

Chapter 2

Realist Theories



Kyodo / AP Images

LIVE FIRE DRILLS NEAR DMZ, SOUTH KOREA, 2017.



Learning Objectives

- 2.1** Identify at least three assumptions of the theory of realism.
- 2.2** Describe two different ways to conceptualize and measure power.
- 2.3** Define anarchy and explain its importance in preventing international cooperation.
- 2.4** Explain the purpose of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) alliance and how the purpose has changed over the history of the alliance.
- 2.5** Describe the Prisoner's Dilemma game, and explain how it is an analogy for the international system.

2.1 Realism

Identify at least three assumptions of the theory of realism.

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

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

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

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

At roughly the same time, in Greece, *Thucydides* wrote an account of the Peloponnesian War (431–404 B.C.) focusing on relative power among the Greek city-states. He stated that “the strong do what they have the power to do and the weak accept what they have to accept.”¹ Much later, in Renaissance Italy (around 1500), *Niccolò Machiavelli* urged princes to concentrate on expedient actions to stay in power, including the manipulation of the public and military alliances. Today the adjective *Machiavellian* refers to excessively manipulative power maneuvers.

The English philosopher *Thomas Hobbes* in the seventeenth century discussed the free-for-all that exists when government is absent and people seek their own self-interests. He called it the “state of nature” or “state of war”—what we would now call the “law of the jungle” in contrast to the rule of law. Hobbes favored a strong monarchy (which he labeled a *Leviathan*) to tame this condition—essentially advocating a dominance approach to solve the collective goods problem in domestic societies. Realists see in these historical figures evidence that the importance of power politics is timeless and cross-cultural.

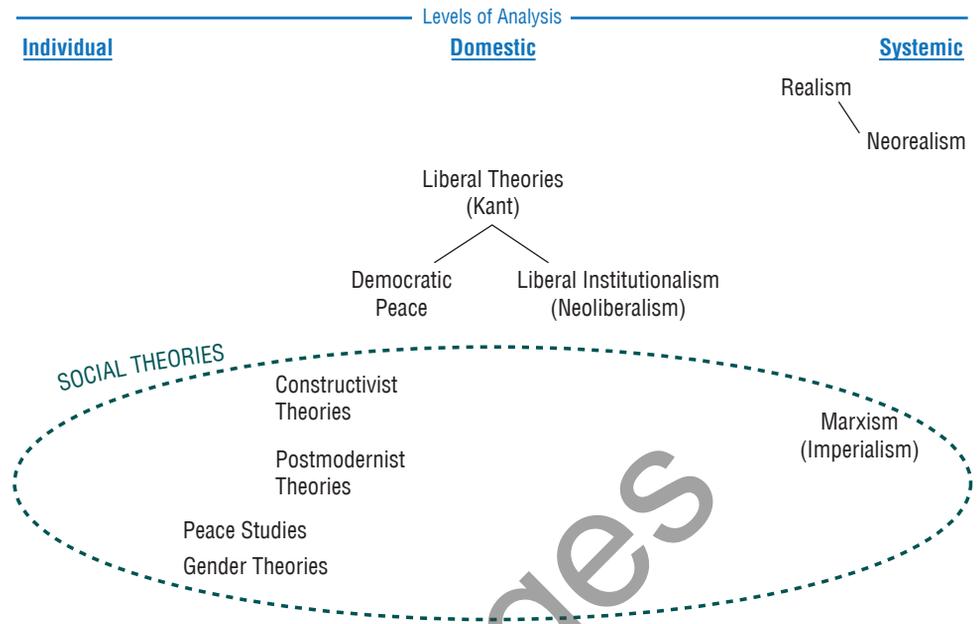
After World War II, scholar *Hans Morgenthau* argued that international politics is governed by objective, universal laws based on national interests defined in terms of power (not psychological motives of decision makers). He reasoned that no nation has “God on its side” (a universal morality) and that all nations have to base their actions

realism A broad intellectual tradition that explains international relations mainly in terms of power. See also *idealism* and *neorealism*.

idealism An approach that emphasizes international law, morality, and international organizations, rather than power alone, as key influences on international relations. See also *realism*.

¹ Thucydides. *History of the Peloponnesian War*. Translated by Rex Warner, With an Introd. and Notes by M.I. Finley. 1972, p. 402.

Figure 2.1 Theories of IR



on prudence and practicality. He opposed the Vietnam War, arguing in 1965 that a communist Vietnam would not harm U.S. national interests.

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

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

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

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

Table 2.1 Assumptions of Realism and Idealism

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

2.2 Power

Describe two different ways to conceptualize and measure power.

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

2.2.1 Defining Power

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

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

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

Measuring capabilities to explain how one state influences another is not simple, however. It requires summing up various kinds of potentials. States possess varying amounts of population, territory, military forces, and so forth. *The best single indicator of a state's power may be its total gross domestic product (GDP)*, which combines overall size, technological level, and wealth. But even GDP is at best a rough indicator, and economists do not even agree how to measure it. For example, most GDP figures in this book use traditional methods of computing GDP, but an alternative method gives GDP estimates that are, on average, about 50 percent lower for countries in the global North and about 50 percent higher for those in the global South, including China (see footnote 2 in Chapter 1). So GDP is a useful estimator of material capabilities but not a precise one.

Power also depends on nonmaterial elements. Capabilities give a state the potential to influence others only to the extent that political leaders can mobilize and deploy these capabilities effectively and strategically. This depends on national will, diplomatic skill, popular support for the government (its legitimacy), and so forth. Some scholars emphasize the *power of ideas*—the ability to maximize the influence of capabilities through a psychological process. This process includes the domestic mobilization of capabilities—often through religion, ideology, or (especially) nationalism. International influence is also gained by forming the rules of behavior to change how others see their own national interests. If a state's own values become widely shared among other states, it will easily influence others. This has been called *soft power*. For example, the United States has influenced many other states to accept the value of free markets and free trade.



Alexander Ryumin/ITAR-TASS News Agency/Alamy Stock Photo

PUTTING SALT IN THE WOUND Power is the ability to influence the behavior of others. Military force and economic sanctions are among the various means that states and nonstate actors use to try to influence each other. The European Union (EU) and the United States have levied several rounds of sanctions against Russia in the past five years to influence its policy toward Ukraine and to deter Russia from meddling in Western elections. In response, Russia has banned the import of goods from Europe and the United States, including salt. Here, a Russian shopper stocks up on salt before the ban goes into effect, 2017.

power The ability or potential to influence others' behavior, as measured by the possession of certain tangible and intangible characteristics.

Thus, dominance is not the only way to exert power (influence others). The core principles of reciprocity and (in the case of soft power) identity can also work. For example, a father who wants his toddler to stop screaming in a supermarket might threaten or actually administer a spanking (dominance), he might promise a candy bar at the checkout as a reward for good behavior (reciprocity), or he could invoke such themes as “Be a big boy/girl!” or “You want to help Daddy, don’t you?” (identity). Although realists emphasize dominance approaches, they acknowledge that states often achieve their interests in other ways. Furthermore, even realists recognize that power provides only a general understanding of outcomes. Real-world outcomes depend on many other elements, including accidents or luck.

Because power is a relational concept, a state can have power only relative to other states’ power. *Relative power* is the ratio of the power that two states can bring to bear against each other. What matters to realists is not whether a state’s capabilities are rising or declining in absolute terms, but only whether a state is falling behind or overtaking the capabilities of rival states. For example, India may be growing its military power quickly, but if rival China is expanding its military power at a faster rate, India may still find itself disadvantaged.

2.2.2 Estimating Power

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

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

Despite the decisive outcome of this lopsided conflict, the exercise of power always carries risks of unintended consequences. In 2012, ethnic fighters and Islamic militants who had fought for Gaddafi took large quantities of weapons and crossed the desert to northern Mali, where they seized control of half the country. In early 2013, France had to intervene militarily in Mali to stop them, and the Islamist militants crossed into Algeria, where they seized hundreds of foreign hostages at a gas facility and killed dozens of them when the Algerian army attacked. Moreover, the situation in Libya itself remained unstable. By 2018, competing groups claimed to rule Libya from different cities. Thus, a big GDP may help a country win a war, but it does not eliminate the elements of complexity and luck as situations evolve over the longer term.

2.2.3 Elements of Power

State power is a mix of many ingredients. Elements that an actor can draw on over the *long term* include total GDP, population, territory, geography, and natural resources. These attributes change only slowly. Less tangible long-term power resources include political culture, patriotism, education of the population, and strength of the scientific and technological base. The credibility of its commitments (reputation for keeping its

word) is also a long-term power base for a state. So is the ability of one state's culture and values to shape the thinking of other states consistently (the power of ideas).

The importance of long-term power resources was illustrated after the Japanese surprise attack on the U.S. fleet at Pearl Harbor in 1941, which decimated U.S. naval capabilities in the Pacific. In the short term, Japan had superior military power and was able to occupy territories in Southeast Asia while driving U.S. forces from the region. In the longer term, the United States had greater power resources due to its underlying economic potential. It built up military capabilities over the next few years that gradually matched and then overwhelmed those of Japan.

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

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

Realists tend to see *military force* as the most important element of national power in the short term, and other elements such as economic strength, diplomatic skill, or moral legitimacy as being important to the extent that they are fungible into military power. Yet, depending on the nature of the conflict in question, military power may be only one of many elements of power. Technological advancements, national endowment of natural resources, and even national will, can be important assets in international politics. Initially, in 2016, a slim majority of British voters supported Brexit and that profoundly changed the course of the European Union development, along with the U.S.-EU relations. Control over the 5G telecommunications technology and hardware is currently being fought between the U.S. and China. Morality can contribute to power by increasing the will to use power and by attracting allies. States have long clothed their actions, however aggressive, in rhetoric about their peaceful and defensive intentions. For instance, the 1989 U.S. invasion of Panama was named "Operation



Wally Santana/AP Images

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

²Sanger, David. A Handpicked Team for a Sweeping Shift in Foreign Policy. *New York Times*, December 1, 2008. Lamothe, Dan. Retired Generals Cite Past Comments from Mattis Opposing Trump's Proposed Foreign Aid Cuts. *Washington Post*, February 27, 2017: A9.

geopolitics The use of geography as an element of power, and the ideas about it held by political leaders and scholars.

Just Cause.” Of course, if a state uses moralistic rhetoric to cloak self-interest too often, it loses credibility even with its own population.

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

2.3 The International System

Define anarchy and explain its importance in preventing international cooperation.

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

2.3.1 Anarchy and Sovereignty

anarchy In IR theory, a term that implies not complete chaos but the lack of a central government that can enforce rules.

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

Some people think that only a world government can solve this problem. Others think that adequate order, short of world government, can be provided by international organizations and agreements (see Chapter 7). But most realists think that IR cannot escape from a state of anarchy and will continue to be dangerous as a result. In this anarchic world, realists emphasize prudence as a great virtue in foreign policy. Thus, states should pay attention not to the *intentions* of other states but rather to their *capabilities*.

norms The shared expectations about what behavior is considered proper.

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

sovereignty A state’s right, at least in principle, to do whatever it wants within its own territory; traditionally, sovereignty is the most important international norm.

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

The lack of a “world police” to punish states if they break an agreement makes enforcement of international agreements difficult. For example, in the 1990s, North Korea announced it would no longer allow inspections of its nuclear facilities by other states, which put it in violation of the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT). The international community used a mix of positive incentives and threats to persuade North Korea to stop producing nuclear material. But in 2002, North Korea withdrew from the NPT and built perhaps a half dozen nuclear bombs, one of which it exploded in 2006 (the world’s first nuclear test in a decade). After reaching an agreement with the United States to stop producing nuclear weapons in 2008, North Korea refused to allow physical inspection of some of its nuclear facilities, noting that “it is an act of infringing upon sovereignty.”³ North Korea continued to work on its nuclear program and missile delivery systems in the years following, conducting more tests of both in 2016 and 2017. These examples show the difficulty of enforcing international norms in the sovereignty-based international system.

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

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

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

States have developed norms of diplomacy to facilitate their interactions. An embassy is treated as though it were the territory of the home state, not the country where it is located (see Chapter 4). For instance, in 2012, when Ecuador’s embassy in Britain harbored the founder of WikiLeaks, who had been ordered extradited to Sweden, British authorities did not simply come in and take him away. To do so would have violated Ecuador’s territorial integrity. Yet in 1979, Iranian students took over the U.S. embassy in Iran, holding many of its diplomats hostage for 444 days—an episode that has soured U.S.-Iranian relations ever since.



Bastian / Agencja Fotograficzna Caro / Alamy Stock Photo

PASSPORT PLEASE Sovereignty and territorial integrity are central norms governing the behavior of states. Terrorism and secessionist movements present two challenges to these norms, but the world’s mostly stable borders uphold them. Every day, millions of people cross international borders, mostly legally and peacefully, respecting states’ territorial integrity. Here, hundreds of Ukrainians line up to enter Poland on the first day that a visa requirement for travel between Ukraine and the EU was eliminated, 2017.

³ *BBC News Online*. (November 12, 2008). N Korea rejects nuclear sampling.

security dilemma A situation in which actions that states take to ensure their own security (such as deploying more military forces) are perceived as threats to the security of other states.

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

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

The security dilemma is a negative consequence of anarchy in the international system. If a world government could reliably detect and punish aggressors who arm themselves, states would not need to guard against this possibility. Yet the self-help system requires that states prepare for the worst. Realists tend to see the dilemma as unsolvable, whereas liberals think it can be solved through the development of institutions (see Chapters 3 and 7).

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

2.3.2 Balance of Power

balance of power The general concept of the power of one or more states being used to balance that of another state or group of states. The term can refer to (1) any ratio of power capabilities between states or alliances, (2) a relatively equal ratio, or (3) the process by which counterbalancing coalitions have repeatedly formed to prevent one state from conquering an entire region.

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

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

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

But states do not always balance against the strongest actor. Sometimes smaller states "jump on the bandwagon" of the most powerful state; this has been called *bandwagoning* as opposed to balancing. For instance, after World War II, a broad coalition did not form to contain U.S. power; rather, most major states joined the U.S. bloc. States may seek to balance threats rather than raw power. For example, U.S. power

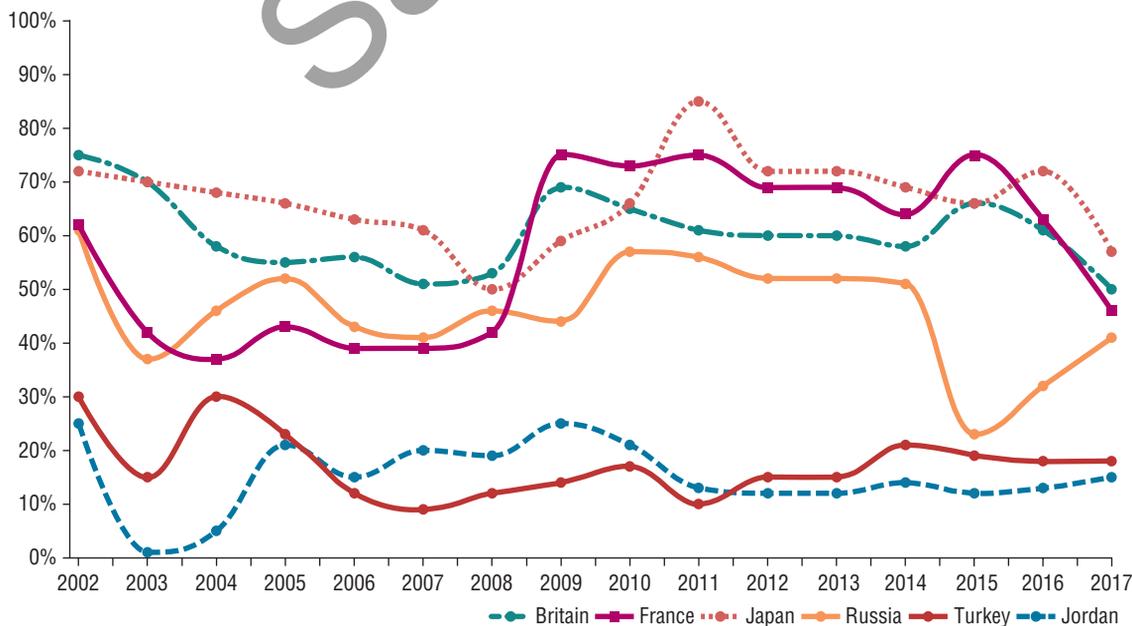
was greater than Soviet power but was less threatening to Europe and Japan (and later to China as well). Furthermore, small states create variations on power-balancing themes when they play rival great powers against each other. For instance, Cuba during the Cold War received massive Soviet subsidies by putting itself in the middle of the U.S.-Soviet rivalry. Other small states may, for domestic reasons, fail to mobilize to balance against threats.

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

World public opinion also reflects shifts in the balance of power (See the Public Opinion and International Relations feature). As the 2003 Iraq War began, widespread anti-American sentiment revealed itself in Muslim countries. In Indonesia, Pakistan, Turkey, and Nigeria—containing half of the world’s Muslims—more than 70 percent worried that the United States could become a threat to their own countries, a worry shared by 71 percent of Russians. A survey of 38,000 people in 44 nations showed a dramatic drop in support for the United States from 2002 to 2003. As Figure 2.2 illustrates, this decline in favorable views of the United States worldwide continued through 2007. Then after 2008, with the United States seeking to exit its wars and exert its power less forcefully around the world, opinions turned upward. More recently, views of the United States have moved wildly in some states (Russia) but have started to decline since 2016 in states traditionally friendly to the United States. These shifts in public opinion can be both a cause and an effect in international politics. Public opinion can make the governments in those countries more or less likely to cooperate with the United States on the world stage, and public opinion in these countries can change based on whether there is cooperation (or hostility) with the United States.

Figure 2.2 Views of the United States in Six Countries, 2002–2017
(Percent favorable view in public opinion polls)

Source: Pew Global Attitudes Project. 2000 data from State Department surveys.



great powers Generally, the half dozen or so most powerful states; the great power club was exclusively European until the twentieth century. See also *middle powers*.

2.3.3 Great Powers and Middle Powers

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

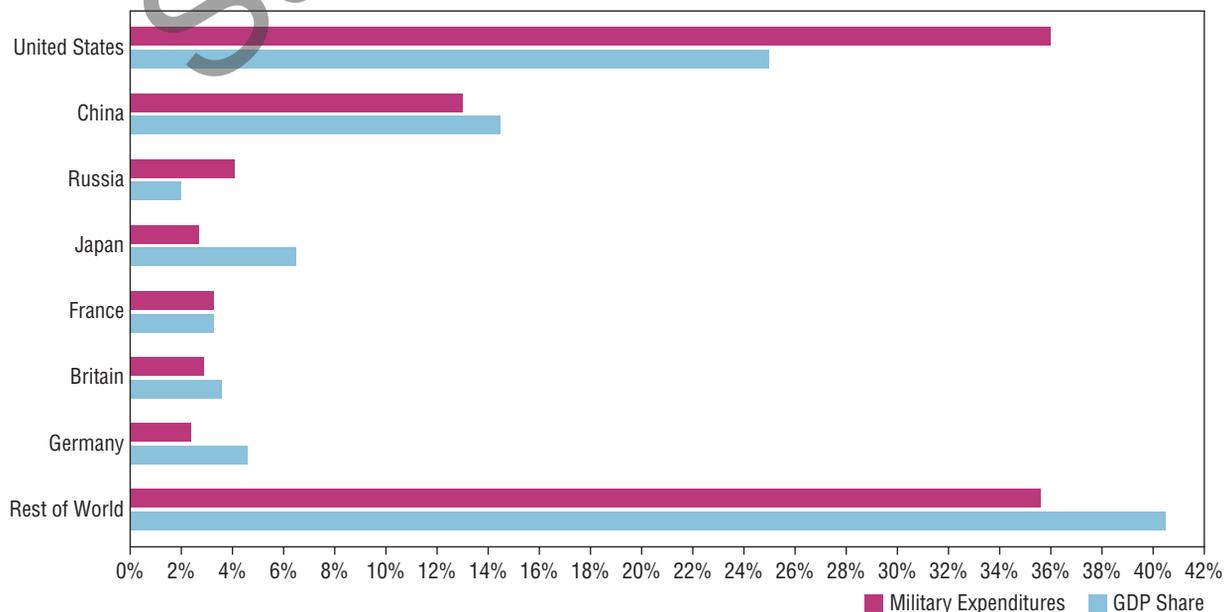
The great powers generally have the world's strongest military forces—and the strongest economies to pay for them—and other power capabilities. These large economies in turn rest on some combination of large populations, plentiful natural resources, advanced technology, and educated labor forces. Because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

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

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

Figure 2.3 Great Power Shares of World GDP, 2017, and Military Expenditures, 2016

Data Sources: World Bank Development Indicators, 2017; SIPRI Yearbook, 2016.



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

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

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

2.3.4 Power Distribution

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

Neorealism, sometimes called *structural realism*, is a 1980s adaptation of realism. It explains patterns of international events in terms of the system structure—the international distribution of power—rather than in terms of the internal makeup of individual states. Compared to traditional realism, neorealism is more “scientific” in the sense of proposing general laws to explain events, but neorealism has lost some of the richness of traditional realism, which took account of many complex elements (geography, political will, diplomacy, etc.). Recently, *neoclassical realists* have sought to restore some of these lost aspects.

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

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

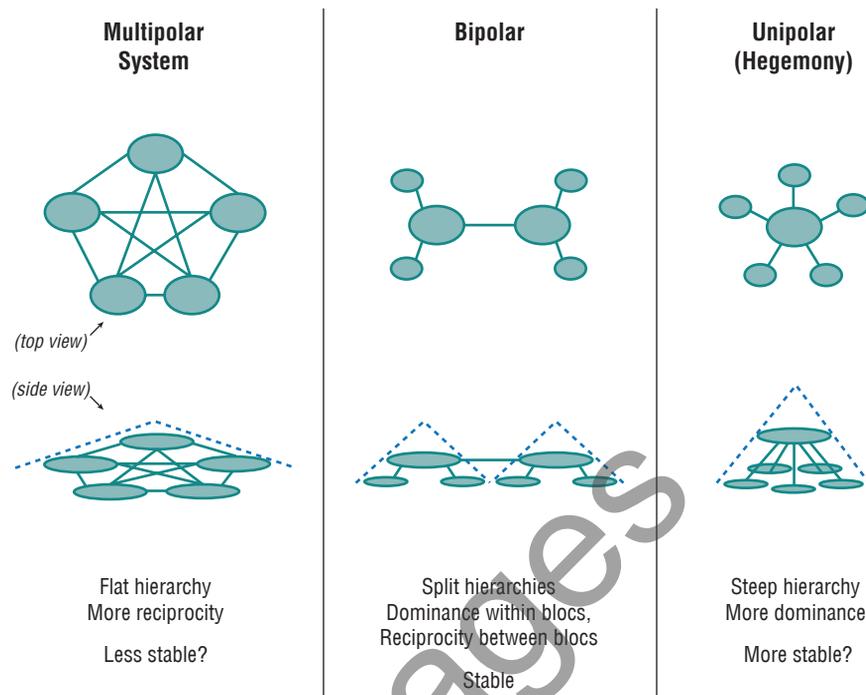
Tripolar systems, with three great centers of power, are fairly rare because of the tendency for a two-against-one alliance to form. Aspects of tripolarity colored the “strategic triangle” of the United States, the Soviet Union, and China during the 1960s and 1970s. Some scholars imagine a future tripolar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

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

middle powers States that rank somewhat below the great powers in terms of their influence on world affairs (for example, Brazil and India). See also *great powers*.

neorealism A version of realist theory that emphasizes the influence on state behavior of the system's structure, especially the international distribution of power. See also *realism*.

multipolar system An international system with typically five or six centers of power that are not grouped into alliances.

Figure 2.4 Power Distribution in the International System

proposition has more support: Peace is best preserved by hegemony (unipolarity), and it is preserved next best by bipolarity.

power transition theory A theory that the largest wars result from challenges to the top position in the status hierarchy, when a rising power is surpassing (or threatening to surpass) the most powerful state.

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

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

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

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

hegemony The holding by one state of a preponderance of power in the international system so that it can single-handedly dominate the rules and arrangements by which international political and economic relations are conducted. See also *hegemonic stability theory*.

2.3.5 Hegemony

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

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

Most studies of hegemony point to two examples: Britain in the nineteenth century and the United States after World War II. Britain's predominance followed the defeat of its archrival France in the Napoleonic Wars. Both world trade and naval capabilities were firmly in British hands, as "Britannia ruled the waves." U.S. predominance followed the defeat of Germany and Japan (and the exhaustion of the Soviet Union, France, Britain, and China in the effort). In the late 1940s, the U.S. GDP was more than half the world's total, U.S. vessels carried the majority of the world's shipping, the U.S. military could single-handedly defeat any other state or combination of states, and only the United States had nuclear weapons. U.S. industry led the world in technology and productivity, and U.S. citizens enjoyed the world's highest standard of living.

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

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

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

Why should a hegemon care about enforcing rules for the international economy that are for the common good? According to hegemonic stability theory, hegemons as the largest international traders have an inherent interest in the promotion of integrated world markets (where the hegemons will tend to dominate). As the most



Jun Nakayama/Yomiuri Shimbun/AP Images

CHINA RISING Realists emphasize relative power as an explanation of war and peace. The modernization of China's military—in conjunction with China's rapidly growing economy—will increase China's power over the coming decades. Some observers fear instability in Asia if the overall balance of power among states in the region shifts rapidly. Here, Chinese citizens celebrate China's second aircraft carrier, 2017.

hegemonic stability theory The argument that regimes are most effective when power in the international system is most concentrated. See also *hegemony*.

advanced state in productivity and technology, a hegemon does not fear competition from industries in other states; it fears only that its own superior goods will be excluded from competing in other states. Thus, hegemony uses its power to achieve free trade and the political stability that supports free trade. Hegemony, then, offers both the ability and the motivation to provide a stable political framework for free international trade, according to hegemonic stability theory. Yet not all IR scholars accept this theory.

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

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

Internationalists, such as Presidents Theodore Roosevelt and Woodrow Wilson, favored U.S. leadership and activism in world affairs. These views seemed vindicated by the failure of isolationism to prevent or avoid World War II. U.S. leaders after that war feared Soviet (and then Chinese) communism and pushed U.S. public opinion toward a strong internationalism during the Cold War. The United States became an

activist, global superpower. In the post-Cold War era, U.S. internationalism was tempered by a new cost consciousness, and by the emergence of a new isolationist camp born in reaction to the displacements caused by globalization and free trade. However, the terrorist attacks of September 2001 renewed public support for U.S. interventionism in distant conflicts that no longer seemed so distant. Recently, though, opposition to the Iraq War, a protracted conflict in Afghanistan, and difficult economic times at home have spurred a new isolationist trend in the United States. This trend culminated in the election of President Donald Trump, who promised to prioritize American interests at the expense of adversaries and allies alike.

A second area of U.S. ambivalence is *unilateralism* versus *multilateralism* when the United States does engage internationally. Multilateral approaches—working through international institutions—augment U.S. power and reduce costs, but they limit U.S. freedom of action. For example, the United States cannot always get



Matt Rourke / AP Images

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

the UN to do what it wants. Polls show that a majority of U.S. citizens support working through the UN and other multilateral institutions. In the 1990s, the United States slipped more than \$1 billion behind in its dues to the UN, and it declined to participate in international efforts such as a treaty on global warming (Chapter 11), a conference on racism, and an International Criminal Court (see Chapter 7). The 2003 U.S.-led war in Iraq, with few allies and no UN stamp of approval, was a strong expression of U.S. unilateralism.

This changed in the late 2000s, however, as the Barack Obama administration emphasized multilateral approaches to international conflicts such as those in Libya, Syria, and Iran. The NATO alliance assumed new importance in Afghanistan and in the 2011 Libya campaign, and UN dues were repaid. However, members of the U.S. Congress (in growing numbers since the 1990s) and the Donald Trump administration have consistently expressed skepticism about the UN and about international agencies, generally favoring a more unilateralist approach. In fact, the Trump administration quickly implemented more unilateralist policies once in office: withdrawing the United States from a global climate treaty (see Chapter 11), leaving a recently negotiated preferential trade agreement (the Trans-Pacific Partnership), withdrawing the United States from a major UN body (UNESCO), threatening friends and allies with trade tariffs, and criticizing NATO allies for paying too little for American military protection.

2.3.6 The Great Power System, 1500–2000

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

This power-balancing system placed special importance on the handful of great powers with strong military capabilities, global interests and outlooks, and intense interactions with each other. (Great powers are defined and discussed in Chapter 1.) A system of great power relations has existed since around A.D. 1500, and the structure and rules of that system have remained fairly stable through time, although the particular members have changed. The structure is a balance of power among the six or so most powerful states, which form and break alliances, fight wars, and make peace, letting no single state conquer the others.

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

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

Figure 2.5 The Great Power System, 1500–2000

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

but were generally allowed to continue as independent states rather than being subsumed into the victorious state.

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

By the outset of the twentieth century, three new rising powers had appeared on the scene: the United States (which had become the world's largest economy), Japan, and Italy. The great power system became globalized instead of European. Powerful states were industrializing, extending the scope of their world activities and the might of their militaries. After Prussia defeated Austria and France in wars, a larger Germany emerged to challenge Britain's position. In *World War I* (1914–1918), Germany, Austria-Hungary, and the Ottoman Empire were defeated by a coalition that included Britain, France, Russia, Italy, and the United States. After a 20-year lull, Germany, Italy, and Japan were defeated in *World War II* (1939–1945) by a coalition of the United States, Britain, France, Russia (the Soviet Union), and China. Those five winners of World War II make up the permanent membership of today's UN Security Council.

After World War II, the United States and the Soviet Union, which had been allies in the war against Germany, became adversaries for 40 years in the Cold War. Europe was split into rival blocs—East and West—with Germany divided into two states. The rest of the world became contested terrain where each bloc tried to gain allies or influence, often by sponsoring opposing sides in regional and civil wars. The end of the Cold War around 1990, when the Soviet Union collapsed, returned the international system to a more cooperative arrangement of the great powers somewhat similar to the Concert of Europe in the nineteenth century.

2.4 Alliances

Explain the purpose of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) alliance and how the purpose has changed over the history of the alliance.

An *alliance* is a coalition of states that coordinate their actions to accomplish some end. Most alliances are formalized in written treaties, concern a common threat and related issues of international security, and endure across a range of issues and a period of time. Shorter-term arrangements, such as the U.S.-led forces in Iraq, may be called a *coalition*. But these terms are somewhat ambiguous. Two countries may have a formal alliance and yet be bitter enemies, such as the Soviet Union and China in the 1960s or NATO members Greece and Turkey today. Or two countries may create the practical equivalent of an alliance without a formal treaty.

2.4.1 Purposes of Alliances

Alliances generally have the purpose of augmenting their members' power by pooling capabilities. For smaller states, alliances can be their most important power element, and for great powers the structure of alliances shapes the configuration of power in the system. Of all the elements of power, none can change as quickly and



Chris Hondros/Getty Images

MARRIAGE OF CONVENIENCE Alliances generally result from a convergence of practical interests, not sentimental or ideological reasons. Here, a U.S. general gets rival Afghan warlords to patch up relations, 2002.

alliance cohesion The ease with which the members hold together an alliance; it tends to be high when national interests converge and when cooperation among allies becomes institutionalized.

burden sharing The distribution of the costs of an alliance among members; the term also refers to the conflicts that may arise over such distribution.

decisively as alliances. Most alliances form in response to a perceived threat. When a state's power grows and threatens that of its rivals, the latter often form an alliance to limit that power. This happened to Iraq when it invaded Kuwait in 1990, as it had to Hitler's Germany in the 1940s and to Napoleon's France in the 1800s.

Realists emphasize the fluidity of alliances. They are not marriages of love but marriages of convenience. Alliances are based on national interests and can shift as national interests change. This fluidity helps the balance-of-power process operate effectively. Still, it is not simple or costless to break an alliance: One's reputation may suffer, and future alliances may be harder to establish. So states often adhere to alliance terms even when it is not in their short-term interest to do so. Nonetheless, because of the nature of international anarchy, the possibility of turning against a friend is always

present. Realists would agree with the British statesman Lord Palmerston, who told Parliament in 1848, "We have no eternal allies and we have no perpetual enemies. Our interests are perpetual and eternal and those interests it is our duty to follow."⁴

Examples of fluid alliances are many. Anticommunist Richard Nixon could cooperate with communist Mao Zedong in 1972. Joseph Stalin could sign a nonaggression pact with a fascist, Adolf Hitler, and then cooperate with the capitalist West against Hitler. The United States could back Islamic militants in Afghanistan against the Soviet Union in the 1980s, then attack them in 2001. Every time history brings another such reversal in international alignments, many people are surprised. Realists are not so surprised.

The fluidity of alliances deepens the security dilemma. If there were only two states, each could match capabilities to have adequate defense but an inability to attack successfully. But if a third state is free to ally with either side, then each state has to build adequate defenses against the potential alliance of its enemy with the third state. The threat is greater and the security dilemma is harder to escape.

Alliance cohesion is the ease with which the members hold together an alliance. Cohesion tends to be high when national interests converge and when cooperation within the alliance becomes institutionalized and habitual. When states with divergent interests form an alliance against a common enemy, the alliance may come apart if the threat subsides (as with the U.S.-Soviet alliance in World War II, for instance). Even when alliance cohesion is high, as in NATO during the Cold War, conflicts may arise over who bears the costs of the alliance (**burden sharing**).

Great powers often form alliances (or less formal commitments) with smaller states, sometimes called client states. *Extended deterrence* refers to a strong state's use of threats to deter attacks on weaker clients—such as the U.S. threat to attack the Soviet Union if it invaded Western Europe. Great powers face a real danger of being dragged into wars with each other over relatively unimportant regional issues if their respective clients go to war. If the great powers do not come to their clients' aid, they may lose credibility with other clients, but if they do, they may end up fighting a costly war. The Soviet Union worried that its commitments to China in the 1950s, to Cuba in

⁴Remarks in the House of Commons, March 1, 1848.

the 1960s, and to Syria and Egypt in the 1970s (among others) could result in a disastrous war with the United States.

2.4.2 NATO

At present, two important formal alliances dominate the international security scene. By far the more powerful is the **North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO)**, which encompasses Western Europe and North America. (The second is the U.S.-Japanese alliance.) Using GDP as a measure of power, the 29 NATO members possess nearly half the world total. Members are the United States, Canada, Britain, France, Germany, Italy, Belgium, the Netherlands, Luxembourg, Denmark, Norway, Iceland, Spain, Portugal, Greece, Turkey, Poland, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Lithuania, Estonia, Latvia, Slovenia, Slovakia, Bulgaria, Romania, Albania, Croatia, and Montenegro. At NATO headquarters in Brussels, Belgium, military staff members from the member countries coordinate plans and periodically direct exercises in the field. The NATO *allied supreme commander* has always been a U.S. general. In NATO, each state contributes its own military units—with its own national culture, language, and equipment specifications.

NATO was founded in 1949 to oppose and deter Soviet power in Europe. Its counterpart in Eastern Europe during the Cold War, the Soviet-led **Warsaw Pact**, was founded in 1955 and disbanded in 1991. During the Cold War, the United States maintained more than 300,000 troops in Europe, with advanced planes, tanks, and other equipment. After the Cold War ended, these forces were cut to about 100,000. But NATO stayed together because its members believed that NATO provided useful stability even though its mission was unclear. Article V, considered the heart of NATO, asks members to come to the defense of a fellow member under attack. It was envisioned as a U.S. commitment to help defend Western Europe against the Soviet Union, but instead was invoked for the first time when Europe came to the defense of the United States after the terrorist attacks in 2001.

The first actual use of force by NATO was in Bosnia in 1994, in support of the UN mission there. A “dual key” arrangement gave the UN control of NATO’s actions in Bosnia, and the UN feared retaliation against its lightly armed peacekeepers should NATO attack the Serbian forces to protect Bosnian civilians. As a result, NATO made threats, underlined by symbolic airstrikes, but then backed down after UN qualms; this waffling undermined NATO’s credibility. Later, NATO actions in the Balkans (the air war for Kosovo in 1999 and peacekeeping in Macedonia in 2001) went more smoothly in terms of alliance cohesion.

NATO’s intervention in Libya in 2011 also proved effective when air power turned the tide of the rebel war that overthrew Libya’s dictator. With UN Security Council and Arab League backing for a no-fly zone, and European countries providing most of the combat planes, NATO rated the operation a great success.

Currently, NATO troops from a number of member countries are fighting Taliban forces in Afghanistan. From 2003 to 2014, these forces, known as the International Security Assistance Forces (ISAF), were under NATO leadership. At its height (between 2010 and 2012), over 100,000 troops served in the ISAF, with NATO states providing the bulk of the forces. Non-NATO states, such as Australia, New Zealand, and Jordan, have also contributed troops to ISAF. In 2015, the ISAF mission formally ended and the Resolute Support mission replaced it. The charge of this new mission was to provide support for Afghanistan’s own military forces, and the number of troops fell to around 13,000, with most troops again provided by NATO countries (see the Seeking the Collective Good box).

The European Union has formed its own rapid deployment force, outside NATO. The decision grew in part from European military weaknesses demonstrated in the 1999 Kosovo war, in which the United States contributed the most power by far.

North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) A U.S.-led military alliance, formed in 1949 with mainly Western European members, to oppose and deter Soviet power in Europe. It is currently expanding into the former Soviet bloc. See also *Warsaw Pact*.

Warsaw Pact A Soviet-led Eastern European military alliance founded in 1955 and disbanded in 1991. It opposed the NATO alliance. See also *North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO)*.

Public Opinion and International Relations

Public Opinion and ICAN

In 2019, a new YouGov poll commissioned by the International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons (ICAN) has found a stark rejection of nuclear weapons in the four EU states which host U.S. nuclear weapons on their soil: Belgium, Germany, Italy, and the Netherlands, as depicted in figure 2.6. The Europeans who would be on the frontline for a potential nuclear attack strongly reject nuclear weapons and support their governments joining the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons. When the public speaks, politicians listen and act accordingly. This applies in arms control, especially for nuclear weapons. It is worth looking back to the history to see how anti-nuclear weapons sentiment has taken shape.

The Nuclear Freeze campaign was a mass movement in the United States during the 1980s to demand the two superpowers, the U.S. and Soviet Union, to halt any activities with nuclear weapons. The movement quickly gained enormous public support and, together with antinuclear allies abroad, played a key role in curbing the nuclear arms race and preventing nuclear war. In the early 1980s, the Nuclear Freeze movement was prominent in the news and it scored numerous political victories. State and federal legislators passed

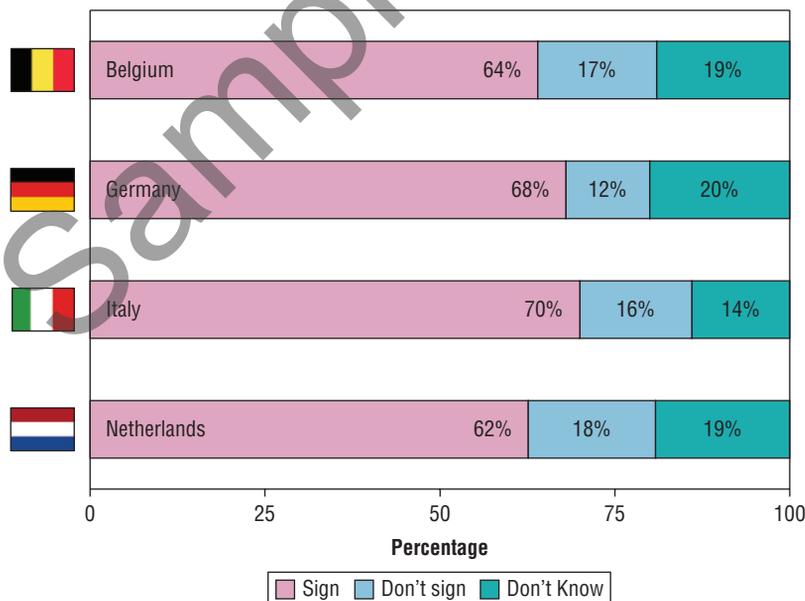
resolutions in support of the Freeze campaign. Public opinion polls played a major role in the debate, as the media and Freeze advocates cited numerous polls indicating overwhelming public support for the initiative. However, while Americans expressed strong support for the basic concept of a freeze, they doubted that a complete freeze agreement was politically and militarily possible. The public was also skeptical that the Soviet Union genuinely supported such an agreement.

Although the Freeze campaign ultimately failed in its primary objectives, the Reagan administration was forced to abandon hostile rhetoric and make substantive proposals on arms control—or continue to face a domestic backlash with potential electoral repercussions. The result of this work forces historians to reconsider the importance of peace movements in relationship to the end of the Cold War. In short, it is the people who have the final say in the world affairs close to their hearts.

Sources: J. Michael Hogan and Ted J. Smith III. *Polling on the Issues: Public Opinion and the Nuclear Freeze. The Public Opinion Quarterly*. Vol. 55, No. 4 (Winter, 1991), pp. 534–569
Maar, Henry Richard. *The Challenge of Peace: Ronald Reagan, Public Opinion, and the Movement to Freeze the Arms Race. Ph.D. Dissertation, University of California, Santa Barbara, 2015.*

Figure 2.6 European Public Opinion Toward Nuclear Disarmament

Source: The International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons (ICAN), 2019.



Seeking the Collective Good

NATO in Afghanistan

COLLECTIVE GOOD: Defeating the Taliban in Afghanistan

BACKGROUND: After the terrorist attacks in 2001, NATO member states pledged their assistance in fighting the forces of al Qaeda and its Taliban protectors in Afghanistan. Countries formed the multinational International Security Assistance Forces (ISAF), made up of mostly NATO troops deployed in Afghanistan. The forces' goals were to provide security for the fledgling Afghan government, train a new military, and build political institutions to prevent the Taliban from retaking power. Although the ISAF formally came to an end in 2015, Operation Resolute Support replaced it. Like that of the ISAF, the goal of Resolute Support is to help provide support and security in Afghanistan.

Getting an adequate force to prevail in Afghanistan is a collective good. Providing troops and equipment for Resolute Support is voluntary on the part of NATO members. Regardless of how many troops the different countries send, they share equally the benefit of a stable Afghanistan. But if too many countries are too stingy in contributing, the overall force will be too small and the goal will not be achieved, potentially leading to the reemergence of the Taliban or other extremist groups.

CHALLENGE: After more than 15 years, the war in Afghanistan is still active, but NATO forces remain, even if in smaller numbers. The war became a controversial political issue in nearly every country contributing troops to ISAF. Pro-Taliban forces have continued to carry out widespread attacks and threaten to undermine the progress made to date.

At the height of the conflict, NATO members became stingy in committing troops. Both the Bush and Obama administrations pressured allies to send more troops and money, but with limited results. In the 2010 “surge,” America added 30,000 troops and other NATO members only 10,000. The allies faced limits because of the war's eventual unpopularity, budget pressures because of the global recession, and uncertain prospects



Rui Vieira/AP Images

Funeral of a British soldier killed in Afghanistan, 2013.

for victory. Most notably, in 2010, the sitting Dutch government lost an election when it tried to keep troops in Afghanistan.

SOLUTION: In theory, NATO operates on reciprocity—its members are equals with all contributing to the common good. The members also share an identity as Western democracies fighting violent religious terrorists. But in the hard currency of boots on the ground and flag-draped coffins coming home, not enough NATO members found these reasons compelling.

The solution to the collective goods problem in this case was for the dominant power to provide the good. NATO is not really a club of equals but a hierarchy, with one member having more military might than the others combined. Being on top of a dominance hierarchy does not just mean ordering around underlings. Often the actors best able to stay on top of a hierarchy are those who form alliances well and use power and wealth to keep other members loyal.

Although this Eurocorps generally works with NATO, it also gives Europe more independence from the United States. In 2003, the European Union sent military forces as peacekeepers to Democratic Congo—the first multinational European military operation to occur outside NATO. In 2004, NATO and U.S. forces withdrew from Bosnia after nine years, turning over peacekeeping there to the European Union (as they had in Macedonia). But NATO forces including U.S. soldiers remain next door in Kosovo.

The biggest issue for NATO is its recent eastward expansion, beyond the East-West Cold War dividing line (see Figure 2.7). In 1999, former Soviet bloc countries Poland, the Czech Republic, and Hungary joined the alliance. Joining in 2004 were Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Romania, and Bulgaria. In 2009, Albania and Croatia accepted membership in NATO, and in 2017, Montenegro became the twenty-ninth state to join. Georgia, Bosnia, and Macedonia all aspire to join NATO in the future. Making the new members' militaries compatible with NATO is a major undertaking, requiring increased military spending by existing and new NATO members. NATO expansion was justified both as a way to solidify new democracies and as



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ALLIANCE OF THE STRONG The NATO alliance has been the world's strongest military force since 1949; its mission in the post-Cold War era is somewhat uncertain. Here, President Kennedy reviews U.S. forces in Germany, 1963.

protection against possible future Russian aggression. Yet the 2003 Iraq War bypassed and divided NATO members. Longtime members France and Germany strongly opposed the war, and Turkey refused to let U.S. ground forces cross into Iraq. At the same time, U.S. leaders began shifting some operations (and money) to new members in Eastern Europe such as Romania—with lower prices and a location closer to the Middle East—while drawing down forces based in Germany.

Russian leaders oppose NATO's expansion into Eastern Europe as aggressive and anti-Russian. They view NATO expansion as reasserting dividing lines on the map of Europe but pushed closer to Russia's borders. These fears strengthen nationalist and anti-Western political forces in Russia. To mitigate the problems, NATO created a category

of symbolic membership—the Partnership for Peace—which almost all Eastern European and former Soviet states including Russia joined. However, the 1999 NATO bombing of Serbia heightened Russian fears regarding NATO's eastward expansion. More recently, NATO cooperation with Ukraine and Georgia, the latter of which fought a short war against Russia in 2008, has also angered Russia. Tensions between Russia and NATO have run high since Russia's 2014 annexation of Crimea and its support of rebels in eastern Ukraine. In response to NATO expansion, Russia has expanded its own military cooperation with states such as Venezuela, a government critical of U.S. foreign policy, and China, with whom it conducts joint military exercises, including near the Baltic states and near North Korea in 2017. In 2016, Russia moved quickly to protect the Syrian government, a longtime ally and home to the only Russian military base in the Middle East.

2.4.3 Other Alliances

U.S.-Japanese Security Treaty A bilateral alliance between the United States and Japan, created in 1951 against the potential Soviet threat to Japan. The United States maintains troops in Japan and is committed to defend Japan if that nation is attacked, and Japan pays the United States to offset about half the cost of maintaining the troops.

The second most important alliance is the **U.S.-Japanese Security Treaty**, a bilateral alliance. Under this alliance, the United States maintains nearly 50,000 troops in Japan (with weapons, equipment, and logistical support). Japan pays the United States several billion dollars annually to offset about half the cost of maintaining these troops. The alliance was created in 1951 (during the Korean War) against the potential Soviet threat to Japan.

Because of its roots in the U.S. military occupation of Japan after World War II, the alliance is very asymmetrical. The United States is committed to defend Japan if it is attacked, but Japan is not similarly obligated to defend the United States. The United States maintains troops in Japan, but not vice versa. The United States belongs to several other alliances, but Japan's only major alliance is with the United States. The U.S. share of the total military power in this alliance is also far greater than its share in NATO.

Japan's constitution (written by U.S. General Douglas MacArthur after World War II) renounces the right to make war and maintain military forces, although interpretation has loosened this prohibition over time. For example, in 2015, Japan's parliament approved a new law allowing the use of military force overseas. Japan maintains military forces, called the Self-Defense Forces, strong enough for territorial defense but not for aggression. It is a powerful army by world standards but much smaller

- Power transition theory states that wars often result from shifts in relative power distribution in the international system.
- Hegemony—the predominance of one state in the international system—can help provide stability and peace in international relations, but with some drawbacks.
- The great power system is made up of about half a dozen states (with membership changing over time as state power rises and falls).
- States form alliances to increase their effective power relative to that of another state or alliance.
- Alliances can shift rapidly, with major effects on power relations.
- The world’s main alliances, including NATO and the U.S.-Japanese alliance, face uncertain roles in a changing world order.
- International affairs can be seen as a series of bargaining interactions in which states use their power capabilities as leverage to influence the outcomes. But bargaining outcomes also depend on strategies and luck.
- Rational-actor approaches treat states as though they were individuals acting to maximize their own interests. These simplifications are debatable but allow realists to develop concise and general models and explanations.
- Game theory draws insights from simplified models of bargaining situations. The Prisoner’s Dilemma game embodies a difficult collective goods problem.

Key Terms

realism 75	neorealism 85	nonaligned movement 98
idealism 75	multipolar system 85	deterrence 102
power 77	power transition theory 86	compellence 102
geopolitics 80	hegemony 86	arms race 102
anarchy 80	hegemonic stability theory 87	rational actors 102
norms 80	alliance cohesion 92	national interest 103
sovereignty 80	burden sharing 92	cost-benefit analysis 103
security dilemma 82	North Atlantic Treaty	game theory 103
balance of power 82	Organization (NATO) 93	zero-sum games 103
great powers 84	Warsaw Pact 93	Prisoner’s Dilemma (PD) 103
middle powers 85	U.S.-Japanese Security Treaty 96	

Critical Thinking Questions

1. Using Table 1.4 (with GDP as a measure of power) and the maps at the front of the book, pick a state and speculate about what coalition of nearby states might form with sufficient power to oppose the state if it were to become aggressive.
2. Describe the deterrence strategy the U.S. has adopted to curb Iran and North Korean nuclear ambitions. What types of power sources are necessary behind the strategy?
3. What theories of power and security dilemma or hegemony can explain the U.S. deterrence strategy?
4. According to the Current Alignment of Great and Middle Powers (Figure 2.8), why would China and Russia may or may not want to be seen as a direct adversary to challenge the U.S. hegemony?
5. Given the distinction between zero-sum and non-zero-sum games, can you think of a current international situation that is a zero-sum conflict? One that is non-zero-sum?

Suggested Readings

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Sample pages