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INTRODUCTION

Why We Disagree about International Relations

THE CRISIS IN SYRIA

Civil war has raged in Syria since 2011. To date some five hundred thousand Syrians have died, many women and children. Another eleven million Syrians, roughly half the population, have fled their homes or left the country. Five million refugees have poured into Turkey, Jordan, and the European Union. Beginning in the spring of 2014, an extremist Islamic army known as the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) swarmed across northern Syria and Iraq conquering territory larger than Belgium, including Iraq's second largest city of Mosul. Also known as the Islamic State (IS), Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), and Daesh, its Arab label, ISIS declared itself a caliphate, resurrecting the medieval empire of Islam, and proceeded to threaten Baghdad, the capital of Iraq. Thousands of jihadists (religious revolutionaries) joined ISIS, some from the United States, and scattered extremist groups from North Africa to Southeast Asia (Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb, Abu Sayyaf, etc.) pledged allegiance to ISIS and adopted its black flag. The caliphate, under its leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, imposed a brutal Sunni Muslim law in the conquered territories, and hooded warriors beheaded Western journalists, local Christians, and Shiite (non-Sunni) Muslims, captured in terrifying videos that went viral on the internet.

Iraqi, Syrian, and Turkish government forces, along with Kurdish and Arab fighters and Russian and American forces, fought back. By 2019 they reclaimed almost all of the territory occupied by ISIS, but terrorist attacks inspired by ISIS and other extremist militants remain a threat, periodically causing ghastly atrocities in Belgium, France, the United Kingdom, the United States, and elsewhere.

What causes a conflict of this sort? And what can be done about it? As students of international relations, we start with the facts, but we have to be careful. There are so many facts we can't know them all or know for certain which may be the most important ones that cause other things to happen. Let's look at what appear to be the salient facts in the case of ISIS and then make a first stab at how we sort out the facts and causes of international events to understand them better.

Some of the Facts

Syria and Iraq are centrally located in the geographically strategic region of the Middle East. They are Muslim countries between the Mediterranean Sea and the Persian Gulf, bordering on a multitude of other countries—Lebanon, Israel, Jordan, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Iran, and Turkey. Both Western and Eastern empires have dominated this region. Christian crusaders repeatedly invaded in the eleventh and twelfth centuries, and the first Muslim caliphate dated from the thirteenth century and lasted until the twentieth century under the Turkish-led Ottoman Empire. After World War I and the collapse of the caliphate, Syria became a colonial territory under French administration, while Iraq was similarly ruled by the British. Both became independent nations after World War II. Oil emerged as a major resource in the

Middle East. Western companies monopolized petroleum production and remain today major players in the region although the oil-producing states now control their own oil and influence global oil markets through the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC).

Syria and Iraq are ethnically and religiously diverse, and power is contested among various tribal and religious groups. Arab peoples have warred against Persians (Iran), most recently between Iraq and Iran from 1980 to 1988. And Muslims divide between Sunni and Shiite sects and between moderate and radical (jihadist) groups. In Syria, the majority population (74 percent) is Sunni, but the government has been controlled since 1970 by a minority Shiite sect known as the Alawites, most recently under the country's leader Bashar al-Assad. Iraq is comprised of 20 percent Sunni Muslims, 60 percent Shiite Muslims, and 20 percent Kurds, a non-Arab, Turkish-origin minority. For decades a minority Sunni government ruled Iraq, most notably under Saddam Hussein. Since the invasion of Iraq by U.S. and Western forces in 2003, Shiite majorities have governed Iraq.

Neither Iraq nor Syria is a democracy, although Iraq sports an American-designed constitution and holds regular albeit disputed elections. Few countries in the Middle East are democratic. In 2011, a rash of protests erupted across the region in what became known as the Arab Spring. Street crowds demanded reform of authoritarian governments. But, except in Tunisia, the Arab Spring quickly turned into an Arab Winter. Tyrants reemerged. Egypt held elections that overthrew the authoritarian regime of Hosni Mubarak, but then the elected Muslim Brotherhood government ended democratic reforms. The military intervened, and Egypt is once again a military dictatorship. Civil wars broke out in Syria, Libya, and Yemen. The Shiite government in Iraq alienated Sunni and Kurdish groups and relies increasingly on Iranian-sponsored militia to confront the ISIS threat. Iran crushed an internal democratic movement in 2009 and remains firmly in the hands of a theocratic regime determined to acquire nuclear weapons and support radical groups such as Hezbollah and Hamas that threaten Israel.

Foreign governments are deeply involved in the ISIS conflict. The Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan, a neighbor of Iran, in 1979, and resistance war by militant Islamic groups spawned Al Qaeda, a radical Sunni group led by Osama bin Laden, scion of a wealthy family in Saudi Arabia. When Iraq invaded Kuwait in 1990, UN forces led by the United States intervened to expel Iraq from Kuwait. In 1996, bin Laden, motivated in part by U.S. forces stationed in Saudi Arabia after the end of the war with Iraq, declared jihad (religious war) against the United States. Fleeing to Afghanistan, bin Laden planned and perpetrated the attacks on the United States on September 11, 2001. A branch of Al Qaeda in Iraq (AQI) sprang up in 1999, but its fortunes rose after the United States invaded Iraq in 2003. AQI's tactics were so brutal, however, that U.S. forces were able to enlist disaffected Sunni tribes to drive AQI out of Iraq in the so-called surge or Awakening of 2007–2008. But then AQI regrouped in war-torn Syria and morphed into the Islamic State. The invasion and conquest of northern Syria and Iraq followed.

The United States, under President Barack Obama, pulled out of Iraq at the end of 2011 and refused to supply arms to moderate groups in the Syrian civil war. In the vacuum, radical groups like ISIS moved in, and Iran replaced the United States as Iraq's principal military adviser. When ISIS beheadings stirred fears in the United States, President Obama ordered air strikes against ISIS and reintroduced a few thousand American noncombat forces to advise and train Iraqi forces. President Donald Trump increased the number of U.S. forces and lifted Obama-imposed constraints on U.S. military activities. Within two years ISIS had lost almost all of its territory.

Other foreign governments are also involved. Russia has a naval base in Syria and intervened in 2015 to establish air bases and conduct direct operations in support of the Syrian government. In 2017 U.S. aircraft shot down Syrian jets prompting Russia to threaten retaliation.

International organizations also play a role, mediating cease-fire and peace negotiations and alleviating the humanitarian suffering occasioned by war.

Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and Turkey, all led by Sunni governments, arm the moderate rebels in Syria. On religious grounds, however, private individuals in Saudi Arabia and other Middle East countries also finance the ISIS extremists, with their governments often looking the other way. On his visit to Saudi Arabia in May 2017, President Trump gave high priority to stopping this financial support, sparking a rift between Qatar, one of the principal offenders, and other Arab Persian Gulf countries. France, Great Britain, Saudi Arabia, and Jordan participate in air strikes against ISIS in both Syria and Iraq. Russia, China, the United States, and other great powers signed a nuclear agreement with Iran in 2015 to halt and reduce (not dismantle) Iran's bomb-related nuclear activities. Despite the agreement, Iran continued to support terrorist actions in the region and purchased arms from Russia, including, in 2015, air defense systems that could thwart Israeli air strikes against Iran's nuclear facilities. In 2018 the United States withdrew from the Iran nuclear agreement arguing that it did not have the intended moderating effect on Iranian behavior.

Israel remains the focal point of conflict in the Middle East. Established by a UN resolution in 1948, Israel has fought six wars and continuous skirmishes to defend itself. As a result of previous wars, Israel occupies Palestinian territory in the West Bank and Syrian territory in the Golan Heights and faces jihadist forces around its borders in Lebanon (Hezbollah), the Gaza Strip (Hamas), and Syria (Jabhat al-Nusra). Iran supports these terrorist groups that regularly fire rockets against Israeli settlements and foment civil war in Yemen threatening stability in Saudi Arabia. The United States has brokered Arab–Israeli peace negotiations, but violence surrounding Israel precludes serious talks. Peace treaties between Egypt and Israel (1979) and Jordan and Israel (1994) are all that stands in the way of another wider regional war.

Sorting Out the Facts

Now you have some of the facts—but only some since there are many, many more. Is your head spinning? And, even if you memorize all these facts, what do you know? What do the facts mean? What is the primary cause of the ISIS conflict, and is that cause coming from outside the region, within a particular country, or from a specific individual or group? You need to know the answers to these questions. Otherwise, you have no idea what to do to ameliorate or end the conflict.

We begin to make some sense of this conflict and all the others we study in international relations by asking three questions: (1) Where are the forces coming from that drive the conflict? We call this the **level of analysis** issue. (2) What underlies or constitutes these forces? Are they *material* forces such as efforts to grab more territory or resources; *ideological* forces such as religious and political beliefs that make up ethnic or national identities; or *interactive* forces such as failed diplomatic negotiations, lack of economic and other contacts, and weak institutions that spawn grievances? We call this the issue of theory or **perspective**. And (3) which perspective or level of analysis is driving the conflict and dominating the influence of other perspectives and levels of analysis, because in any real-world situation all levels of analysis and perspectives are active? We discuss this aspect in terms of **causal arrows**, namely, which level of analysis and perspective causes or dominates the others.

Let's see how we might apply these questions to the ISIS conflict. First, where are the forces coming from? Some forces are coming from outside individual countries and the region. We

level of analysis

the direction, or "level," from which the primary cause of events is coming.

perspective a statement or hypothesis that explains the primary cause of what is happening—for example, a struggle for power causes conflict and sometimes wars.

causal arrow an indicator of which perspective or level of analysis influences the other perspectives and levels of analysis more than the reverse.

call this level of analysis *systemic* or *external*. In this category we can place the historical interventions by the Crusades, Western colonialism, and the major international oil companies. We can also place here the more recent interventions by outside actors such as the United States, the United Nations, and Russia.

Second, some forces are coming from inside the countries in the region. They constitute characteristics of the country as a whole. We call this level of analysis *domestic* or *internal*. Here we can place the Sunni–Shiite conflict, a religious war that has been going on for centuries among Muslims; the struggles inside countries between factions favoring authoritarian and democratic forms of government; the cultural differences among Arab countries and between Arab countries and Iran, a Persian country; and religious differences between Arab countries and the Jewish nation of Israel.

Third, some forces are coming from specific individuals or groups of decision makers within these countries. We call this level of analysis *individual* or *decision making*. Now we are looking for facts that are not characteristic of the country as a whole, like their common political beliefs, language, or culture, but are specific to individual leaders and their immediate supporters. Here we place Saddam Hussein and his tribal supporters in and around the town of Tikrit in Iraq, Bashar al-Assad and his Alawite supporters in Syria, Osama bin Laden and his jihadist comrades in Al Qaeda, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi and ISIS, and so on. We refer to these three categories as levels of analysis—systemic, domestic, and individual (see Figure Intro-1).

Next we ask what seems to be causing the outcomes in this conflict. We divide these causes into three groups (see Figure Intro-2). First, is it the competition for raw power and military and economic resources that causes things to happen? This explanation we call the *realist perspective*. The struggle for power influences actors at all three levels of analysis—systemic actors like the wealthier ex-colonial powers seeking to dominate the region and its oil, domestic actors like the oil-rich countries dominating poorer countries, or individuals such as Saddam Hussein or Bashar al-Assad exercising power to benefit their tribe or religious sect. At all these levels what causes outcomes is who has power and how much power they are gaining or losing.

FIGURE INTRO-1 ■ What Level of Analysis Do the Causes of the Conflict with ISIS Come From?

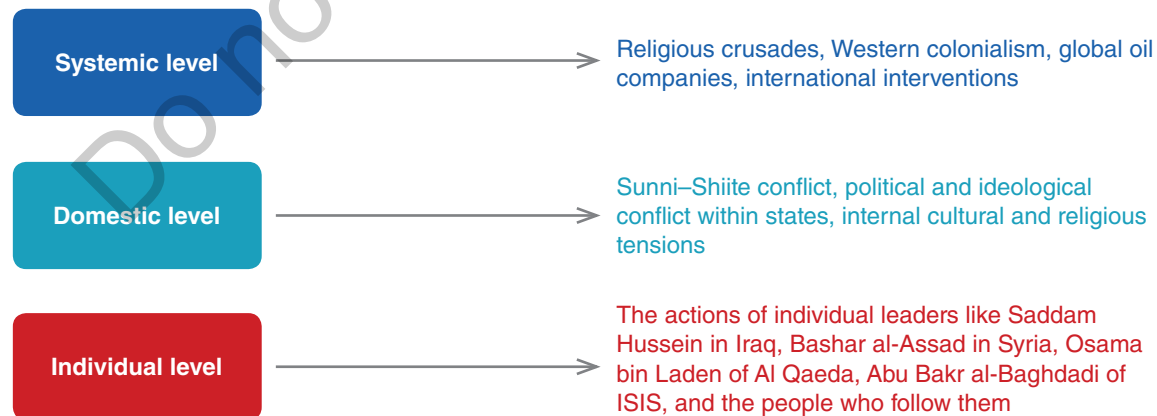
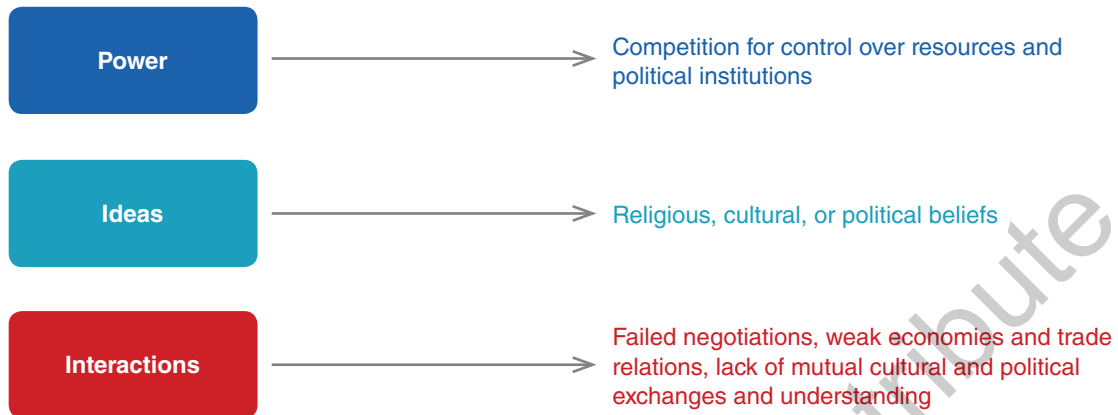


FIGURE INTRO-2 ■ What Perspective (Cause) Is Driving the Outcomes of the Conflict with ISIS?


Second, is it ideology—religious, cultural, and political beliefs—that matters most in deciding outcomes? This explanation we call the *identity perspective*. Here we think of the religious conflict between Sunnis and Shiites, the cultural conflicts between Jews and Arabs and between Arabs and Persians (Iran), and the political conflicts between authoritarian governments and democratic ideas. Again, these ideological forces may come from all levels of analysis—from the outside system involving the intervention of Western nations to promote democracies in the region, from countries within the region who disagree over religion such as Sunni Saudi Arabia versus Shiite Iran, or from individuals primarily motivated by religious beliefs such as Osama bin Laden. In all cases, the motivation generated by beliefs dictates who grabs power and determines outcomes.

Third, is it the extent of interactions or interdependence among actors and the problems in communications and negotiations that matter most in deciding outcomes? We call this explanation the *liberal perspective*. Here we think of economic interactions among the Middle East countries. These countries do most of their trade with outside countries, not with each other, and this outside trade is based mostly on resources such as oil that generate fewer jobs than manufacturing trade. Moreover, the countries historically have stronger diplomatic, educational, and cultural ties with outside powers than with each other. Students, business and professional leaders, and tourists do not visit across countries. All this means that the countries have difficulties communicating with one another and developing habits of interdependence and reciprocity in which they learn to compromise with one another and achieve mutual gains. Again, reciprocal activities or lack thereof may exist at any level of analysis—with outside powers, among the countries in the region, or between individuals. What matters from all levels of analysis is how repetitive and habit forming these interactions are. Intense interactions create international institutions that set rules countries follow to resolve disputes peacefully (United Nations) or regulate trade (World Trade Organization).

Different Causes or Explanations

OK, now we are ready to connect these different perspectives functioning at different levels of analysis to formulate hypotheses or explanations about what is going on in the ISIS conflict.

We are trying to ascertain what substantive forces (power, interactions, or ideas) coming from what level of analysis (external, domestic, or individual) are most important in determining outcomes and therefore, if altered, could change those outcomes in the future. Which way do the causal arrows run among the levels of analysis and perspectives?

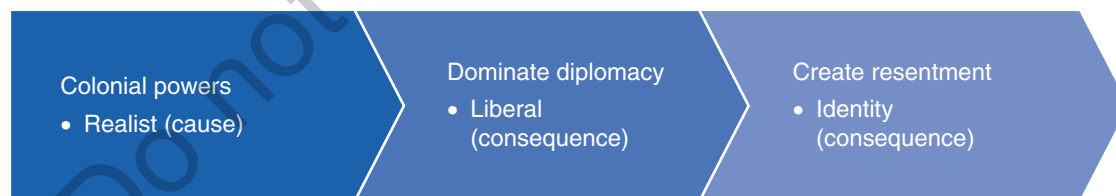
Is the ISIS conflict primarily a consequence of the imperial intervention of former colonial powers that created arbitrary countries in the Middle East, dominated their politics, and caused lasting resentment? For example, did ISIS arise because the United States invaded Iraq in 2003? If so, we have an explanation of the conflict based on power from outside the region. The dominant perspective in this explanation is realist and the dominant level of analysis is systemic (see Figure Intro-3).

Reducing outside intervention might do little good, however, if the conflict is due primarily to internal factors. Maybe the conflict is the consequence of religious and ethnic rivalries that lead groups to wage holy wars against one another, thus provoking outside intervention to oppose or support specific groups. Now outside intervention is a consequence not a cause of the conflict. We have an explanation based on ideological factors—the identity perspective—from a domestic (if the fighting is within a country) or systemic (if the fighting is between countries) level of analysis. Sunnis and Shiites, Jews and Muslims, and Christians and Muslims will have to reconcile with one another before outside intervention can end. The United States did not intervene until Muslim fanatics attacked the World Trade Center in 1993 and again in 2001 to wage holy war against the Christian infidels. From this perspective, the United States is involved in the Middle East to defend itself not to dominate the region (see Figure Intro-4).

OK, that's plausible. But what if leaders are just using religion to gain power over other domestic groups? What if they align with outside actors for the same purpose? Now we have an explanation based on material factors—again, the realist perspective—but this time from an individual level of analysis. Until leaders in the region become more enlightened and less self-interested, religious differences and foreign intervention will persist (see Figure Intro-5).

FIGURE INTRO-3 ■ The Cause of the ISIS Conflict According to the Realist Perspective, Systemic Level of Analysis

Perspectives:



Levels of Analysis:

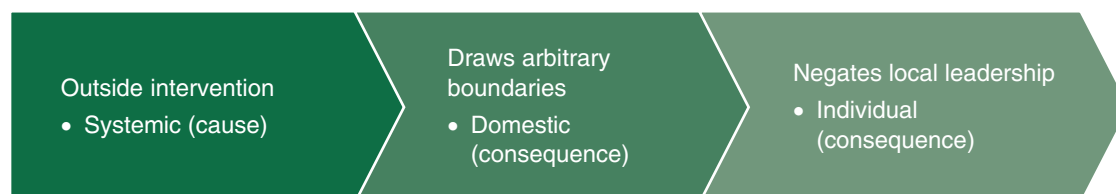
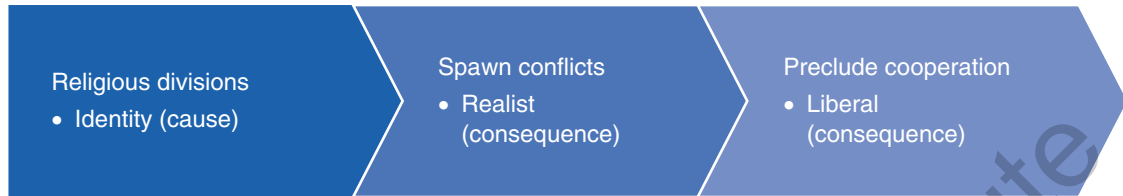


FIGURE INTRO-4 ■ The Cause of the ISIS Conflict According to the Identity Perspective (Religion), Domestic Level of Analysis

Perspectives:



Levels of Analysis:

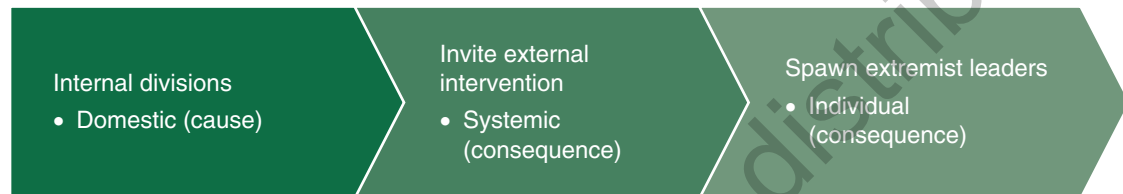
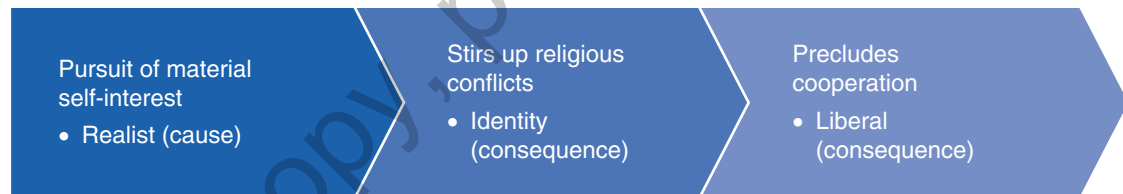
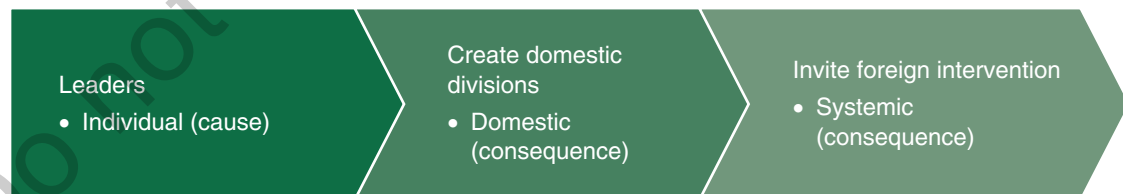


FIGURE INTRO-5 ■ The Cause of the ISIS Conflict According to the Realist Perspective, Individual Level of Analysis

Perspectives:



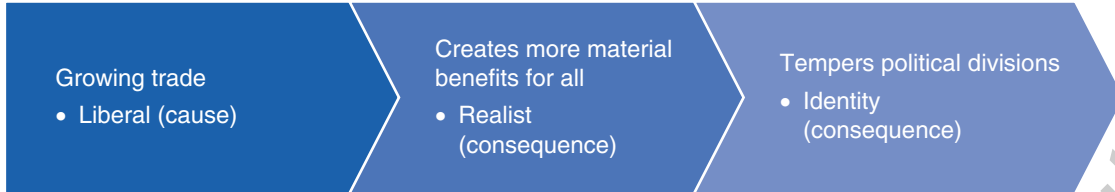
Levels of Analysis:



But maybe leaders are self-interested because the region is insufficiently modernized and developed. They fight over resources because those resources are stagnant rather than growing. Now we have an explanation based on interactive forces (the liberal perspective), such as industrialization and trade, from a systemic (regional) level of analysis. If individual countries could be encouraged to create jobs instead of wars, the people in the region would gain mutual benefits and find compromises to bring them together (see Figure Intro-6).

FIGURE INTRO-6 ■ The Cause of the ISIS Conflict According to the Liberal Perspective, Regional Level of Analysis

Perspectives:



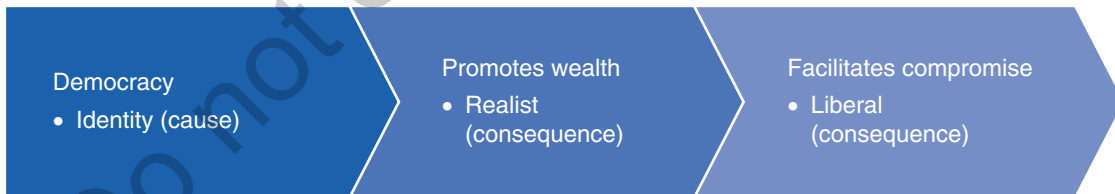
Levels of Analysis:



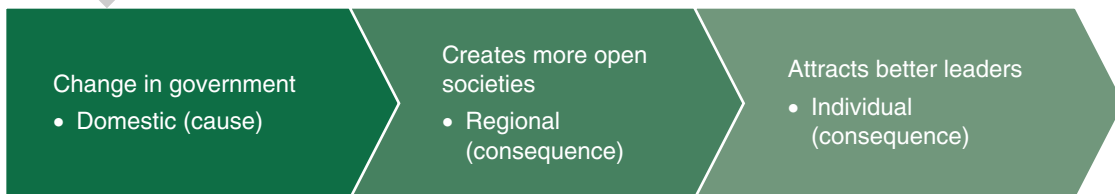
But maybe countries are not moderate and modernized because they are not democratic. The desire to reform autocratic governments and become more democratic inspired the Arab Spring and produced protests and elections throughout the Middle East. Democracies are generally more wealthy, open, and peaceful. This is another ideological explanation (identity perspective) but from a domestic level of analysis (see Figure Intro-7).

FIGURE INTRO-7 ■ The Cause of the ISIS Conflict According to the Identity Perspective (Democracy), Domestic Level of Analysis

Perspectives:



Levels of Analysis:



Maybe all these factors play a role. And they do. When we say that power struggles cause something to happen, we do not rule out the influence of interactions (trade) or ideology (religion). We simply hypothesize that power factors influence interactive and ideological forces more than the latter influence power factors. For example, Iran's pursuit of nuclear weapons (power) makes trade and diplomacy (interaction) with other countries more difficult and increases mutual suspicions and enmity (ideology). The causal arrows run from power to interactive factors to ideas. The levels of analysis interact in similar fashion. For example, the Supreme Leader of Iran (individual level) cracks down on reformists inside Iran (domestic level) to unite the country and challenge Israel for preeminence in the Middle East (systemic or regional level). Based on this explanation, if a more moderate opposition group seized control in Iran, Iran might reduce its hostile behavior in the region.

The remaining sections of this introduction develop these and other concepts for understanding international relations—the role of perspectives, levels of analysis, and causal arrows; the use of history as a laboratory of previous experiments; the importance of methods; the role of judgment; and the centrality of ethical and moral values.

THE ROLES OF PERSPECTIVES, LEVELS OF ANALYSIS, AND CAUSAL ARROWS

Theories (perspectives) and facts (history) work together to produce an informed and comprehensive understanding of world affairs. We focus on facts but never all of the facts. As historian Charles Tilly tells us, we seldom do more than skim the surface when we gather facts: “I must deal with historical facts like a rock skipping water. . . . I do not know all the history one would need to write this book fully.”¹ From the beginning we select certain facts over others and interpret them based on the theoretical models or perspectives we adopt. “Without a theory,” political scientist professor Robert Jervis tells us, “we’re just lost. We just have all these random phenomena we can’t make any sense of.”² Thus perspectives and facts are joined at the hip.

The various perspectives taken by scholars of international relations indicate which of the factors discussed above—power, interactions, and ideology—they consider most influential. The realist perspective, for example, emphasizes the competition for power. States with the most power are more important, in this view, than those with less power. From this perspective, John Mearsheimer, a well-known political scientist, writes *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics*.³ According to Mearsheimer, states care most about survival, and to survive in a world where there is no central, global authority they need power, the more power the better. Thus, to Mearsheimer, international relations are largely about the seeking and balancing of power. Mearsheimer does not ignore international interactions or institutions (liberal perspective) and political and religious ideologies (identity perspective); he simply concludes that international institutions “are essentially arenas for acting out power relationships,” that “the behavior of great powers is influenced mainly by their external environment, not by their internal characteristics,” and that there is no need “to draw sharp distinctions between ‘good’ and ‘bad’ states, because all great powers act according to the same logic regardless of their culture, political system or who runs the government.” In short, power relationships determine what happens inside institutions and override identity factors such as morality, culture, and ideology—all from a systemic level of analysis.

The identity perspective emphasizes the pursuit of ideas for which states in turn seek power and interact within international institutions. It starts with the domestic political ideologies of

states, such as democracy or theocracy, and explores how these ideologies affect the way states perceive the power of other states and motivate their behavior in international institutions. Mark L. Haas, a less well-known but seminal theorist in the field of international relations, has written *The Ideological Origins of Great Power Politics, 1789–1989*.⁴ His book is a direct counterpoint to Mearsheimer's analysis explaining great power behavior not in terms of differences in power but differences in ideology. "The greater the ideological differences dividing decision-makers," Haas explains, "the more likely they are to view one another as substantial dangers. . . . Conversely, the greater the ideological similarities uniting states' leaders, the higher the probability they will view one another . . . as less of a threat." In short, "ideological distance" not power disparity determines whether states pursue power against one another and how they interact in international institutions. Again, Haas does not ignore power or international institutions. He simply reverses the causal arrows. Ideology drives power and interactions, now from a more domestic than systemic level of analysis. In Haas's framework, a change in domestic leaders changes the country's foreign policy behavior, whereas in Mearsheimer's framework, external determinants prevail.

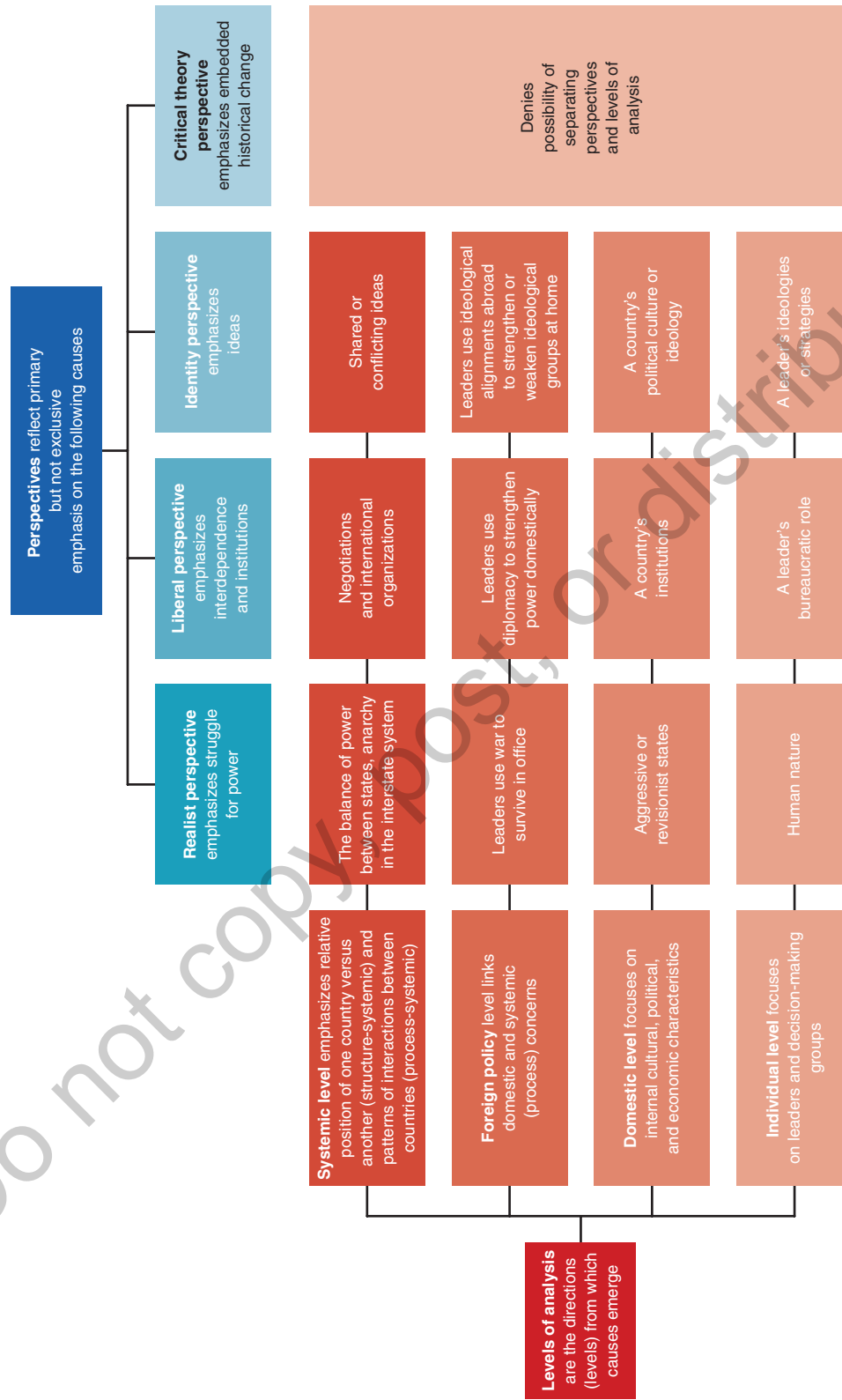
The liberal perspective emphasizes the role of interactions. States behave more on the basis of how other states behave toward them than on the basis of their relative power or ideologies. Thus, communications, signaling, diplomacy, bargaining, international institutions, trade, and economic interdependence take center stage in determining international outcomes. Three prominent political scientists wrote a textbook of international affairs titled *World Politics: Interests, Interactions, and Institutions*.⁵ They seek to provide a "toolbox" of neutral analytical concepts "common to many theories of world politics." This toolbox includes interests, interactions, and institutions—all concepts that focus on interrelationships emphasized by a liberal perspective. Notice the toolbox does not include ideas or power, which are more important in identity and realist perspectives. The authors don't ignore these factors; they simply subsume ideas under interests and investigate power relations within a bargaining context or under the hierarchical rules of international institutions, rather than under the anarchic conditions emphasized by the realist perspective.

From time to time, we take note of a fourth perspective, the critical theory perspective. We do so because this perspective questions the basic approach of the mainstream perspectives. It doubts that we can break up reality into individual pieces, separate specific causes from historical circumstances, and use this knowledge from the past to engineer a better world in the future. Critical theory, such as Marxism, sees the past as deeply distorted by capitalism and racism, obscuring vast inequalities that marginalize weak and minority peoples. It seeks to expose these past injustices and encourage more radical, maybe even revolutionary, solutions to bring about social justice in the future.

At times we also consider other levels of analysis. The foreign policy level of analysis, for example, links domestic politics and international relations when, for example, leaders try to use foreign wars to get reelected or exploit domestic events to invite foreign intervention. The transnational level of analysis involves the interactions of nongovernmental groups across national boundaries, such as multinational corporations and labor unions, that operate to a significant extent independent of relations among governments. And the regional level of analysis captures events between the systemic and domestic levels when, for example, we speak of the Middle East region (see Figure Intro-8).

Scholars and students of international affairs access facts only through perspectives and levels of analysis. That is why this text considers multiple perspectives and levels, which illuminate different facts. In the process we examine more facts than we might from just one perspective or

FIGURE INTRO-8 Perspectives and Levels of Analysis: A Synopsis



level of analysis. Figure Intro-8 offers an initial synopsis of the principal perspectives and levels of analysis. Don't be discouraged if it seems a bit overwhelming at this stage. We refer frequently throughout the text to these concepts. If it helps, think of it this way: a theory interprets international relations the way a portrait interprets a face. Some portraits emphasize noses over eyes and mouths; others emphasize the eyes or mouths. Group together all the portraits that emphasize noses, and you have a perspective. Group together all the portraits that emphasize eyes, and you have another perspective. That's how the perspectives used in this book group together the various theories of international relations. All theories of international relations include power, institutions, and ideas, just as all portraits of faces include noses, eyes, and mouths. But some theories emphasize one of these factors, just as some portraits emphasize noses.

Similarly, to understand the level-of-analysis concept, think of a baseball analogy. Imagine trying to hit a pitch. Perspectives tell us what kind of pitch is coming: fastball, curveball, or changeup. Levels of analysis tell us the direction from which the pitch is coming, whether it is thrown overhand, sidearm, or underhand. Unless we know both the kind and the direction of the pitch, we'll probably miss the ball—or, in international affairs, we'll fail to understand the events we are interested in.

Good students and scholars constantly test alternative explanations against the facts. We do this as much as possible, but we never have enough time to analyze all the facts or enough resources to deal with all the explanations. At some point therefore we have to make judgments. And this is why we disagree, not so much about the facts, which all serious people know, but about which facts are most important. These different judgments account in turn for disagreements among us about historical and contemporary events.



Standing in front of the damaged Askariya Shrine in Baghdad, an Iraqi policeman views the world from this Muslim country. How others see the world and how we see others are matters of perspective.

AP Photo/Hameed Rasheed

You live in the internet age, and facts are available instantly at your fingertips via your computer or phone. But whose facts are they? What or whose algorithm is at work that brought these facts to your attention? Even if you trust the facts, what do they mean? You will encounter and memorize many facts in this textbook, and it is important that we know the major events of European, Asian, African, Middle Eastern, and Latin American history and contemporary life if we are going to be serious students of international affairs. But that is not the ultimate payoff of this exercise. The payoff is the strengthening

of your intellectual faculties and your ability to think critically about and understand world affairs. We aim to work mostly on your central processor rather than on your memory storage—although we hope to fill up the latter as well.

THE ROLE OF HISTORY

History is the laboratory of international relations. We use historical examples to gather the facts and test the perspectives that enable us to explain and anticipate how the world works. Students often ask why we have to study history. That was then, they say; this is now. Everything changes, right? Well, if that's the case, how do we recognize when something is new? Don't we have to

know what is old to determine what is new? Take globalization, for example. Is it new? Many commentators say it is. But globalization existed before World War I at levels not surpassed until after the mid-1970s. That makes globalization today different but not unprecedented. We need to recognize patterns from the past to identify the trajectories of the future.

History is also full of human drama. Perhaps you like to read novels. They contain all the elements of human tragedy, triumph, mystery, adventure, and romance. Well, so does history. After all, it is the *real* story of human triumph and tragedy. History is also personal. Think of where you come from. Ask your parents and friends: where were they when 9/11 occurred? Did family members fight in the Vietnam, Afghan, or Iraq War? Do you know from what part of the world your family comes? If you live in the United States, unless you are Native American, your family came from someplace else. All these personal stories are part of the historical narrative. As we go through the book, I'll share some snippets of my family's history. I do so not to focus on my life but to help you discover how your life, too, is linked with history.

This book therefore covers more history than most international relations textbooks. It shows that although we have most of the facts about these events, we still disagree about them. For example, what caused World War I? Scholars do not agree. History therefore gives us a chance to explore the role of perspectives and levels of analysis in sorting out disagreements even after all the facts are known.

THE ROLE OF METHODS

All knowledge starts with theories and involves empirical methods to test these theories. The natural sciences too explore facts based on theories. Before Galileo, scientists thought about motion only in linear terms, in straight lines from one point to another. Galileo was the first to think about motion in periodic terms, that is, as the back-and-forth motion of a pendulum or the movement of the Earth around the sun. As a result, he discovered and emphasized new facts such as inertia, a precursor to Isaac Newton's discovery of the force of gravity.

The natural and social sciences are the same in this regard. They both use scientific methodology, or what we call *rationalist methods*. The difference lies in the kinds of facts they deal with. The natural sciences deal with facts that do not have minds of their own. Atoms are not self-conscious actors. The social sciences deal with human beings, who do have minds of their own and often change them, and that is what makes social science facts somewhat more elusive. Moreover, in the social sciences we study ourselves. We like and dislike the things we study, such as the political parties we belong to. Natural scientists do not like or dislike atoms. All this means that we need to be more conscious of our biases when we deal with social science subjects. We are dealing with people whose views may differ from our own and may change in response to the information we provide. If we ask them questions, they may not understand or answer our questions in the way we expect. And they could always change their minds the minute after they answer a question.

Methods provide rules for testing theories against facts. They allow us to conclude whether our theories or perspectives are consistent with the world out there. But methods are not miracles. They cannot tell us the way the world out there actually is. They can tell us only that the way we are thinking about that world is not falsified by what is out there. The scientific method in the natural sciences faces these same limitations. In physics, one theory says that time and space are fixed; another says they are probabilities. Which is the real world?

methods the formal rules of reason (rationalist) or appropriateness (constructivist) for testing perspectives against facts.

Rationalist versus Constructivist

In the social sciences, we speak of two general types of methods: rationalist and constructivist.⁶ Realist and liberal perspectives of international affairs generally employ rationalist methods. Identity perspectives use both rationalist and constructivist methods.

Both methods start by naming or labeling facts. Before we can test whether sunlight causes plant growth or power balancing causes war, we need definitions of *sun*, *sunlight*, *plants*, *growth*, *power*, and *war*. **Rationalist methods** assume that such labeling can be done in a reasonably objective way; **constructivist methods** pay more attention to the discourse or subjective language that produces labels. For example, when U.S. policy makers named the first atomic weapon, they called it Little Boy. Did that reflect a subjective discourse that discriminated against women and fostered male predilections for war?

More important, the two methods differ over whether facts or events *cause* or *constitute* one another. Rationalist methods see **causation** as sequential. One fact or event exists independent of another and precedes or comes before it. The preceding event is cause; the subsequent event is consequence. For example, the sun exists before a plant and drives plant life. Sunlight initiates photosynthesis, producing carbohydrates, the fuel of plant growth. Plants grow and reproduce as a result of the sun's light. Rationalist methods apply this kind of sequential causation to international affairs. For example, various types of power balances, whether two great powers or multiple great powers exist, precede and cause different types of interactions between states, ranging from cooperation to war. Realist perspectives argue that the number of great powers in the system causes or determines the prospects of war.

Unlike rationalist methods, constructivist methods see causes as bound together in context, not as separate and sequential occurrences. They fit together not because one causes another sequentially but because they *mutually* cause one another. Social relationships often have this constitutive characteristic. For example, where did the concept of sovereignty come from?

Social scientists using rationalist methodologies hypothesize that sovereignty was caused by an independent and preceding event, namely, the Treaty of Westphalia in 1648. Monarchs who existed in Europe prior to Westphalia gathered together to assert their independence from the universal Catholic Church led by the pope in Rome and the Holy Roman Emperor in Vienna. In the treaty, they established (caused) the practice of sovereignty, legal recognition of their rights to decide all matters domestically and their responsibilities to respect similar rights of other monarchs. Social scientists using constructivist methodologies hypothesize that sovereignty emerged from a network of developments taking place over the course of an earlier historical period and, most important, “a change . . . in the basic *structure* of property rights,” which came about through a newly interdependent international society.⁷ Before the seventeenth century, monarchs held property in common as local members of a single universal community known as the Holy Roman Empire. By the end of the seventeenth century, they possessed territory separately and exclusively. How did this change in the understanding of property rights come about? Not by one prior thing causing another subsequent one but by a combination of factors—population pressures, diminishing returns to land, a widening of trade, and institutional innovations—that accelerated the growth of international social relationships. Notice how constructivist methods explain things in terms of broad context and appropriateness (at some point, sovereignty and states seemed appropriate to the situation) and how, in this example, ideas—a new conception of property rights—altered institutions and power rather than the reverse (identity over liberal and realist perspectives).

rationalist methods

methods that disaggregate and explain events sequentially as one event preceding and causing a second event.

constructivist methods

methods that see events as a whole as mutually causing or constituting one another rather than causing one another sequentially.

causation explaining events in terms of one another rather than just describing them.

Correlation, Causation, and Process Tracing

Rationalist methods separate events from context and examine many cases to find patterns of correlation among them. Some rationalist methods become formalistic and mathematical. Because statistical studies show that wars seldom, if ever, occur among democracies, rationalist methodologies conclude that democracies do not go to war with one another. **Correlation** is not the same as causation, however. Correlation tells us only that democracy and the absence of war appear together across many cases. It does not tell us whether democracy causes no war (an identity explanation) or no war causes democracy (a realist explanation if no war is a result of successful power balancing and peace; a liberal explanation if no war is a consequence of cooperation and international institutions). Nor does it tell us that the two variables appearing together, such as democracy and no war, may not be caused by a host of other factors or variables that we have not considered. Called **exogenous variables**, these omitted variables lie outside the theoretical framework. They contrast with **endogenous variables**, which are included in the framework.

What is more, all these factors may be interrelated with one another. To move from correlation to causation requires a method known as **process tracing**, which examines events historically and in context to trace how different variables interact with one another. Does one variable appear in time before the other and thus can be said to cause it? Constructivist methods assume that we cannot separate variables in sequence or time. We have to substantiate all the facts through a thick description or narrative of the repetitive practices and interactions through which they emerge. Constructivist methods offer plausible rather than predictive explanations. They call attention to how situations might be interpreted rather than replicated and sensitize us to future possibilities rather than make precise predictions. Thus, constructivist studies might conclude that the peace among democracies is hard to separate from the deeply embedded structure of American and British culture in the contemporary world and may be a consequence of unique rather than replicable factors that can be applied to future situations.

Counterfactual Reasoning

Both rationalist and constructivist methods use what we call **counterfactual reasoning**. The counterfactual of the claim “Event A caused Event B” is to ask, “If Event A had not happened, would Event B have happened?” History appears to have a single outcome because we look back on events that have already occurred. It appears to be factual. But we know that along the way many choices were made. With each choice, history took one path and abandoned others. Maybe a war of some sort was going to happen in the early twentieth century. But it did not have to begin in July 1914, and it did not have to cost twenty million lives. How do we determine what choices or paths were *not* taken and use that knowledge to judge the present circumstances? We ask *counterfactual* questions. What if Archduke Franz Ferdinand of Austria-Hungary had not been assassinated in Sarajevo in June 1914, the triggering event for the start of World War I? What if Germany had not had a military plan to fight a war at the same time against both Russia and France? We make educated guesses about alternative paths that history might have taken, and that helps us look for missing facts and test alternative explanations.

IS ONE PERSPECTIVE OR METHOD BEST?

Is one perspective or method better than another? Perhaps, but there is no general consensus among specialists and, like all other analysts and even professors, you will eventually have

correlation a situation in which one fact or event occurs in the same context as another fact or event but is not necessarily linked to or caused by it.

exogenous variables autonomous factors that come from outside a theoretical model or system and that cannot be explained by the system.

endogenous variables causal variables that are included in a theoretical model or framework.

process tracing a method of connecting events in sequence to identify cause and effect.

counterfactual reasoning a method of testing claims for causality by asking what might have happened if one event had not occurred.

to make a judgment for yourself.⁸ This book familiarizes you with the arguments of each perspective and method and thus helps you decide which one works better for a given set of facts and circumstances.

The realist perspective may have certain advantages in situations where threat is severe. When someone draws a gun on you, you tend not to ask what that person believes (an identity approach) or whether you can refer the dispute to a court or institution (a liberal solution). You duck or fight back to even up the balance of power if you can. But how do you determine situations of severe threat? Often a threat is not obvious. It depends on what you are looking for. So the realist perspective, it is sometimes argued, may exaggerate threats or find them where they do not exist.

The liberal perspective may be better at finding ways to cooperate. Long before someone draws a gun on you, you try to find out what is aggravating that person and negotiate a compromise or alleviate the circumstances, such as poverty or lack of education, that may be driving him or her to violence. But what if the individual intends all along to harm you, not because of anything you do or he or she doesn't have but just because this person doesn't like you (an identity cause)? You may be compromising with someone who will take advantage of you later (a realist possibility). How do you protect yourself? So the liberal perspective, it is sometimes argued, may risk exposure to unanticipated dangers.

The identity perspective may be best at distinguishing between potential allies and enemies. It looks for similarities or differences in collective and individual self-images and asks how these self-images get constructed. If identities can be brought closer together, you might be more willing to risk cooperation (for example, if it's your brother who pulls the gun on you). If identities diverge, you might prefer to protect yourself. But how do you manage relations with an enemy to avoid war and maybe mutual destruction? Don't you have to risk cooperation, even or especially with enemies? And what about friends? Don't they sometimes change and become enemies? Maybe the identity perspective is too categorical—some would say ideological—and leads to more fear or complacency than power disparities or opportunities for compromise might otherwise prescribe.

The critical theory perspective may have advantages in understanding the deeper context of events. World War I was the beginning of a class struggle between workers and capitalists that culminated in World War II, the Cold War, and today's struggle against global poverty. But critical theory may also lock in the march of events and underestimate the prospects of change and self-correction.

This book presents and discusses the different perspectives (and methods) evenhandedly. Through this approach, each perspective, in effect, critiques the others. What the realist perspective relatively de-emphasizes—for example, the roles of institutions and ideas—the liberal and identity perspectives emphasize. What the liberal perspective de-emphasizes—for example, the roles of power and ideas—the realist and identity perspectives emphasize. And so on. Thus, when we discuss the Cuban Missile Crisis or 9/11 terrorist attacks from the four different perspectives, we see the strengths and weaknesses of each perspective. We can keep an open mind toward each perspective rather than being told at the outset that this or that perspective is best.

Many studies of international affairs deliberately exclude alternative explanations. Professor Sean Wilentz, for example, places the burden of judgment on the reader: "I reject . . . the now fashionable claim that objectivity involves reporting all views or interpretations equally. Objectivity instead involves judging validity for oneself, fairly, and then inviting others to consider and argue the evidence, logic, and fairness on which that judgment is based."⁹ This textbook helps you develop that capacity to judge validity for yourself, first, by making you aware

that you have a preferred point of view and, second, by keeping you open to alternative points of view. This is healthy. Too much contemporary debate about international affairs is personalized and vitriolic. People label one another wicked or stupid instead of listening carefully. Once we are used to thinking in terms of alternative perspectives, we may become more patient and generous in our debates with fellow citizens. We may concede that they are just as well meaning and smart as we are but may be judging the world from different perspectives or levels of analysis.

THE ROLE OF JUDGMENT

There will always be differences and controversies in international affairs. As noted above, scholars still disagree about the causes of World War I. Contemporary controversies are no different. Take the war in Iraq in 2003. Did Saddam Hussein have weapons of mass destruction (WMDs)? At the time the United States invaded Iraq in March 2003, all the major intelligence services around the world in the United States, France, Russia, China, Great Britain, and Australia thought he did, particularly biological and chemical weapons.¹⁰ UN inspectors thought so as well. After the invasion, however, no weapons were found. Was that simply a case of bad intelligence? To some extent, it was. On the other hand, decision makers never act on the basis of perfect information. They have to rely on conjecture and judgment. As *Washington Post* columnist Jim Hoagland writes, “Most of the time you are not going to have perfect knowledge for making decisions. If you look at the way Saddam Hussein acted, any reasonable person would have concluded that he was hiding those weapons, just from what he said and did. The key point is always going to be the judgment you then make from what is almost always imperfect intelligence.”¹¹

After we have assembled all the facts and done all the testing of perspectives we have time for, **judgment** comes into play. This is especially true in policy making, where time is always a pressing factor. We make decisions based on some broader judgment about what we think makes sense. What is judgment? Is it instinct? Is it experience? Is it character? It is probably all these. Whatever it is, it is different from facts and tested knowledge, yet it does not substitute for them. The best judgment, we say, is informed judgment—judgment enriched by facts and accumulated knowledge.

Thus, judgment is indispensable for good statesmanship as well as good scholarship. Oliver Wendell Holmes, the Supreme Court justice, once described President Franklin D. Roosevelt as a man with “a second-class intellect but a first-class temperament.”¹² Many said the same thing about President Ronald Reagan. Neither man had a brilliant mind, yet, arguably, these two men were the greatest American presidents of the twentieth century. They had first-class personalities and instincts; they were excellent judges of people and events. As the *Economist* observed on Reagan’s death in June 2004, Reagan knew “that mere reason, essential though it is, is only half of the business of reaching momentous decisions. You also need solid-based instincts, feelings, whatever the word is for the other part of the mind. ‘I have a gut feeling,’ Reagan said over and over again, when he was working out what to say or do.”¹³ A gut feeling without facts is ignorance, but incomplete knowledge without a gut feeling is often useless, especially under time constraints.

judgment the broader assessment of what makes sense after one accumulates as many facts and tests as many perspectives as possible.

THE ROLE OF ETHICS AND MORALITY

Judgment is part of character, and character in turn is guided by **ethics and morality**. Because judgment plays a role in decision making, personal honesty is important in intellectual and

ethics and morality standards of good conduct for human behavior.

human affairs more generally—which is why we emphasize it in academic and other activities. What are our obligations to one another as human beings and to the world we inhabit? Ethics and morality deal with standards of right conduct and behavior—what we ought to do, not what we need, can, or prefer to do. Thus ethics and morality go beyond mere facts and perspectives. They involve what we believe, not what we want, have, or know. Belief often delves into intangible, maybe religious, worlds that we cannot access or test through logical or scientific means. But that does not mean that ethics and morality are incompatible with the material world. Indeed, ethical and moral beliefs are essential guides for directing contemporary scientific and technological debates. The question of what we do with nuclear technology or with the technology used to clone human beings involves moral and ethical dilemmas. In international affairs, we can distinguish three broad views about ethics and morality: relativism, universalism, and pragmatism.¹⁴

Relativist Values

relativism a position that holds that truth and morality are relative to each individual or culture and that one should “live and let live.”

Relativism holds that all truth is relative. No universal moral principles apply to all people under all circumstances. Each culture or religion is entitled to its own view of truth. Because relativists do not believe in an ultimate truth, they are willing to tolerate multiple truths. Their attitude is “live and let live”—respect all views of ethics, morality, and religion. This became the moral view, at least within Christendom, in the seventeenth century. Protestants and Catholics who had been fighting one another for more than a hundred years decided to tolerate one another and agreed in the Treaty of Westphalia in 1648 to respect the right of each sovereign to choose the religion for his or her own country. Sovereignty meant that each sovereign, and subsequently each state, agreed not to interfere in the domestic life—meaning, at that time, religion—of other sovereigns. This principle of nonintervention in the domestic affairs of other states remains enshrined today in the Charter of the United Nations. It now accommodates a world of diverse religions, going beyond Christianity. But such moral relativism, taken to an extreme, could also accommodate genocide—the purposeful slaughter of human beings because of their race, religion, or ethnicity—because there are no moral absolutes or prohibitions to condemn it. Shouldn't it be possible to proscribe morally the slaughter of Jews in Germany, Muslims in Bosnia, and Tutsis in Rwanda under all circumstances at all times?

Universal Values

universalism a position that holds that truth and morality are universal and cannot be adjusted to specific circumstances.

Universalism rejects relativism and argues that some absolute moral principles apply to all people in all countries at all times. After World War II and the murder of six million Jews in Europe, many decided that genocide should never happen again, that the world community has a moral obligation to prevent or stop it. Thus, the United Nations has evolved a standard of humanitarian intervention that directly contradicts the organization's charter. Kofi Annan, then secretary-general of the United Nations, framed the contradiction this way: even though the UN Charter rules out intervention in the domestic affairs of states, “is it permissible to let gross and systematic violations of human rights, with grave humanitarian consequences, continue unchecked?”¹⁵ The international community may be moving beyond Westphalia's relativist morality and insisting that there are universal standards of basic human rights that all states, whatever their cultural or moral beliefs, must follow. But where do we draw the line? Saddam Hussein grossly violated the human rights of the citizens of Iraq, yet neither the United Nations nor the North Atlantic Treaty Organization

(NATO) authorized the U.S. invasion of Iraq in March 2003. Was the United States nevertheless right to intervene based on universal standards of human rights? If so, how do we know whose standards are the universal ones?

Pragmatic Values

Pragmatism offers a third point of view. Pragmatists answer the question of whether to intervene based on certain practical requirements, such as preserving stability or not setting a precedent. That is, they ask, will an intervention create disproportionate consequences that actually reduce world solidarity, and will an intervention set a standard that encourages repeated future interventions? U.S. intervention in Iraq, pragmatists might argue, increased rather than reduced the scale of violence. Moreover, the U.S. action sanctioned the doctrine of preemption, attacking another state *after* you see it preparing to attack you, or, worse, the doctrine of prevention, attacking another state *before* you see any preparations because you fear it may attack you at some point in the future. Whether Iraq was an imminent threat was much disputed at the time. But some pragmatists might conclude that the threat was not imminent and that America's intervention encouraged further repeated interventions in the future. Pragmatists look to the immediate circumstances surrounding the action and ask whether intervention minimizes instability in that situation while at the same time securing whatever just outcome is possible. Pragmatism does not abandon a notion of universal morality but opposes the application of a single morality at all times in all places. It is willing to compromise, even though compromise, repeated too often, risks slipping into relativism.

pragmatism the idea that morality is proportionate to what is possible and causes the least harm.

Moral Choice

A simple story illustrates the differences among these moral views.¹⁶ An officer and a small group of soldiers involved in war enter a village that enemy forces recently occupied. Overnight, one soldier is killed by a single shot. The next morning, the officer assembles the village residents and asks who shot the soldier. The villagers remain silent. The officer then announces that he will randomly select and kill three villagers in retaliation for this atrocity. You are a member of the officer's group. What should you do?

If you are a relativist, you will not object. Each side has its own standards of morality. If the other side can justify killing you, certainly you can justify killing them. Killing three people instead of one sets an example in a situation where force is the only arbiter of order because there is no common morality.

If you are a universalist, you will object. No one can kill innocent villagers under any circumstances at any time. To do so may be committing a war crime. So you say to the officer, "This is wrong; you can't do it." At this point, the officer turns to you and says, "OK, you shoot one, and I'll let the other two go." As a universalist, you still have to say no because it is wrong to kill innocent people, whether the number is one or three. If you survive the event, you may go on to report the incident as a war crime.

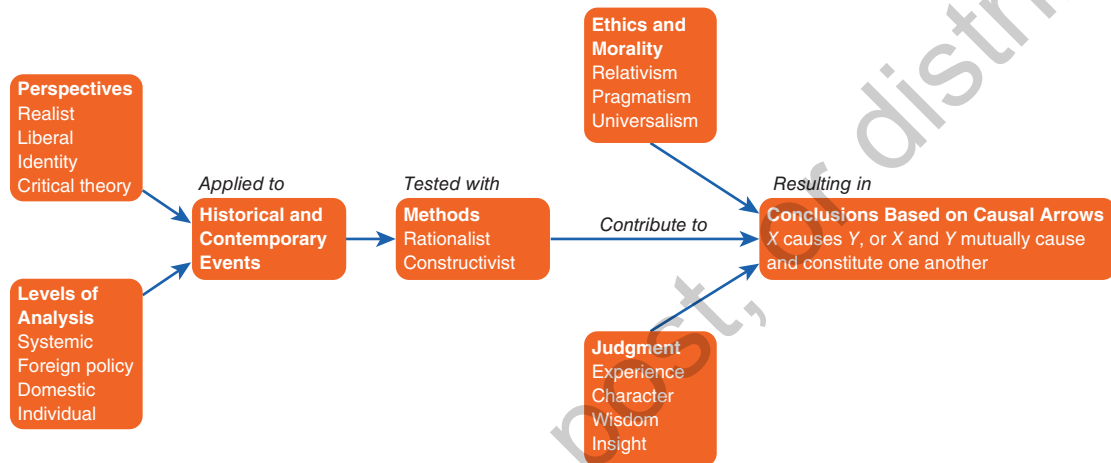
If you are a pragmatist, however, you might accept the officer's offer and shoot one villager, thereby saving the lives of two others. For the pragmatist, killing three villagers would be disproportionate because only one person on your side was killed and the disproportionate retaliation might encourage further arbitrary killing. Killing one innocent villager is still immoral, but the pragmatic choice minimizes the violence and sets a standard—tit for tat, not triple tit for tat—that potentially limits a chain of future retaliations.

SUMMARY

We start with perspectives because we could not start at all if we tried to consider all at once the many facts that make up world affairs. We theorize about what causes events and select or consider as many facts as we can from the different levels of analysis. Then we test our perspective against other perspectives using rationalist or constructivist methods or some combination of the two. Finally, we

draw conclusions about how the causal arrows run based on which perspective and level of analysis seems to be primary, relying on judgment, ethics, and morality to fill in the gaps that analysis inevitably leaves. Figure Intro-9 shows how the various elements of studying and understanding international relations, which we have covered in this introduction, fit together.

FIGURE INTRO-9 ■ How One Thinks about International Relations



KEY CONCEPTS

causal arrow, 3

causation, 14

constructivist methods, 14

correlation, 15

counterfactual reasoning, 15

endogenous variables, 15

ethics and morality, 17

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judgment, 17

level of analysis, 3

methods, 13

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pragmatism, 19

process tracing, 15

rationalist methods, 14

relativism, 18

universalism, 18

STUDY QUESTIONS

- Why is one event considered front-page news but not another?
- Do you think terrorism is caused by American military dominance or American diplomacy? Which answer reflects the realist perspective? Which reflects the liberal perspective?
- How would you test the perspective that American military dominance is the cause of terrorism—by measuring relative power over different periods or by examining the social purposes of American foreign policy embedded in specific historical circumstances? Which method is rationalist, and which is constructivist?

4. Do you believe the U.S. invasion of Iraq was wrong because it violated Iraq's independence or right because it ended genocide in Iraq? Which argument is relativist, and which is universalist?
5. Why is history relevant to what is new even though it deals with what is old?



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