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The point is that you count—by voting, protesting, joining issue-oriented groups, donating money to causes you support, or even by having your thoughts recorded in a political poll. Few individual actions are dramatic, and by themselves few significantly change world politics, but the sum of many smaller actions can and does make a difference. Do not consider politics a spectator sport. It is more important than that. Treat politics as a participant—even a contact—sport.

### THINKING THEORETICALLY: PUTTING EVENTS IN CONTEXT

#### Web Link

Four great sources for international news are the *New York Times* at [www.nytimes.com/](http://www.nytimes.com/), the BBC at [www.bbc.co.uk](http://www.bbc.co.uk), CNN at [www.cnn.com](http://www.cnn.com), and Worldpress.org at [www.worldpress.org](http://www.worldpress.org).

It is important to organize our thinking about world events given their impact on our daily lives. The day this is being written, the front page of the *New York Times* is carrying news items related to suicide bombings in Afghanistan, U.S. foreign policy toward Israel, the impact of the Democrats' capture of Congress on U.S. policy in Iraq, Iran's alleged nuclear weapons program, and U.S.-Vietnam trade relations. Each of these stories relates to a unique issue; yet each is also part of a larger context. If you are not familiar with these issues or others that dominate the news as you read this book, then it is important to “catch up” on them by regularly following global events through the news media.

To get a better perspective of these and other stories, they should be put in both a historical and theoretical context. To help you with the historical context, chapter 2 provides a foundation for understanding world politics by laying out a brief history of the world system and its current trends. Good reporting in the news media will often include more immediate historical background.

Thinking theoretically is a second way to put things in their larger context. A **political theory** is an idea or connected set of ideas about why things happen and how events and trends relate to one another. Theory helps us see that trees are not just single plants but also part of a forest. Scholar James Rosenau (2004:327) advises that thinking theoretically

is a technique that involves making a habit of asking a six-word question about anything we observe. . . . The six-word question seems quite simple at first glance. It is: “Of what is this an instance?” The “this” in the question is anything you observe (be it in world or personal affairs) and it is a powerful question because it forces you to find a larger category into which to locate that which you observe. That is, it compels you to move up the ladder and engage in the theoretical enterprise.

There are many advantages to thinking theoretically. One is that it helps us build knowledge. If we confine ourselves to treating each event as unique, then our past and present are little more than a complex jumble of seemingly random events. By thinking theoretically, we look for patterns that help us understand more clearly what has occurred and, perhaps, to even predict what may occur. Second, thinking theoretically gives us a better chance of evaluating policy. One example is assessing the debate over whether the United States and other democracies should work to promote the democratization of the Middle East and elsewhere. Some insight can be found in chapter 6's exploration of “democratic peace theory,”



“Thinking theoretically” is a key to being able to understand how world events fit together.

which is the idea that democratic states seldom if ever go to war with one another (Chernoff, 2004). If this theory is correct, then the path to world peace may be through world democratization. This would make promoting democracy not simply an altruistic ideal, but also a significant contribution to national security.

As you begin to think about events and to decide “of what is this an instance,” do so expansively and do not worry for now whether your ideas seem controversial or even contradictory. Rosenau once ended up with 23 answers when he thought about one event and asked himself of what it was an instance. From such beginnings, you can test and refine your thinking to see what seems to hold up and what does not.

You will encounter discussions of various levels of political theory throughout this book, but a good place to begin is with a range of ideas that have been put forth to address the general study of international relations. To that end, we will proceed somewhat chronologically in the development of modern international relations theory by first taking two veteran theories: realism and liberalism. Then we will turn to postmodernist, feminist, and economic approaches to international politics. These are considered to be theories by some, part of larger theories by others, and critiques of realism and liberalism by others, but their classification is not as important as their contribution to the international relations theory debate beginning mostly in the 1970s. Finally, we will turn to constructivism, an analytical approach that in the view of many scholars emerged in the 1990s as a third macrotheory. Table 1.1 outlines the main points of realism, liberalism, and constructivism.

Before taking up the various schools of thought, four cautions are in order. First, none of these theories is truly comprehensive. Some scholars argue that even realism and liberalism are “best described as paradigm[s],” rather than full-scale theories

**TABLE 1.1 Realism, Liberalism, and Constructivism**

Views/Emphasis	Realists/Neorealists	Liberals/Neoliberals	Constructivists
<b>Human nature</b>	Pessimistic: Humans self-interested and competitive	Optimistic: Humans capable of enlightened cooperation	Neutral/No assumption
<b>Core concepts</b>	Power, conflict	Cooperation, interdependence	Ideas, communications, language
<b>Reality</b>	Largely objective	Largely objective	Largely subjective
<b>Politics stakes</b>	Zero-sum	Non-zero-sum	Non-zero-sum
<b>Conflict in system</b>	Central and inevitable	Central but not inevitable	Central but not inevitable
<b>International system</b>	Anarchical	Anarchical, but growing order	Anarchical because assumed to be
<b>Main cause of conflict</b>	States pursuing conflicting self-interests	Lack of central processes to regulate competition	Assumptions of conflict and hostility
<b>Best path to peace</b>	Achieve balance of power	Increase interdependence, cooperation, and adherence to international law	Communicate to find common goals and ways to achieve them
<b>Key organizations</b>	States	IGOs, states	NGOs, IGOs, states
<b>Morality</b>	National interest is a state's moral imperative	Define and follow common moral standards	Morality is subjective
<b>Policy prescriptions</b>	Pursue self-interest, expand/preserve power	Cooperate to achieve mutual interests	Shape ideas and language to promote preferred reality

**Did You Know That:**

You can learn more about the U.S. college faculty in international relations in Susan Peterson, Michael J. Tierney, and Daniel Malinia, "Inside the Ivory Tower," *Foreign Policy* 51 (November/December 2005), pp. 58–64.

(Geller & Vasquez, 2004:1). Such controversies are not our focus here, so treat "theory," "paradigm," "approach," and other such words as synonymous.

Second, each theory has numerous variations because, "If you put four IR theorists in a room you will easily get ten different ways of organizing theory, and there will also be disagreement about which theories are relevant in the first place" (Jackson & Sørensen, 2003:34). There are, for instance, classical realists, neorealists, offensive realists, defensive realists, and other kinds of realists (Schmidt, 2004). We will briefly note some of these subdivisions but will mostly concentrate on the major premises of the basic theories.

Third, do not be fooled by the connotations of realism and liberalism. Realists do not necessarily see things as they "really" are. Also do not equate the use of "liberal" here with how it applies in domestic politics to left-of-center political parties. For example, President George W. Bush is a conservative in terms of American domestic politics, yet he has liberal leanings, such as wanting to promote democracy and free trade, in the international relations theory use of the term.

Fourth, focus on what each theory has to offer rather than whatever its shortcomings may be. Each of these approaches helps us to better understand world politics. Each also has its weaknesses. There are also considerable overlaps among theories (Snyder, 2005; Lebow, 2004).

## Realist Theory

**Realism** is the view that world politics is driven by competitive self-interest. **Realists** therefore believe that the decisive dynamic among countries is a struggle for power in an effort by each to preserve or, preferably, improve its military security and economic welfare in competition with other countries. Furthermore, realists see this struggle for power as a **zero-sum game**, one in which a gain for one country is inevitably a loss for others. Realists are also prone to seeing humanity as inherently divided by national loyalty to countries or some other focus of political identity such as religion or culture.

As an approach to international politics, realism can be traced to such ancient practitioners and thinkers as Sun Tzu (544–496 B.C.), the Chinese general and author of *The Art of War*; Thucydides (460–399 B.C.), a Greek historian and author of *The History of the Peloponnesian War*; and Kautilya (4th century B.C.), minister to the Mauryan emperor of India, who wrote in *Arthashastra*, "A king shall always endeavor to augment his own power." More recently, realism also marked the diplomacy of such statesmen as Otto von Bismarck (1815–1898), the Iron Chancellor, who engineered the unification of Germany under Prussia's control. For our purposes here, though, we will pick up the theory of realism when it emerged in the years surrounding World War II (1939–1945) as the dominant theory in the developing academic discipline of international relations scholarship.

Realist theory emerged partly as a reaction to the failure to preserve the peace after World War I (1914–1918). That horrific war shocked the conscience of many, who blamed the conflict on the *realpolitik* policies pursued by the major European powers. In response, an idealist movement developed. It advocated conducting global relations according to such lofty principles as cooperation, morality, and democracy. President Woodrow Wilson was a leading idealist. He argued, for example, that peace could only be restored and kept by "a partnership of democratic nations."<sup>7</sup> Wilson sought to bring that partnership into reality by helping found the League of Nations. The idealist vision also led to such initiatives as the

**Did You Know That:**

The term *realpolitik*, power politics, was coined by Prussian/German Chancellor Otto von Bismarck in about 1870.

Kellogg-Briand Pact (1928), whose signatories pledged to renounce war “as an instrument of national policy.”

The aggression of Germany and Japan, both signatories of the Kellogg-Briand Pact, persuaded many that idealism was not only naïve, but dangerous because it had led countries to abandon realpolitik, which might have steered them to react more forcefully to such trends as the early stages of Germany’s rearmament and, thus, might have prevented World War II. Among scholars, this view was taken up in writings of such scholars as British political scientist Edward H. Carr in *The Twenty Years Crisis 1919–1939* (1939) and even more notably in the work of the American scholar Hans Morgenthau, including his influential text, *Politics Among Nations* (1948). In it he argued (p. 13), “International politics, like all politics, is a struggle for power.”

### Classic Realism and Neorealism

As realist theory evolved, it split into two schools of thought based primarily on different views of the root cause of conflict. **Classic realism** is associated with Morgenthau and other realists who are pessimistic about human nature. They believe that political struggle among humans is probably inevitable because people have an inherent dark side. Therefore, classic realists believe that it is foolhardy to trust other countries and their people (Brewer, Gross, Aday, & Willnat, 2004). As one realist puts it, “The sad fact is that international politics has always been a ruthless and dangerous business and it is likely to remain that way” (Mearsheimer, 2001:2). Many realists trace their intellectual heritage to the English political philosopher Thomas Hobbes (1588–1679), who argued in *Leviathan* (1651) that humans have an inherent urge to dominate, which often causes them to “become enemies and . . . [to] endeavor to destroy or subdue one another.” Similarly, Morgenthau (1945:17) described “the lust for power” in humans as an “ubiquitous empirical fact.”

**Neorealism** also portrays politics as a struggle for power, but **neorealists** believe that the cause of conflict in the international system is its anarchic (unregulated) structure (James, 2002). As one neorealist puts it, the international system based on sovereign actors (states), which answer to no higher authority, is “anarchic, with no overarching authority providing security and order.” The result of such a self-help system is that “each state must rely on its own resources to survive and flourish.” But because “there is no authoritative, impartial method of settling these disputes—i.e. no world government—states are their own judges, juries, and hangmen, and often resort to force to achieve their security interests” (Zakaria, 1993:22).

The two schools of realism also disagree on how countries determine their foreign policies (Cozette, 2004). Classic realists believe a country should and usually does follow the dictates of power, but they do not believe that they always do so (Williams, 2005). Instead classic realists believe that national leaders can and do err by allowing morality, ideology, or anything else other than power realities to govern foreign policy. By contrast, neorealists pay little attention to the internal policy making in countries. This is because neorealists believe that countries are “rational actors” and therefore will react similarly and predictably to power realities in a given situation no matter who is in office. Because neorealists see states reacting predictably to power, these theorists are interested in ascertaining rules about how states will react in a given set of circumstances. Examples of how these rules work can be found in the discussion of the international system in chapter 3.

What unites both realists and neorealists is that they doubt whether there is any escape from conflict. Classical realists believe human nature is immutable, and neorealists are skeptical about the ability of interdependence or international organizations to promote cooperation (Sterling-Folker, 2002).

#### Web Link

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### Realism: An Emphasis on Power

Realists contend that struggles between states to secure their frequently conflicting national interests are the main action on the world stage. Given this view, realists maintain that countries should and usually do base their foreign policy on the existence of what they see as a Darwinian world in which power is the key to the national survival of the fittest. In the words of one scholar, “In an environment as dangerous as anarchy,” those who ignore realist principles will “ultimately not survive” (Sterling-Folker, 1997:18). From this perspective, realists define national interest mainly in terms of whatever enhances or preserves a state’s security, its influence, and its military and economic power. For realists, then, might makes right—or at least it makes success.

With respect to justice and morality, Morgenthau reasoned that it is unconscionable for a state to follow policy based on such principles. He argued that “while the individual has a moral right to sacrifice himself” in defense of an abstract principle, “the state has no right to let its moral [views] . . . get in the way of successful political action, itself inspired by the moral principle of national survival” (Morgenthau, 1986:38). This does not mean that realists are amoral (Williams, 2004). Some argue that the highest moral duty of the state is to do good for its citizens. More moderately, other realists argue that surviving and prospering in a dangerous world requires that morality be weighed prudently against national interest. One scholar has summed up this realist rule of action with the maxim, “Do ‘good’ if the price is low” (Gray, 1994:8).

### Realism and the Competitive Future

There are many implications to the realists’ dark view of politics. One is that there is little hope for substantially reforming the anarchic international system. Morgenthau, for instance, argued that only a global government could permanently secure international peace and justice, but he concluded gloomily, “A world state cannot be established” (Speer, 1968:214). With meaningful change out of reach, realists advocate a pragmatic, realpolitik approach to world politics. One rule is to secure your own country’s interests first and worry about the welfare of other countries second, if at all, on the assumption that other countries will not help you unless it is in their own interest. This makes realists wary of what they see as the self-sacrificing policies advocated by liberals (Goldsmith & Krasner, 2003). Such policies are not just foolish but dangerous, according to Morgenthau (1986:38), because countries that shun realpolitik will “fall victim to the power of others.”

Second, realpolitik holds that countries should practice balance-of-power politics. This means to strive to achieve an equilibrium of power in the world in order to prevent any other country or coalition of countries from dominating the system. Methods for achieving this goal include building up your own strength, allying yourself with others, or dividing your opponents.

Third, realists argue that the best way to maintain the peace is to be powerful: “Peace through strength,” as President Ronald Reagan was fond of saying. Showing his realist side, President George W. Bush takes a similar line, arguing, “We will build our defenses beyond challenge, lest weakness invite challenge.”<sup>8</sup> Thus, realists believe that countries must be armed because the world is dangerous and reject the liberal counterargument that the world is dangerous because countries are so heavily armed. As Morgenthau put it about disarmament, “Take away their arms, and they will either fight with their bare fists or get themselves new arms with which to fight” (Speer, 1968:214).

It is incorrect to think that realists are militarists because they emphasize national power. For example, many realists opposed the U.S. invasion of Iraq in 2003 because they believed that it was not worth the cost and the loss of American lives, symbolized here by this funeral of a U.S. Marine, Lance Corporal Jose Gutierrez, the first American to die in the war.

Fourth, realists advise that a country should neither waste its power on peripheral goals nor pursue goals that it does not have the power to achieve. This frequently makes realists reluctant warriors, not warmongers, as they are sometimes portrayed. Morgenthau, for instance, criticized U.S. involvement in the war in Vietnam as a waste of resources in a tangential area. Many realist scholars also opposed the invasion of Iraq in 2003, arguing accurately that Iraq was not an immediate threat and, therefore, “Even if such a war goes well and has positive long-range consequences, it will still have been unnecessary. And if it goes badly—whether in the form of high U.S. casualties, significant civilian deaths, a heightened risk of terrorism, or increased hatred of the United States in the Arab and Islamic world—then its architects will have even more to answer for” (Mearsheimer & Walt, 2003:58). More generally, one realist scholar claims, “America’s . . . realists [have] . . . warned of the dangers that a hegemonic United States would over-reach itself and, by asserting its power heavy-handedly, provoke opposition to it” (Layne, 2006:46).



## Liberal Theory

**Liberalism** contends that people and the countries that represent them are capable of finding mutual interests and cooperating to achieve them, at least in part by working through international organizations and according to international law. **Liberals** reject the realists' contention that politics is inherently and exclusively a struggle for power. Liberals do not dismiss power as a factor, but they add morality, ideology, emotions (such as friendship and mutual identity), habits of cooperation, and even altruism as factors that influence the behavior of national leaders and the course of world politics. Liberalism also holds that international politics can be a **non-zero-sum game**, that it is possible to have win-win situations in which gains of one or more countries do not have to come at the expense of others. Liberals are also prone to think that all humans have a common bond that they can draw on to identify themselves beyond the narrow boundaries of their country or group and to identify and forge ties with people around the world.

Like realism, liberalism is not a new approach to world politics. Indeed, part of modern liberalism is resurrected idealism, although that label fell into disuse. Whatever its label, the approach includes such ideas as the notion that justice is a basic human right, which dates at least to Mesopotamia around 2500 B.C. (Altman, 2005). A sense of universalism has also long prompted efforts to organize internationally for peace. For one, French official Pierre Dubois proposed in *The Recovery of the Holy Land* (1306) that the Christian kingdoms create “a league of universal peace” to settle their disputes. Such views have persisted, with the idealism of President Woodrow Wilson and his drive to found the League of Nations a much more recent example.

Also like realism, the (re)emergence of liberalism was a reflection of the times. Realism, as noted, had gained strength among scholars during the alarming period

between the outbreak of World War II and the depths of the cold war in the 1950s and 1960s. In the 1970s, however, the cold war began to thaw, the international landscape looked very different, and liberalism resurged. Reflecting the times, liberals made a number of claims. One was that, especially in a nuclear age, the assumptions of realism trapped the world into a mind-set of conflict that could literally destroy civilization. This concern prompted some scholars to pursue a “disciplined inquiry into the ways [that] values [such as peace and justice] can be realized” in global politics (Falk, 1986:16). Liberalism stressed the spread of democracy and the work being done on democratic peace theory. This idea, as detailed in chapter 6, contradicts the core realist assumption that all countries, democratic or not, would struggle with one another. Liberals also noted the expanding role of the UN, the growth of the European Union, and many other examples of global cooperation and charged that realism could not explain such changes (Nye & Keohane, 1970).

### Classic Liberalism and Neoliberalism

Liberalism, like realism earlier, soon divided into two schools of thought. **Classic liberalism** is the older of the two and the direct descendent of idealism. Like classic realism, classic liberalism is based on its adherents’ view of human nature. However, in contrast to the pessimism of classic realists, classic liberals are optimistic about human nature. In this sense, they trace their intellectual lineage to political philosophers such as Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712–1778). He argued in *The Social Contract* (1762) that humans had joined together in civil societies because they found it easier to improve their existence through cooperation than competitive self-reliance. Contemporary liberals apply this notion to global society, and argue that people and their countries can better their existence by joining together to build a cooperative and peaceful global society.

**Neoliberalism** developed in the 1970s and 1980s somewhat parallel to neorealism. Neoliberals agree with neorealists that competition among sovereign states in an anarchical world system causes conflict. However, neoliberals contend that the system is not nearly as anarchical as neorealists claim. According to neoliberals, the system is marked by *complex interdependence*. This means that countries are tied together through trade and many other economic, social, and other exchanges that both increase cooperation and limit conflict. Complex interdependence also promotes the increased use of international law and the creation of more and stronger international organizations to deal with the expanding ties among countries. In turn, the spread of international law and importance of international organizations progressively acts to reduce anarchy and, therefore, conflict in the system.

### Liberalism: An Emphasis on Cooperation

Unlike realists, liberals do not believe that acquiring, preserving, and applying power must be or even always is the essence of international relations. Instead, liberals argue that foreign policy should be and sometimes is formulated according to the standards of cooperation and even altruism. This does not mean that liberals are never willing to use military force or other forms of coercion. Almost all liberals are willing to do so in self-defense or in response to overt international aggression. Many liberals would also use force, especially if authorized by the United Nations, to prevent or halt genocide and other gross violations of human rights. Beyond such cases, though, liberals differ. Some favor assertive liberalism, an approach that led Woodrow Wilson to send American troops to Europe in an effort to make the world safe for democracy and led George W. Bush to invade Iraq in part to foster democracy there. Proponents

of more passive liberalism argue that using force is often counterproductive and that it also often leads to imperial domination even if the initial intentions were lofty (Morefield, 2004).

Whatever the exact coloration, liberalism has been evident in some post-cold war leaders. For example, President Bill Clinton asked Americans to support sending U.S. troops to Bosnia because “it is the right thing to do” to prevent the continued agony of “skeletal prisoners caged behind barbed wire fences, women and girls raped as a tool of war, [and] defenseless men and boys shot down in mass graves.”<sup>9</sup> Even more recently and sounding much like Wilson’s resolve to make the world safe for democracy, President Bush has pledged, “America will . . . support democratic movements . . . with the ultimate goal of ending tyranny in our world.”<sup>10</sup>

Such views do not mean that Clinton, Bush, and others with liberal internationalist views do not also pursue realist policy. When, for example, Clinton sought the presidency in 1992, he condemned China as a tyrannical abuser of human rights and assailed President George H. W. Bush for his realpolitik approach to that country. As president, though, Clinton learned that he could not afford to overly antagonize a country as powerful as China, and he tempered his liberalism. Clinton had to admit near the end of his first term, “it would be fair to say that my policies with regard to China have been somewhat different from what I talked about in the [1992 presidential] campaign.”<sup>11</sup>

Liberals also dismiss the realists’ warning that pursuing ethical policy often works against the national interest. The wisest course, liberals contend, is for countries to recognize that their national interests and the common interests of the world are inextricably tied. For liberals, this means that improving global economic conditions, human rights, and democracy are very much in the national interest of the United States and other economically developed and democratic countries. This was the argument President Bush was making in 2005 when he told Americans, “In the long term, the peace we seek will only be achieved by eliminating the conditions that feed radicalism and ideologies of murder. If whole regions of the world remain in despair and grow in hatred, they will be the recruiting grounds for terror, and that terror will stalk America and other free nations for decades.”<sup>12</sup>

### Liberalism and the Cooperative Future

Liberals believe that humanity is struggling toward a more orderly and peaceful international system and can and must succeed in that goal. All theories recognize the importance of the state in world politics, but whereas realists focus almost exclusively on the state, liberals put a great deal of emphasis on the UN and other IGOs as both evidence and promoters of greater cooperation. Liberals are divided, however, over how far cooperation can and should go. Classic liberals believe that just as humans learned to form cooperative societies without giving up their individuality, so too can states learn to cooperate without surrendering their independence. These liberals believe that the growth of international economic interdependence and the spread of global culture will create a much greater spirit of cooperation among the world countries. Neoliberals are more dubious about a world in which countries retain full sovereignty. These analysts believe that countries will have to surrender some of their sovereignty to international organizations in order to promote greater cooperation and, if necessary, to enforce good behavior.

As for the future, liberals are encouraged by some recent trends. One of these is the willingness of countries to surrender some of their sovereignty to improve themselves. The EU, for instance, now exercises considerable economic and even political authority over its member-countries. Member-countries were not forced into the EU;



**SURVEY**

Identify Your Perspective on  
World Politics



## DEBATE THE POLICY SCRIPT

### Applying Theory to Policy

Although national leaders seldom talk in terms of international relations theory, they do apply it. This was clear in late 2006 when a committee of former top U.S. officials headed by James Baker and Lee Hamilton sent President Bush a report that began, “The situation in Iraq is grave and deteriorating” and recommended a series of pragmatic steps designed to “enable the United States to begin to move its combat forces out of Iraq responsibly.”<sup>1</sup>

The *Washington Post* termed the report “The Realist Manifesto.”<sup>2</sup> Similarly, *Time* greeted the report and the replacement of Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld by Robert Gates with a column entitled, “The Return of the Realists.” The columnist Walter Isaacson linked the neoconservatism of Rumsfeld and others in the administration to the idealism of Woodrow Wilson waging World War I “to make the world safe for democracy,” and characterized the invasions of Iraq in 2003 as a “neo-Wilsonian mission of spreading democracy.”<sup>3</sup>

Describing realism and idealism (liberalism) as “competing strands of American foreign policy,” Isaacson characterized realism as a “hard-nosed focus on clearly defined national interests . . . pursued with a pragmatic calculation of commitments and resources,” and idealism as emphasizing “moral values and ideals” in formulating U.S. foreign policy. As for the argument some make that U.S. pragmatic interests and moral values are synonymous, Isaacson dismissed that conjecture as “alas, not always true in a messy world.”

Which standard should Americans follow? Isaacson hedged, writing that while “welcoming the return of some realism, let’s not forget that America’s strength comes from its values.” To help determine whether you would write the future policy script with a realist or idealist/liberal theme, or perhaps both (full internationalism) or neither (isolationism), consider the following

eight scenarios. Assume that you are the U.S. president, and that for each scenario your maximum cost will be 5,000 American troops killed and \$500 billion. Then decide for each scenario whether you are willing to order U.S. forces into action and pay the price.

1. Retaking the U.S. territory of Guam after it has been seized by another country
2. Stopping a genocidal slaughter that has already killed 200,000 people in a distant country
3. Preventing a clearly hostile country from acquiring nuclear arms and long-range missiles
4. Ousting a dictator who has ended democracy in a distant country and is ruling by terror
5. Toppling a government that is supplying a terrorist group that is threatening you
6. Liberating a country of no strategic importance that has been invaded by a neighbor
7. Defeating a country that dominates the Middle East and has cut off U.S. oil supplies
8. Forcing a country harboring war criminals to surrender them to the International Criminal Court

#### What Do You Think?

Which scenarios did you consider worth going to war? The view here is that scenarios 1, 3, 5, and 7 are realist goals. Scenarios 2, 4, 6, and 8 are idealist/liberal goals. Think about what your answers say about your theory orientation and compare and discuss them with others in your class. Try the exercise again with a maximum cost of 1,000 dead and \$100 billion. Did your answers change?

they joined it freely. This and other indications that sovereignty is weakening will be discussed at length later in the text. Liberals are further buoyed by the spread of democracy and economic interdependence. They believe that both tend to lessen the chances of conflict among states, and research shows that there is substantial validity to this notion (Kinsella & Russett, 2002). Liberals also condemn the practice of *realpolitik*. They charge that power politics leads to an unending cycle of conflict and misery in which safety is temporary at best.

Because realism and liberalism, or idealism as some still call it, are what might be termed the two vintage theories and are the ones that are still used to characterize and debate public policy, it might be enlightening for you to explore which more closely characterizes your approach to world politics and which you believe your country should follow. This can be accomplished in the Debate the Policy Script box, “Applying Theory to Policy.”

## Postmodernist, Feminist, and Economic Theories

Discontent with realist theory was not confined to those who fell into the liberal school of thought. At about the same time that the liberal challenge to realism was developing, some scholars were also beginning to apply postmodernist and feminist perspectives to criticize the state of international relations theory, especially realism. Additionally, there is a range of economic theories, some long existent, others more contemporary, which help us think theoretically about world politics.

### Postmodernist Theory

At its core, **postmodernism** contends that what we take to be political reality is created by the ways that we think about it and by our discourse (writing, talking) about it. As such, postmodernists believe that much of what we assume to be real is merely mind-set that we have created by defining and communicating about things in a certain way. Similarly, our values, what we define as positive and negative, are mental constructs. In this sense, Shakespeare made a postmodern point in *Hamlet* when the Prince of Denmark mused, “there is nothing either good or bad, but thinking makes it so.” For instance, postmodernists would dispute the conception of progress that defines scientific/technological modernity as good and seeks to impose it on people of traditional cultures.

Postmodernists are not some disconnected group who imagine that a warplane or the White House is only an illusion. But they would say that the need to have either of these, like many other political realities, is a matter of mind-set, in this case the result in part of defining yourself primarily as, say, an American who is distinct from other nationalities, as compared to defining yourself first and foremost as a human who has common links and interests with all other humans globally. From this starting point, postmodernists go on to explore ways to escape traditional thinking and create new ways of thinking, and thus new realities. To say that postmodernists advocate much greater creativity in “thinking outside of the box” hardly does them justice, but it does convey some sense of their approach.

This point about narrow thinking is the root of the postmodernist critique of realism and liberalism. Postmodernists charge that both theories perpetuate stale ways of conceiving how we organize and conduct ourselves by, for example, assuming the long-term continuance of national identities and the existence of the international system centered on independent countries. What postmodernists say is that these “realities” can be changed by thinking about and discussing ourselves and others in different ways. They believe that organizing ourselves politically around a geographically defined country is only an image in our mind reinforced by the way that we discuss politics. Postmodernists want to change political discourse so primary political identity could expand beyond nationalism to also include, for instance, being a North American, a woman, or simply a human.

As an example, most people define the concept of “national interest” to mean those things that benefit the country and its people in terms of gaining, increasing, and keeping wealth, military might, and status. Postmodernists reject such a meaning because, they contend, there is no such thing as an objective national interest. If that is true, we can change what it is by conceiving of national interest differently. It may be in American national interest to share more of America’s wealth to uplift the multitude of abjectly poor people in the world, a policy that would arguably enhance Americans’ sense of moral rectitude and their standing in the world. Indeed, postmodernists reject the validity of the “we” and “they” discourse in international politics that distinguishes between ethnonational groups.

Postmodernists even doubt the reality of the “metanarratives” (overarching stories) of history. The standard portrayal of the rise and fall of powerful states is based on the power struggles among them. Is that real? Perhaps the real story, as Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels suggested in the *Communist Manifesto* (1848), is that all history is defined by class struggle between the propertied class (the bourgeoisie) and the oppressed workers (the proletariat). Or maybe politics has been driven, as some feminist postmodernists suggest, by creating structures (such as states and organized religion) that have allowed men to oppress women in the supposed interest of protecting them. Because you have not heard such alternative stories, your instinct may be to dismiss them. But do not be so sure of what is fact and what is fiction.

One of the numerous postmodernist contributions is providing an alternative way to think about how to achieve peace. For example, they view states as linked to violence in many ways and are therefore suspicious of them. One charge is that states justify their existence and power by promoting a sense of danger. Postmodernists also believe that states focus on enhancing their own security as a structure, rather than in terms of their people. Moreover, states try to harness people to the state’s purpose by creating nationalism as the exclusive political identity and by suppressing as muddled, even treasonous, attempts to create competing political identities. In short, according to one postmodernist, “It is force that holds the state together.” Based on this view, to achieve peace, we must examine the relationship of violence to our current political structure and “encourage individuals to actively engage in politics” in order to change the discourse (Shinko, 2004).

### Feminist Theory

Yet another critique of realism and liberalism is provided by feminist thought. Like all the theories and critiques we are exploring, feminism has many aspects and even its own internal disputes. To bridge these, we will adopt the strategy of one feminist author and use feminism “in its original meaning: the theory of, and the struggle for, equality for women” (Fraser, 1999:855). From this perspective, it is possible to highlight a number of common points in feminist thought about world politics. First, feminism argues that women have been left out of the process and even the conceptualization of world politics.

Feminist scholars maintain that the definition of what is relevant to the study of international relations is largely a product of the male point of view and ignores or underrepresents the role of women, their concerns, and their perspectives. Similarly, feminist scholars argue that to a significant degree male-dominated research has promoted methodologies that are not relevant to the questions posed by feminist scholars and to their perspective on knowledge (Tickner, 2005; Caprioli, 2004). In this sense, many feminists would agree with the postmodernists that mainline scholarship has presented a metanarrative of world politics that is not real. Instead it reflects just one set of perceptions (male, in this case). The overarching story from a feminist perspective would be very different.

Concepts such as peace and security are prime examples of how, according to feminists, men and women perceive issues differently. One feminist scholar suggests that “from the masculine perspective, peace for the most part has meant the absence of war” (Reardon, 1990:137). She terms this “negative peace.” By contrast, Reardon (138) continues, women think more in terms of “positive peace,” which includes “conditions of social justice, economic equity and ecological balance.” Women, more than men, are apt to see international security as wider than just a military concept, as also including security from sexism, poverty, domestic violence, and other factors



#### SIMULATION

So Say the Mamas:  
A Feminist World

that assail women. Women favor this more inclusive view of security because, according to another study, “the need for human security through development is critical to women whose lives often epitomize the insecurity and disparities that plague the world order” (Bunch & Carillo, 1998:230).

This inclusive view of violence is supported by women’s experiences. “The most painful devaluation of women,” according to one UN report, “is the physical and psychological violence that stalks them from cradle to grave” (UNDP, 1995:7). Fewer women than men may die or be wounded as soldiers, but women are at least as likely to be casualties in military and terrorist attacks on economic and population centers. Many women die from the starvation and disease that frequently accompany war, and yet others fall victim to widespread sexual abuse that occurs in some wars. During the early 1990s, the campaign against the Bosnians by the Serbs included an officially orchestrated campaign of sexual attack on many thousands of women and girls as young as 13 in an effort to terrorize the Bosnians. Sometimes even the supposed peacemakers may be sexual predators. A UN report in 2005 documented many cases of UN peacekeeping troops and officials in the Congo and elsewhere sometimes raping and more often coercing destitute women and girls as young as age 12 into “survival sex,” swapping sex for as little as a dollar’s worth of food or other necessities.<sup>13</sup> Among many other signs of endemic violence against women are the facts that (1) about 80% of the world’s refugees are women and their children, (2) an estimated 100 million girls suffer genital mutilation, and (3) globally, the national incidence of women who have been the victim of abuse by an intimate partner averages 25% and ranges up to 58%.

Feminism is related to political identity in two ways (Croucher, 2003a). One is to create womanhood as a focus of women’s sense of who they are politically. This does not mean that women are apt to try to forge an independent feminist state somewhere in the world, but it does mean that women may view their country and its policies through a heightened feminist consciousness. Second, the political identity of some women is influenced by their suspicion that states and other political structures are designed to maintain male dominance. This view, one feminist scholar writes, “strips the [state’s] security core naked so that we can see its masculine-serving guises” (Sylvester, 1994:823).

### Economic Theories

Chapter 12, the first of two on the international political economy (IPE), includes a lengthy discussion of various theories related to its operation. Nevertheless, it is important to have some early sense of these approaches. **Economic nationalism** is closely related to realism and argues that countries do and should use their economic strength to increase national power and, in turn, use their national power to further build economic strength. **Economic internationalism**, by contrast, is akin to liberalism. Economic internationalists believe free economic interchange without political interference can bring prosperity to all countries.

**Economic structuralism** is the third major IPE approach. There are a number of variations to economic structuralist theory, but they all share the view that economics plays a key, perhaps dominant role in determining politics. All radical theorists also



Among other things, feminists believe that women should be equally active and as well represented among policy makers as men. The positive role that women play is captured in this photo of two of the many women who have won the Nobel Peace Prize, Northern Ireland’s Betty Williams (1976) and Guatemala’s Rigoberta Menchú Tum (1992). They were together in Guatemala City in 2006 during an event to motivate young adults to take a role in their world.

see the world divided by economic circumstance and believe that the wealthy (countries, corporations, societal classes) act in a self-interested way to keep poor countries and classes within societies impoverished and weak.

Being aware of the structuralist theories is particularly important at the beginning of this text in order to gain some perspective on matters taken up in other chapters, such as the yawning prosperity gap that exists between a few countries like the United States that are very wealthy and the many countries like Uganda that are excruciatingly poor (see Figure 2.4, p. 59). As evident in chapters 2, 5, 14, and elsewhere, economic structural theory is an important component of the critique of globalization. One charge is that globalization and its liberal agenda of lowering barriers to trade, investment, and other international economic exchanges has primarily served the interests of the United States and other wealthy countries by allowing them to further penetrate and dominate poorer countries. There is even an argument that when economic measures are not enough to preserve and expand the dominance of the core countries they will use force to further their ends. Casting globalization as a U.S. “project” designed to further American dominance, one critic writes, “The Iraq war should be seen as part of an intended endgame for a globalization project that . . . [serves] U.S. ambitions” (Schulzinger, 2006:16).

### Constructivist Theory

As the realists and liberals battled it out intellectually, other scholars rejected all or parts of both theories and sought new ways of thinking. Among other influences, the views of postmodernist, feminist, and other scholars on the subjectivity of much of what we assume is real led in the mid-1980s to the formulation of constructivist theory (Jacobensen, 2003; Zehfuss, 2002). **Constructivism** views the course of international relations as an interactive process in which the ideas of and communications among “agents” (or actors: individuals, groups, and social structures, including states) serve to create “structures” (treaties, laws, international organizations, and other aspects of the international system). These structures, in turn, influence the ideas and communications of the agents. This definition, like constructivist theory itself, is very challenging to understand because, as an early constructivist scholar had noted in a reading entitled “World of Our Making,” it takes “most readers into unfamiliar worlds” (Onuf, 2002:127).

#### Constructivism and the Nature of Politics

The title, “World of Our Making,” is an apt description of the core beliefs of constructivists. Their view begins with a rejection of what they claim is the assumption by realists and liberals that most of the actors of world politics, such as states, and structures, such as the anarchistic international system, are a stable given. Constructivist read all such “knowledge” (it exists) as much more fluid than do realists and liberals. It is not that constructivists do not recognize that countries exist. It is that constructivists see them as primarily structures that are fluidly based on the willingness of agents (in this case citizens) to define themselves politically in terms of the state (national political identity) and behave in ways (fighting for it, paying taxes) that support it. Such political identities are mental pictures of who we are, and, as such, both they and the political structures that rest on them are more ethereal than you might assume. For example, in 1991 there was no doubt, even among constructivists, that the Soviet Union existed. It was the world’s largest country with a complex governmental structure and a vast nuclear and conventional military inventory. Indeed, the Soviet Union was one of the world’s two superpowers. Yet as the clock

struck midnight on December 26, 2001, the Soviet Union disappeared. Why? That will be debated for a long time, but constructivists would argue that one factor was that the Soviet Union had been constructed in part in the minds of those within its borders. When they shifted their political identities to being Russians, Ukrainians, Kazaks, and other nationalities, rather than Soviets, these people “constructed” new sovereign states and “deconstructed” the Soviet Union, which was then disbanded by Russia and its other constituent republics.

Constructivists also differ from liberals and, especially, realists in what they see as the goals of the agents. Liberals and realists hold different views on how to best achieve goals, but they tend to see them in relatively concrete terms such as physical safety and material well-being. By contrast, constructivists believe that an important role is played by nonmaterial factors such as ideology, morality, and other cultural outlooks and values. This stress on societal values makes constructivists place considerable emphasis on the internal political processes of countries and how those dynamics shape a country’s perceptions of the world and interactions with it. Historians of American foreign policy, for example, have found a religious component in American culture that disposes it to see the “American way” as God given, which promotes a missionary zeal to carry its blessing to others. This messianic tendency in American culture helps explain from a constructivist point of view the determination to spread democracy to the Middle East and elsewhere. Factoring in values also helps understand policy choices.

### Constructivism and the Course of World Politics

Because constructivism contends that to a great degree the world is what we make of it, most of its adherents do not share the pessimism of realists about the possibilities of escaping global competition and conflict. For instance, understanding that powerful countries may define their world role in different ways may help avoid confrontations. As this is being written in late 2006, the news includes an Associated Press story headlined, “Rice: U.S. Concerned about Rising China” that quotes Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice’s worry about China’s “outsized . . . military buildup.” Realists would react with alarm, but constructivists would, among other things, look at China’s history of strategic culture, which arguably has generally not sought to propel China militarily far beyond its borders (Lantis, 2005). Constructivists would worry that discussing China’s military buildup as a threat might become a self-fulfilling prophecy, creating tensions between Washington and Beijing, escalating armaments by both sides, leading to yet higher tensions, more armaments, and so on. From this perspective, positive interactions with China might yield better results. Research indicates, for instance, that military-to-military contacts between U.S. military representatives and those of other countries are “positively and systematically associated with liberalizing trends” in those countries, a finding that “provides evidence that constructivist mechanisms do have observable effects, and that ideationally based processes play an important role in U.S. national security” (Atkinson, 2006:509).

Even more broadly for constructivists, the future rests on the ways in which we communicate (speak and write) and think about the world and our place in it. They believe that language calls things into existence. For them, choosing one label over another (foreigner, fellow human), then attaching certain values to that label (foreign = different, not my responsibility; fellow citizen = similar, my responsibility) is profoundly important politically because we act on the basis of what things mean to us (Tsygankov, 2003). Constructivists believe that we should reject traditional meanings because they have led to division and conflict. As one put it, “A path cannot be



called a path without the people who walk it” (Simon, 1998:158). They do not believe that the anarchical condition of the international system forces states to take certain actions (like being armed). Instead, constructivists think that how we conceive of the lack of central authority is what determines interactions—“Anarchy is what states make of it” (Wendt, 1992:335). From this point of view, conflict is not the result of structural power politics. Rather, it stems from the discordant worldviews and the inability of people to communicate in ways that would allow them to construct a mutually beneficial vision and create structures to accomplish that vision. “Constructivism is about human consciousness and its role in international life . . . [and] rests on . . . the capacity and will of people to take a deliberate attitude towards the world and to lend it significance [by acting according to that attitude],” is how one constructivist put it (Ruggie, 1998:855). If values and perceptions change, then so too can relations, structural realities, and other aspects of the international system. Political identification can be among these changes. How we define ourselves and the values we place on that identification in relationship to others can, according to constructivists, reshape the structures by which we organize ourselves and the interactions among those structures.

### Assessing Theories

“Good grief,” you may be thinking, “with an avalanche of abstract theory I am having trouble connecting to reality.” Do not be dismayed. That is not an unreasonable response to many pages of theory at the beginning of this text and your course. Moreover, as you progress further in this text and your course, and as you reflect on the outlines of the theories you have just encountered, they will begin to make more sense. They will also help you organize your thoughts about how to connect the actors, events, trends, and other aspects of the world drama that you will encounter.

As you continue thinking theoretically, here are a couple of suggestions that may help. One that was made at the beginning of the theory section but bears repeating is to avoid trying to “referee” the debate among the various schools of thought. Various well-educated, well-read scholars who have devoted their academic careers to studying theory profoundly disagree on which one is the best model of reality. You certainly may find one theory or another appeals to you, but for the present the best idea is to keep an open mind about all of them. Each has something important to say.

Also observe that many of the theories have both empirical (facts) and normative (values) aspects. Empirically, any good theory should provide insightful *description*. That is, it should be able to describe past and current events in a way that tells you of what they are an instance, to recall Rosenau’s standard from earlier. Harder yet, but still a valid test of the empirical worth of a theory is how well it enables accurate *prediction*. Realists would probably predict diplomatic muscle flexing and perhaps even military action if, for example, two democracies are angrily disagreeing about each other’s withdrawals from an oil field that lies under both their territories. Liberals would be more likely to predict that the democracies would not fight (democratic peace theory) and that, instead, they would negotiate a compromise or perhaps even submit the dispute to an intergovernmental organization such as the International Court of Justice. So one thing you can do to evaluate realism and idealism is to watch developing events, think about how realists and liberals would predict their outcome, and then see which proves more accurate.

*Prescription* is a third aspect of many theories. This involves policy advocacy, arguing what policy should be, rather than describing what it has been or is or predicting what it will be. Many realists, for instance, do not believe that countries always

follow a self-interest course. Indeed, realists worry that their country may be persuaded by altruism, by ideological fervor, or by some other drive to pursue policies that are not in the national interest. Recall that realist Hans Morgenthau opposed the Vietnam War as a misuse of U.S. power and, more contemporarily, realist John Mearsheimer took essentially the same view of invading Iraq in 2003. Thus you can use theory to organize your views about what your country's foreign policy should be and, indeed, what the entire future course of world politics should be. If you do so from a solid grounding in theory, you will be far ahead of those who imagine that each event and situation is unique and not part of the ongoing drama on the world stage.

## CHAPTER SUMMARY

### PREVIEWING THE GLOBAL DRAMA

1. This book's primary message is captured by Shakespeare's line, "All the world's a stage, and all the men and women merely players." This means that we are all part of the world drama and are affected by it. It also means that we should try to play a role in determining the course of the dramatic events that affect our lives.
2. This text is organized to reflect the theme that the world system is evolving. Along the traditional path countries have pursued their national interests as far as their power permits within a largely anarchical international system. The alternative, evolving path would have states abandon their pursuit of short-term self-interest and take a more cooperative, globalist approach to world politics.

### THE IMPORTANCE OF WORLD POLITICS TO EACH OF US

3. Economics is one way that we are all affected. The word *intermestic* has been coined to symbolize the merging of *international* and *domestic* concerns, especially in the area of economics. Countries and their citizens have become increasingly interdependent.
4. Economically, trade both creates and causes the loss of jobs. International investment practices may affect your standard of living in such diverse ways as perhaps helping fund your college scholarship or creating employment for you or someone in your family. The global economy also supplies vital resources, such as oil. Exchange rates between different currencies affect the prices we pay for imported goods, the general rate of inflation, and our country's international trade balance.

5. Our country's role in the world also affects decisions about the allocation of budget funds. Some countries spend a great deal on military functions. Other countries spend relatively little on the military and devote almost all of their budget resources to domestic spending.
6. World politics also plays an important role in determining the condition of your living space. Politics, for the most part, has not created environmental degradation, but political cooperation almost certainly will be needed to halt and reverse the despoiling of the biosphere.
7. Your life may also be affected by world politics. You may be called on to serve in the military. Whether or not you are in the military, war can cost you your life.
8. There are many things any one of us can do, individually or in cooperation with others, to play a part in shaping the future of our world. Think, vote, protest, support, write letters, join organizations, make speeches, run for office—do something!

### THINKING THEORETICALLY: PUTTING EVENTS IN CONTEXT

9. We improve our understanding of world politics by putting events within the context of theory to see patterns and make generalizations about the conduct of international affairs.
10. Realism, liberalism, constructivism, postmodernism, feminism and a variety of economic theories all help organize our ability to think theoretically.
11. Realism focuses on the self-interested promotion of the state and nation. Realists believe that power politics is the driving force behind international relations. Therefore, realists believe that both safety



and wisdom lie in promoting the national interest through the preservation and, if necessary, the application of the state's power.

12. Liberalism holds that humans are capable of cooperating out of enlightened common interests in an orderly, humane, and just world, and the world has moved significantly in that direction during the last century. Liberals also see the policy prescriptions of realists as dangerous.
13. Postmodernism criticizes existing theories, especially realism, for making unfounded assumptions about what is real. Feminism criticizes existing theories for ignoring the perceptions of women

and their role in world politics. Nationalist, internationalist, and structuralist economic theories also provide insights into the course of world politics.

14. Constructivism contends that ideas, language, and communications created a subjective reality that we mistake for objective reality and that causes us to create structures that reinforce our perceptions.
15. For now, assess the theories by keeping an open mind, considering the insights each has to offer, and evaluating the descriptive, predictive, and prescriptive value of each.

For simulations, debates, and other interactive activities, a chapter quiz, Web links, and much more, visit [www.mhhe.com/rourke12/](http://www.mhhe.com/rourke12/) and go to chapter 1. Or, while accessing the site, click on Course-Wide Content and view recent international relations articles in the *New York Times*.



## KEY TERMS

anarchical international system	economic nationalism	liberalism	postmodernism
classic liberalism	economic structuralism	neoliberalism	realism
classic realism	feminism	neorealism	sovereignty
constructivism	fiscal year (FY)	nongovernmental organizations (NGOs)	states
direct democracy	intergovernmental organizations (IGOs)	non-zero-sum game	zero-sum game
economic internationalism	intermestic	political theory	