raising in wealthy countries so they can deliver services and help people in less-fortunate parts of the world. They can and do make a difference, from building schools in Ethiopia to providing clean drinking water in Angola and Bangladesh. Governments sometimes get unhappy with the representatives of NGOs and kick them out, but like a pesky wasp, they will try to come back when possible. In democratic states, NGOs take on the role of interest groups who then push for particular approaches to foreign policy.

Multinational Corporations

The largest companies on earth now span the globe. McDonald's has restaurants in 100 countries; Wal-Mart and its French counterpart, Carrefour, can be found around

24. Intergovernmental security alliance comprising 28 states, including the United States and much of Europe.

25. Groups of private citizens who work to change government policy and help people in various parts of the world.

the world. Ford builds cars in the U.S., Canada and Europe; General Motors models are produced in both Detroit and Shanghai. Airbus is attempting to circumvent competition with Boeing by building a plant in the U.S., and Toyota, Nissan and Honda have built cars in both the U.S. and Japan for nearly 30 years.

So, realistically, these companies and the people who run them owe their allegiance to no country in particular. They are merchant princes now, whose interests are scattered around the globe and whose reach is consequently that broad. This makes it harder for sovereign states to clamp down on their activities. The era of global capital means they are fluid and mobile. They can leave if they have to. Of course leaving a market entirely poses problems for sales, and the reason firms locate in multiple markets is to develop sales in those markets. But as the goal of those firms, as with most if not all firms, is to make a profit, they become political players in trying to get sovereign states to keep markets open and trade flowing, regardless of what other costs that might entail.

Multinational corporations²⁶ may move operations to nations with lower human rights or environmental standards; companies moved factories from the Philippines when that nation adopted more worker-friendly labor laws. On the other hand, rising standards of living and more wealth represented by those jobs tend to eventually put pressure on governments to improve human rights and environmental conditions, though that can take a long time.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- The post-World War II and post-Cold War eras have seen the rise of extra-governmental organizations, and intergovernmental organizations, as major players in international relations.

EXERCISE

1. Identify and research an NGO. What is this organization's objective? In what countries does it operate? What is its annual budget and where does it get its funding? Does it appear to be successful?

26. Firms whose operations are spread between different countries, and who therefore have an interest in international affairs, particularly trade policy.

9.5 The Nuclear Question, Revisited

PLEASE NOTE: This book is currently in draft form; material is not final.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

In this section you will learn:

1. How the nuclear question has changed but remains a feature of international relations.
2. The challenges of applying economic sanctions as an instrument of foreign policy.

Despite all that has changed in the last three decades, nuclear weapons issues persist into the 21st century. The nations that admittedly have nuclear weapons—the United States, China, Russia, Britain and France—have signed a nuclear non-proliferation treaty, in hopes that the weapons will not be spread elsewhere. Nonetheless, Israel has them and Iran is trying to develop them; North Korea has them although it lacks a consistent delivery system. India has them and so does its arch-rival Pakistan. And still, since their sole usage in World War II, nobody has used them in war.

In fact, weapons of mass destruction have never been used except against people who don't have them. Poison gas was used by both sides in the First World War. At the time it was the most horrible weapon ever devised. The Italians under Mussolini used them against Ethiopia when they conquered that country in 1935–36. So there was great fear that World War II would see renewed use of these weapons. And yet neither side did. In fact, at one point U.S. forces inadvertently fired gas-laden artillery shells at some Italian troops. They immediately contact the Italians and apologized, and there was no reprisal. They were not used again until Saddam Hussein used them against rebel Shiites and separatist Kurds who attempted to overthrow him following the First Gulf War in the early 1990s. Moreover, since the end of the Cold War, the number of nuclear weapons has declined from 65,000 in 1985 to under 25,000 at present.

Still, the prospect of a nuclear-armed Iran causes no small concern in the west. The Iranians claim their nuclear program is for energy generation only, although western analysts dispute this claim. The quixotic government of Iran, which combines democratic elements with an Islamic theocracy, makes no secret of its desire to wipe Israel off the map. Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad has said, among other things, that Iran's enemies are seeking to create drought in the country by destroying rain clouds before they reach Iran. He also has claimed that the Holocaust and the deaths of six million Jews never happened. Moreover, Iranian support for terrorist groups makes western leaders fear that they will give them a bomb, with resulting destruction that would make 9-11 seem trivial by comparison.

The realist perspective on this problem, which some conservative American and pro-Israeli politicians have advocated, would be to attack Iran and try to destroy its nuclear program. Allowing Iran to develop nuclear capabilities would not only allow it to attack Israel, a U.S. ally, but also to dominate its neighboring states and threaten the world's supply of oil. An Iran-Israel nuclear war would threaten to grow into a much broader conflict, with dire consequences for everyone, including the U.S.

The liberal approach would be necessarily different. The fact that Iran is a big country and that the nuclear program is spread all over it doesn't seem to deter the realist line of thinking, even as U.S. military leaders suggest we are very unlikely to take out all of their nuclear development sites. President Ronald Reagan once spoke of what he called "constructive engagement," by which we would work with another state to try to coax them along to where we want them. But while the Reagan administration advocated this approach with allies, such as South Africa, then non-communist but still driven by the racist policy of apartheid, the president and his advisers never seemed to try this with anyone they really disagreed with.

The advantage of constructive engagement—tempting and cajoling the other side into doing what you want them to do, as opposed to just trying to force them—is that it maintains the moral high ground for the U.S., and doesn't antagonize relations with most other Muslim states. So the liberal approach would be to talk first and shoot last, and hope it never comes to that.

President Barack Obama, in contrast to George W. Bush, tried this approach with Iran, and it's difficult to say what it achieved. Like North Korea, Iran's government seems intransigent when it comes to negotiations. And like North Korea, they may be using the threat of attack by western powers as a way of maintaining legitimacy in the eyes of a restive populace, including a lot of young people who have a hunger for western goods and culture and who don't march around shouting "Death to America!" Given that the Iranian regime's real goal may be something other than or

at least in addition to nuclear weapons, they may see it in their interests to continue the standoff with the U.S. and other western powers for the foreseeable future.

Part of the response of the west to Iran has been **economic sanctions**²⁷, by which states agree to suspend or limit trade in some or all goods with the targeted state. Sanctions are difficult to make work. First, they have to affect the leadership of the country. So Iranian voters would have to vote out the ruling factions in government, who then would change course for Iran's nuclear program. Given that religious authorities in Iran control who makes the ballot, this seems unlikely. For the most part, sanctions tend to hurt ordinary people more than they hurt governments. Sanctions also need to target third-party states, who may not be part of the sanctions effort and would prefer to continue trading with the target state. So while the U.S. the EU and a host of other nations have halted trade with Iran in everything from military hardware to oil equipment, Iran continues to trade with China. The sanctions on oil technology appear to be having some impact on the Iran's economy, but the Iranian government continues to drag its feet over its nuclear program. Multiple U.N. resolutions also have called upon Iran to give up the program, with little effect.

Does this mean this relatively liberal approach to Iran should be abandoned for military action? Not necessarily. Military action comes with its own costs, and wouldn't necessarily end Iran's nuclear ambitions. The combination of diplomatic pressure, economic sanctions and offers of economic aid may yet do the trick.

Contrast this with the approach to North Korea. One of the world's last communist states, it has nuclear weapons and an economy that is so bad its citizens face the constant threat of malnutrition and starvation. It has test-fired missiles over Japan, and still has occasional small-scale military clashes with South Korea. Three generations of rule by the Kim family have been maintained by rigorous control of public information, painting a picture that whichever Kim is in power is the only thing that stands between the people and annihilation by foreign powers (the United States). This further complicates negotiations with the north because pressure from the outside, and North Korea's resistance, helps cement the state's legitimacy at home. Consequently, the reason for the north to have nuclear weapons is precisely to invite the attention of foreign powers. Nonetheless, despite agreement among the Russians, Chinese, Americans, South Koreans and Japanese that the north should end its nuclear program, no one is threatening military action. The South Korean government favors reunification with the north, but is willing to wait for it to happen. Perhaps they think that North Korea's economy is so bad that the state will eventually collapse from within.

27. Restrictions on trade, often on military goods and other kinds of technology, by one more nations to force another nation to change its policies.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- The nature of nuclear weapons issues has changed since the end of the Cold War.
- Economic sanctions face certain challenges to be effective, but can have an impact on targeted nations if there is widespread compliance with the sanctions.

EXERCISE

1. What different approaches could be used in dealing with Iran or with North Korea? Which approach would you favor and why?

PLEASE NOTE: This book is currently in draft form; material is not final.