



Introduction

Why We Disagree About International Relations

Let's say you are interested in the ethnic warfare going on today in Darfur, a western province of Sudan, an African country just south of Egypt (see map at the front of this book). You go to the Library of Congress's online catalogue and find more than two hundred book titles on Sudan. You Google "Darfur, Sudan" and get over 8 million Web sites on the subject. Do you start by reading every single one of these materials? Maybe, if you have ten years to do the research. Otherwise you select certain readings. On what basis do you make this selection? Even if you read them all, what would you know? You would know a bunch of facts, but you would not know all the facts and some facts might be disputed. Would you know what caused the ethnic conflict? Not unless you formulated and chose a particular perspective. A **perspective** is a hypothesis that suggests which facts or events cause other facts or events. For example, have economic or other material disparities between Arab and African tribes in Darfur caused the ethnic violence? Or did the colonization of Sudan by Egypt and Britain in the nineteenth century create a deep-seated discrimination that persists today? Maybe the cause of the conflict is religion—Christian blacks fighting against



Darfuri refugees camp out near the Sudanese border in March 2008. What causes such human sadness (a matter of perspective), and who is responsible (a matter of level of analysis)?

perspectives
ideal type theories or explanations that emphasize one of three causes (power, institutions, or ideas) of world events over the others.

levels of analysis

the direction, or “level,” from which different causes of international change emerge. Three types are identified here: the systemic, domestic, and individual.

ideal types

perspectives or simplified characterizations of theories that identify the most important aspects, not all of the intricacies and variations.



An Iraqi policeman views the world from his Muslim country. How others see the world and we see others are a matter of perspectives.

Muslim Arabs. You might test all of these explanations to see if the facts support them, but you can't test every possible explanation in every situation. So which perspectives do you select to test when an unlimited number of explanations are possible?

There is a further problem. From what level of analysis do you test your perspectives? A **level of analysis** is the location from which causes of events originate. If economic disparities are the cause of ethnic tensions in Darfur, from what primary location or level of analysis do these causes come? Do they derive from elite leaders who manipulate inequalities to maintain their authority? Do they derive from a domestic system of law and property rights that discriminates consistently among various ethnic groups regardless of who their leaders are? Do they derive from the abject poverty of the country (compared to other countries in the international system) that makes a country such as Sudan prey to foreign intervention and exploitation? Causes may come from all these levels, but which is more important? In the real world, we have to decide what to do about the situation in Darfur. If we decide to replace the leadership but domestic property rights turn out to be the more important cause of the violence, we have not done much to solve the ethnic crisis.

Our objective in this book is to develop the tools of analysis—perspectives and levels of analysis—you need to understand international situations like the one in Darfur. Along the way, you will learn many facts about world history and contemporary events. But this is not a traditional textbook that presents events and topics one after the other and calls them international relations. We will encounter and memorize many facts, to be sure, 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 strengthening your intellectual tool kit and ability to think about and understand world affairs. We will be working mostly on your central processor—not your memory storage—although we hope to fill up the latter as well.

The Role of Perspectives and Levels of Analysis

We see and understand international relations through different perspectives and levels of analysis. Both perspectives and levels of analysis are what we call **ideal types**.

They help boil down a complex reality, allowing us to see which causes and levels of analysis we are primarily emphasizing when we try to explain and sometimes predict world affairs. Serious students of international affairs try to consider all causes and levels of analysis. They test their perspectives and levels of analysis against as many facts as possible. But time is not unlimited, and no human mind or even a computer can take into account every fact of history or contemporary affairs. Nor can a mind or machine consider every possible explanation of those facts. Think about the newspapers and Web sites you read. Do front pages give you all the news that is fit to print? No, they don't and they can't. Someone decides what news is fit to print and that decision involves selecting and emphasizing certain facts



Why did Al Qaeda attack America: the weak balancing the strong, a reaction to U.S. diplomacy in the Middle East, or a rejection of western values?

over others. It is crucial to ask on what basis, from what primary perspective and level of analysis, publishers and Web site masters make that selection. Similarly, from what principal perspective and level of analysis do diplomats and politicians act? And from what primary perspective and level of analysis do you evaluate their actions? This textbook will help you develop the skills to understand alternative perspectives and levels of analysis in international relations and use them to draw your own conclusions.

There is a crucial point to understand from the outset. Ideal types single out primary perspectives and levels of analysis. The various perspectives and levels of analysis we discuss in this book are not exclusive of one

another. In the real, not ideal, world, they overlap and every situation contains facts important from all perspectives and levels of analysis. But, as we have suggested already, people cannot consider all the perspectives and levels of analysis in any specific situation. Even if they could, they would have to emphasize some causes and levels over others to decide what to do. If we don't know why something happens, we can't fix it. If everything is a cause of an event, nothing is the cause. Based on the best evidence we can gather, we have to decide at some point which perspective and level of analysis are more important. Ideal types help us to detect this relative emphasis in the points of view expressed by others and in our own conclusions.

Perspectives help us decide what the primary cause of an event is. We consider three principal perspectives in this book. The first claims (hypothesizes) that a struggle for power is the primary cause of what happens in international affairs; this we call the realist perspective. The second, the liberal perspective, argues that interdependence and institutions exert the primary influence on world events. The third, the identity perspective, asserts that ideas are more important than power or institutions in shaping international outcomes. We will flesh these out later. From time to time, we'll take note of a fourth perspective, the **critical theory perspective**, which questions whether events can be explained apart from historical circumstances and focuses instead on social and political change that unfolds within history. This perspective tends to project novel, sometimes utopian and radical solutions, such as revolution, to achieve a world of greater justice and equality. Critical theory reminds us that any understanding of a complex world is fragile and always subject to critique.

Levels of analysis tell us the direction from which different causes come. We consider three principal levels of analysis. The **individual level**, sometimes called the decision-making level, emphasizes the leaders and decision-making institutions within a country. The **domestic level** focuses on the internal characteristics of countries as a whole such

critical theory perspective

a perspective that questions whether events can be explained apart from historical circumstances and focuses instead on social and political change that unfolds within history; it offers broad critiques of international relations and generally advocates radical solutions such as revolution.

individual level of analysis

a level at which individuals or small groups of individuals make decisions and cause events using power, institutions, or ideas.

domestic level of analysis

a level that focuses on domestic features of a country as a whole, such as capitalist economic system or nationalist ideology, from which the causes of a realist, liberal, or identity perspective come.

Figure Intro-1

				Perspective			
				"Ideal types" reflect primary but not exclusive emphasis on the following elements:			
				Realist	Liberal	Identity	Critical theory
				Struggle for power	Interdependence and institutions	Ideas	Social change
Level of analysis These are the directions or "levels" from which causes emerge	Systemic	Structure	Relative position of one country vs. another				
		Process	Interactions between countries	⊕	→		
	Foreign policy		Links domestic and systemic-process concerns				
	Domestic		Internal cultural, political and economic characteristics				
	Individual		Leaders and decision-making groups				

systemic level of analysis

a level that identifies causes that come from the positioning and interaction of states in the international system.

foreign policy level of analysis

a level of analysis between the systemic process and domestic levels where foreign policy officials actually make decisions.

methods

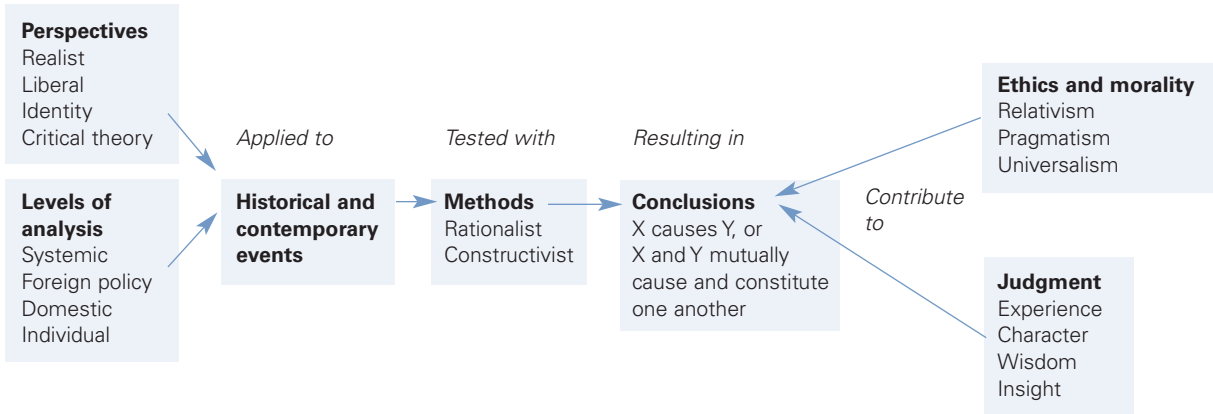
the formal rules of reason (rationalist) or appropriateness (constructivist) for testing perspectives against facts.

as their culture, political, and economic systems. And the **systemic level** highlights the way countries are positioned (structure) and interact (process) with respect to one another. At times we will consider a fourth level, the **foreign policy level of analysis**; this level links domestic politics and international relations and falls between the study of comparative politics (comparing countries domestically) and the study of international relations (looking at how countries interrelate internationally). (See Figure Intro-1.)

Because we have to emphasize different perspectives and levels of analysis to make sense of international relations, we often disagree about international relations (just as we do about domestic politics). When disagreements arise from ignorance and prejudice, we try to resolve them by testing alternative perspectives and levels of analysis against the facts. We use various **methods** to see how well the facts fit our perspectives and level of analysis. In this book, we consider two principal types of methods: rationalist and constructivist. But disagreements often persist even after we've tested perspectives. In that case, disagreements result because different people legitimately hold different perspectives and emphasize different causes. Often, the available facts support competing explanations.¹ Thus, when we have to decide and act, we often exercise **judgment**, or informed opinion, based on experience, character, and other factors that go beyond theoretical and empirical knowledge. Socially derived standards of good conduct for human behavior—**ethics** and **morality**—come into play, and for many people in today's world religion plays a key role. Figure Intro-2 shows how these elements—different perspectives, levels of analysis, methods, judgments, and ethical and moral convictions—interact to explain events and account for disagreements. The rest of this introduction looks at each element more closely in the context of a specific case.

Figure Intro-2

How One Thinks About International Relations



Understanding the 9/11 Attacks

How do perspectives and levels of analysis help us understand contemporary debates? Take the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, against the World Trade Center in New York and Pentagon in Washington, D.C. Let's look at three different interpretations of those attacks.

Weak vs. Strong

Three days after 9/11, Ronald Steel, a professor at the University of Southern California, characterized the attacks in the *New York Times* as “a war in which the weak turned the guns of the strong against them . . . showing . . . that in the end there may be no such thing as a universal civilization of which we all too easily assume we are the rightful leaders.”² Steel interpreted the attacks of Al Qaeda as weak actors rebelling against strong actors, with the weak actors rejecting the notion that the strong ones can dictate what is right and therefore universally valid in international affairs. Steel is applying a perspective emphasizing the struggle for power. This perspective we call the **realist perspective**. It sees the world largely in terms of a struggle for power in which strong actors seek to dominate weak ones and weak actors resist strong ones to preserve their interests and independence. The most important fact driving international behavior from this perspective is that there is no overarching or universal center of power in the world that is recognized by all actors as legitimate. The decentralized distribution of power requires states and other actors to defend themselves because they cannot rely on anyone else to defend them. In so doing, they often come into conflict with one another. They try to manage this conflict through the reciprocal acquisition and use of military arms, or what is called the balance of power.

The struggle for power goes on at all levels of analysis: between state and nonstate actors at the systemic level, among groups within states at the domestic level, and among leaders making decisions for states and nonstate actors at the individual or decision-making level. Traditionally, realists have focused on the actors with the great-

judgment

the broader assessment of what makes sense after accumulating as many facts and testing as many perspectives as possible.

ethics and morality

standards of good conduct for human behavior.

realist perspective

a perspective that sees the world largely in terms of a struggle for power in which strong actors, especially states, seek to dominate weak ones and weak actors resist strong ones to preserve their interests and independence.

est capability to exercise power. Today, these actors are states. But the realist perspective can apply at any level of analysis.

The weak in the case of the 9/11 attacks are individuals or nonstate actors coming from the individual level of analysis. However, if we emphasize the Taliban government in Afghanistan where the Al Qaeda trained, we might be thinking of weak or failed states that have been taken over internally by terrorists and conclude that the cause is coming from the domestic level of analysis. Or, if we think more broadly still and argue that “the weak” refers to the poor Muslim countries dominated in the Middle East and elsewhere by the strong Western powers, we might decide the cause is coming from the distribution of power in the international system as a whole, or the systemic level of analysis. At each level, the cause is the same, namely the struggle for power between the weak and the strong. But, depending on which level of analysis we emphasize, we respond differently to the attack. In the first case, we focus our attention on the individual terrorists. In the second, we react to domestic problems in weak or failed states. And in the third, we address problems in broader relationships between Muslim and Western countries (Table Intro-1).

Perspectives emphasize causes—in the realist case, the struggle for power. Levels of analysis emphasize where the cause is coming from—in the 9/11 event, from weak nonstate actors such as Al Qaeda. We need both perspectives and levels of analysis to draw a complete picture. Think of it like hitting a baseball. Perspectives tell us what kind of pitch is coming: fastball, curveball, or changeup. Levels of analysis tell us from which direction the pitch is coming, whether it is thrown overhand, sidearm, or underhand. Unless you know both, you’ll miss the pitch or, in international affairs, you’ll fail to explain the event you are interested in.

As we mentioned, perspectives do not exclude other factors. They just emphasize them differently. Notice how Steel tells us what is not important as well as what is. He discounts the possibility that ideas help bridge the gap between the weak and strong. Ideas, he says, are relative, not universal. There “may be no such thing as a universal civilization.” In this brief passage, he also does not mention international institutions as a way to resolve differences between the weak and the strong without resorting to force. He is making the realist point that the struggle for power has a greater impact on outcomes than ideas or institutions do.

Failed Negotiations

Writing two days after Steel in the *Washington Post*, Caryle Murphy, a journalist, saw the attacks quite differently. September 11, 2001, was not a result of the weak striking back against the strong but of unresolved diplomatic disputes, such as the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, that created unfairness and grievances between the feuding par-

Table Intro-1

The Causes of the 9/11 Attacks: From the Realist Perspective

Level	Perspective Realist: Struggle for power between the “weak” and the “strong”
Systemic	Muslim countries reject U.S. oppression in the region/world
Domestic	Taliban takeover of the weak Afghan state
Individual	Individual terrorists plotting against the United States

ties. She argued that “if we want to avoid creating more terrorists, we must end the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in a way both sides see as fair.”³ Murphy is using the **liberal perspective**. It emphasizes relationships and interdependence among actors in international affairs, how groups interact, communicate, negotiate, and transact exchanges such as trade with one another. She is saying that the cause of the 9/11 attacks is the failure to include all parties—terrorists and nonterrorists, Palestinians and Israelis—in a negotiated agreement that is fair and legitimate. An outcome decided by a power struggle or imposing one side’s ideas on the other would not be fair or legitimate and would probably just create more terrorists. On the other hand, negotiating an agreement might actually reduce the threat of terrorism. Note how diplomacy trumps power. The liberal perspective holds out the prospect that solutions to international conflicts do not require a balance of power but derive from common rules and institutions that include all actors regardless of their relative power or ideas.

Murphy is emphasizing the systemic level of analysis because international negotiations are a more important cause of and, therefore, solution to the problem of terrorism than institutional aspects of domestic governments or the specific behavior of individual leaders. From the liberal perspective, actors at any level—systemic, domestic, or individual—behave not so much on the basis of their relative power, whether they are weak or strong, but on the way the other party behaves, how the parties interact and negotiate, the patterns of behavior they create, and the roles and rules they establish in institutions that regularize their relationships (Table Intro-2).

Democratic Reform of Governments

Writing a year after the September 11, 2001, attacks, as prospects of war against Iraq loomed, Jim Hoagland, a columnist for the *Washington Post*, suggested still a third way to think about the attacks of 9/11. He was skeptical of finding a solution to terrorism through a better balance of power between the weak and strong or through negotiations of the Arab-Israeli dispute. He felt that the problem was one of nondemocratic governments in the Middle East. “The removal of Saddam Hussein [then Iraq’s leader] and Yasser Arafat [then leader of the Palestinian Authority] are necessary but not sufficient conditions for stabilizing the Middle East. . . . The administration cannot rely .



Israeli (Shimon Peres, right) and Palestinian (Yasser Arafat, left) leaders meet to stop the *intifada*. Why did the Camp David agreement in December 2000 fail: militants too strong, a flawed agreement, or irreconcilable ideologies?

liberal perspective

a perspective that emphasizes relationships and negotiations among actors in international affairs, as well as how groups interact, communicate, and transact exchanges with one another, such as trade; liberal perspectives tend to focus on the role of institutions in solving international conflicts.

Table Intro-2

The Causes of the 9/11 Attacks: From the Liberal Perspective	
Level	Perspective Liberal: Failed negotiations, problematic relationships
Systemic	Failure to include all parties in a balanced and fair agreement
Domestic	Institutional aspects of domestic governments
Individual	Behavior of specific leaders



Iran's president, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, speaking at a ceremony marking the Iranian New Year holiday, March 17, 2008.

identity perspective

a perspective that emphasizes the importance of ideas that define the identities of actors and that motivate the use of power and negotiations by these actors.

of analysis are more important than removing individual leaders—the individual level—and may subsequently change the way Middle East states behave toward one another at the systemic level. If actors identify themselves in adversarial or diverging terms, negotiations are more difficult to achieve and power balancing is more likely to occur. If, on the other hand, actors have similar or converging identities, cooperation is more likely. Hoagland argues that, until Arab identities become more democratic and their identities converge with that of Israel, negotiations (the liberal solution) will remain discredited and shifts in power such as removing Hussein and Arafat (the realist solution) will not change much (Table Intro-3).

Pervasive Violence

From a critical theory perspective, the cause of 9/11 is the pervasive violence in the present international system caused primarily by the United States, which as the pre-eminent power fights terrorism lawlessly while never acknowledging the terror it deploys against the rest of the world, including its own citizens, through imperialism and the curtailment of civil and human rights. As one radical critic puts it, “the probability of ‘apocalypse soon’ . . . is surely too high . . . because of Washington’s primary role in accelerating the race to destruction by extending its historically unique military dominance”⁵ (Table Intro-4).

Table Intro-3

The Causes of the 9/11 Attacks: From the Identity Perspective

Level	Perspective
	Identity: Understanding of and changes in how actors and entities define and identify themselves
Systemic	Divergent identities generate conflict, converging identities cooperation
Domestic	Democratic reforms in Arab governments would make them less adversarial toward Israel and others in the region
Individual	Removing individual leaders not as important as more democratic institutions

. . . on a now discredited peace process. . . . Only a level and clarity of American commitment to democratic change . . . will calm an ever more deadly conflict.”⁴ Note how Hoagland deemphasizes the negotiation process, which a liberal perspective would emphasize, by describing it as a “discredited peace process” and says that the mere removal of Saddam Hussein and Yasser Arafat from power, which the realist perspective would emphasize, is not enough. Instead what is needed, he maintains, is a change in the nature of Arab governments and their political identities in the Middle East. They need to reform and, with U.S. help, become more democratic.

Hoagland is employing the **identity perspective**. This perspective emphasizes the importance of ideas that define the identities of actors and motivate their use of power and negotiations in international affairs. He is projecting that democratic reforms at the domestic level

Table Intro-4

The Causes of the 9/11 Attacks: From the Critical Theory Perspective	
Level	Perspective Critical Theory: View of events in historical/political context with emphasis on social justice and change
Systemic	Pervasive violence in international system, primarily on the part of the United States
Domestic	
Individual	

More Perspectives and Levels of Analysis

The three primary perspectives we've discussed—realist, liberal, and identity—and three primary levels of analysis—individual, domestic, and systemic—help us better understand the protean world of international affairs. Each perspective emphasizes a different primary cause of world events that can come from a variety of levels of analysis. The realist perspective emphasizes power—human nature at the individual level, aggressive states at the domestic level, and the balance of power at the systemic level. The liberal perspective emphasizes institutions—a leader's role at the individual level, government institutions at the domestic level, and international institutions at the systemic level. And the identity perspective emphasizes ideas—shared or conflicting ideas at the systemic level, a country's culture or political ideology at the domestic level, and leaders' ideas at the decision-making level.

These are not the only perspectives and levels of analysis we could study. There are more complex variations of each perspective as well as additional levels of analysis. For example, the realist perspective includes classical realist and neorealist, offensive and defensive versions of the power struggle. The liberal perspective covers classical liber-



President George W. Bush meets with the National Security Council at Camp David, September 15, 2001. Does the United States run and terrorize the world?

al and liberal institutionalist or neoliberal theories of trade and international institutions. The identity perspective treats idealist, normative, social constructivist (constructing identities through discourse), psychological, and methodological variants of international affairs. And critical theories include Marxist, feminist and other historically embedded approaches. We refer to these more complex variations in our discussions as theories, not perspectives. Perspectives deal with what theories emphasize, not with all the variations of each theory. All realist theories, for example, emphasize the struggle for power, although some, such as classical realism, give a larger role to ideas than do others, such as neorealism.

Similarly, there are many more levels of analysis between the individual and systemic levels than just the three or four we consider here. There are, for example, a public- vs. private-sector level of analysis domestically and a regional level of analysis internationally, useful in analyzing the European Union. We distinguish between two types of systemic levels of analysis, process and structure, later.

But we don't need to understand all these more complex variations at this point. Reality is always more complex than the analytical tools we use to understand it. That's why we use ideal types to help us judge which real-world theories and arguments are, *relatively*, being emphasized. Without ideal types we would not know in the 9/11 example that Steel is emphasizing the power struggle and deemphasizing shared values among international actors. Because we cannot include and emphasize everything, we need analytical devices such as ideal types to help distinguish what is primary and secondary in scholarly theories as well as in day-to-day political arguments.

The Role of Methods

All knowledge starts with theories. Even natural sciences use theories to select and order facts. 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 difference between the natural (physics) and social (political science) sciences is not that social sciences depend on perspective and natural sciences do not. 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. A social science, such as international relations, deals with human beings, who do have minds of their own and often change them. That people can and do think for themselves makes social science facts somewhat more elusive, but they are still real. And it means that we need to be more conscious of our perspective when we deal with social science subjects. We are dealing with people whose perspective 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 same way we would. And they could always change their answer the minute after we ask the question.

Scholarly theories seek to *describe*, *explain*, and *predict* events. Methods provide rules to test 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, just that the way we are thinking about that world is not falsified by what is out there. We can never know what

is true or actually out there. That's the case in the natural sciences too. Newtonian physics, which helped us reach the moon, assumes the universe is made up of fixed bodies, time, and space. Quantum physics, which helps us explode the atom, tells us it is made up of probabilities and relative time and space. Which world is the real world? We won't know until we find a unified theory that subsumes both theories, and even then a rival theory may always be possible.

Rationalist vs. 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, and some identity perspectives are actually called constructivist because they are considered to be methodologies only, not full-blown theories comparable to realism or liberalism. We use *constructivism* to refer to full-blown theories, such as social constructivism, and *constructivist* to refer to methodologies only.

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 game that produces labels. For example, why did U.S. policymakers name the first atomic weapon "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 independently of the other and precedes or comes before it. The first event links up with and causes a second event that comes after 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 several great powers exist, precede and cause different types of interactions between states, ranging from cooperation to war. Realist perspectives argue that polarity, the number of great powers in the system, causes or determines the prospects of war.

Unlike rationalist methods, constructivist methods see events as bound together in context, not as separate and sequential occurrences. They fit together, not because one causes the other but because they *mutually* cause one another. Social relationships have this constitutive characteristic. Take, for example, the relationship between a master and a slave. One does not precede and cause the other. The master, unlike the sun, does not exist before the slave; instead, the master is defined by acquiring a slave, and the slave is defined by succumbing to a master. The two entities appear together chronologically, and one has no meaning without the other. They mutually cause or constitute one another and in that sense explain one another. Two things fit together in a given context or situation because they are appropriate to that context. This logic of appropriateness replaces the logic of consequence by which one event precedes and causes the other.

rationalist methods

methods that assume that causal factors can be disaggregated and described objectively, explaining one event by a second event occurring in sequence.

constructivist methods

methods that pay more attention to the way that meaning is formed discursively, through language, and that see events as mutually causing or constituting one another rather than causing one another sequentially.

causation

one fact or event causing another.

Sovereignty as Consequence or Construction

For example, we might ask which facts caused the rise of sovereignty or legal equality among states in international relations. Social scientists using rationalist methodologies might hypothesize that it was caused by an independent and preceding event such as the Treaty of Westphalia in 1648. Monarchs who existed in Europe prior to Westphalia gathered together and established (caused) the practice of sovereignty to assert their independence of the pope in Rome and holy Roman emperor in Vienna. Social scientists using constructivist methodologies might hypothesize that sovereignty derived from broader historical developments, “a change . . . in the basic *structure* of property rights that characterizes an entire social formation” (meaning an entire historical period rather than a particular event) and came about through the “growth in the volume and dynamic density” (meaning interdependence) of international society.⁷ Before the concept of sovereignty emerged, property or territory among rulers was not considered separable or exclusive. Rulers viewed themselves as local members of a single universal community of Catholic Europe. The new definition of property or territorial rights involved separateness or exclusiveness. Territory now belonged to one and only one monarch or state. How did this change in the concept 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 in the volume and dynamic density” 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. This is characteristic of identity perspectives; our example reflects one such perspective, known as social constructivism.

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 does not tell us whether democracy causes no war or no war causes democracy. 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 omitted variables that we have not considered. These factors may all be interrelated with one another, creating what methodologists call multicollinearity. 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 them through a thick description, or narrative of the repetitive practices and interactions by 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 making precise predictions. Thus, constructivist studies might conclude that the peace among democracies

correlation

one fact or event occurring with another fact or event.

is hard to abstract 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 apply to future situations.

Counterfactual Reasoning

Both rationalist and constructivist methods use what we call **counterfactual reasoning**. History, because we look back on events that have already occurred, appears to have a single outcome. 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 an event such as World War I was going to happen. But it did not have to begin in July 1914, and it did not have to cost 20 million lives. How do we determine what choices or paths were *not* taken and use that knowledge to judge present circumstances? We ask *counterfactual* questions. What if Archduke Franz Ferdinand of Austro-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? What if the United States had given United Nations (UN) inspectors more time in 2003 to do their work in Iraq? We make educated guesses about alternative paths that history might have taken, and that helps us to look for missing facts and test alternative explanations.

counterfactual reasoning

a method of testing claims for causality by inverting the causal claim. The counterfactual of the claim “event A caused event B” is to ask, “if event A had not happened, would event B have happened?”

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 to make a judgment for yourself. 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 of greater threat. When someone draws a gun on you, you tend not to ask what that person believes or whether you can refer the dispute to a court or institution. You duck or fight back to even the balance of power if you can. But how do you determine situations of greater threat? Often a threat is not obvious. It depends on what you are looking for. So, the realist perspective may exaggerate threat.

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 he or she doesn't like you? You may be compromising with someone who will take advantage of you later. How do you protect yourself? So, the liberal perspective may underestimate the risks of cooperation.

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 country to avoid war and

maybe mutual destruction? Don't you have to risk cooperation, especially with enemies? And what about friends? Don't they sometimes change and become enemies? Maybe the identity perspective is too rigid—some would say ideological—and leads to more fear or more complacency than power disparities or opportunities for compromise might otherwise prescribe.

This book presents and discusses the different perspectives (and methods) evenhandedly. By doing so, each perspective, in effect, critiques the others. What the realist perspective relatively deemphasizes—for example, the role of institutions or ideas—the liberal and identity perspectives emphasize. What the liberal perspective deemphasizes—for example, the role of power and ideas—the power and identity perspectives emphasize. And so on. Thus, when we discuss the Cuban Missile Crisis or terrorist attacks from the three different perspectives, we will see the strengths and weakness 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.

F. Scott Fitzgerald, the novelist, once said that a well-educated person can hold two contradictory ideas in mind at the same time.⁸ We will try to hold three (and, at times, four) different ideas—the perspectives and levels of analysis—in mind at the same time. We do this for two reasons. First, each of us already has a preferred way of thinking about the world, although we may not be conscious of it. That is how we conclude whether we are for or against a particular policy, such as the current war in Iraq. By being open to alternative perspectives, we discover which perspective we prefer and decide whether we want to continue to hold that perspective. Second, by considering all perspectives evenhandedly, we remain open to the opinions of others, even after we have decided our own point 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 to one another. 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 viewing the world from a different perspective.

The Role of Judgment

What is certain is that there will always be differences and controversies in international affairs. World War I occurred almost one hundred years ago. Yet we still don't agree on what caused it. Why? Don't we know all the facts by now? Probably, although a historian may still discover a lost diary or set of letters left by some participant. But will these last few facts resolve the controversy? Probably not. The reason is that people bring different perspectives to bear on the facts. Chapter 3 demonstrates this conclusion in the case of World War I.

Contemporary controversies are no different. Take the recent war in Iraq in 2003. Did Saddam Hussein have weapons of mass destruction? At the time the United States invaded Iraq in March 2003, 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. 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, no doubt 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 the *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.”⁹

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 on the basis of 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 of 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.”¹⁰ 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.”¹¹ A gut feeling without facts is ignorance, but incomplete knowledge without a gut feeling is often useless, especially under time constraints.

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 very important in intellectual and 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 an essential guide for directing contemporary scientific and technological issues. The question of what we do with nuclear technology or 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.¹²

Relativist Values

Relativism holds that all truth is relative. There are no universal moral principles that apply to all people under all circumstances. Each culture or religion is entitled to its

relativism

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

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 over 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; one cannot adjust moral behavior to circumstances without sliding down the slippery slope to relativism.

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 6 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 its charter. Kofi Annan, 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?”¹³ 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 UN nor the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) authorized America’s invasion of Iraq in March 2003. Was America 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

the idea that morality is proportionate to what is possible and that one should do what one can to uphold proper standards under present and potential future circumstances but that one should not be dogmatic.

Pragmatism offers a third point of view. Pragmatist answer the question of whether to intervene based on certain practical requirements, for example, stability and 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, it 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 or not is much disputed. But some pragmatists might conclude that the threat was not imminent and that America’s intervention

encouraged unlimited 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 its application at all times in all places. It is willing to compromise, even though compromise risks slipping into relativism. Indeed for pragmatists, the greatest moral good is compromise.

Moral Choice

A simple story illustrates the differences among these moral views.¹⁴ An officer and a small group of soldiers involved in war enter a village, which 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 did it. The villagers remain silent. So the officer 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. 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. By killing one villager, the pragmatist minimizes the violence and sets a standard—tit for tat, not triple tit for tat—that potentially limits a chain of future retaliations.

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. Things change, so why is the past relevant? Everything is totally new under the sun, right? Well, if that's the case, how do we recognize when something is totally new under the sun? Don't we need to know, at least, how the new differs from the old? Take globalization, for example. Is it new? Many commentators say it is. But globalization existed before World War I at levels that were not surpassed again until after the mid-1970s. We need patterns from the past to identify the trends of the future. Of course, history never repeats itself exactly. But if we don't examine it, we learn nothing from it and may inadvertently repeat it.

History is also fun. 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. Where was your family during the Vietnam War or your grandparents in World War II? Do you know from what part of the world your family comes? 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 this not to focus on my life but to help you discover how your life, too, is linked with history.

This book therefore covers lots of history, but at a high level of generalization. We use this history to gain insight into contemporary and future international affairs. We start in Part I with *military* history and contemporary conflicts such as the recent terrorist attacks. In Part II, we take up *economic* history and current controversies about globalization and the world economy. In Part III, we explore *transnational and global* issues that may be creating a new world community or dividing it in different and more dangerous ways. In each part, we seek to understand what has existed in the past to see more clearly what may be coming in the future. Knowing that perspectives matter, we already know that international relations are not just about world events. Somebody has to decide what events matter, and somebody can decide that only through an examination of the past.

Summary

Refer back to Figure Intro-2 for a minute. It suggests how the various elements of understanding international affairs fit together. We start with perspectives because we could not start at all if we tried to consider all the 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 relying on judgment, ethics, and morality to fill in the gaps that analysis inevitably leaves.

Every student or participant in international affairs has to approach the subject in this manner. Take a 900-page book entitled *Diplomacy* that former secretary of state Henry Kissinger wrote in 1994. In it, he argued that the United States was entering a world after the end of the Cold War for which it was poorly prepared. He used a realist perspective to survey centuries of world history and show that balancing power is the best approach to preserving peace in a world of relatively equal powers. Today, Kissinger observed, America is entering a world of relatively equal powers—comprising China, Russia, India, Europe, and the United States—but America's self-image, which is exceptionalist and considers democracy appropriate for all countries, is an obstacle to dealing with other countries that share equal power but have different political identities. From a realist perspective, Kissinger wants the balance of power to prevail over any specific country's identity. Do you agree with Kissinger? How can you know unless you have some idea what history he selected and what history he left out? Now you see why, if you want to participate in this debate, you need to understand perspectives and history. In the next chapter, we distinguish more carefully among the three perspectives and levels of analysis to better prepare ourselves, if we are so inclined, to argue with Kissinger's perspective.

Key Concepts

constructivist methods 00	ideal types 00	perspectives 00
correlation 00	identity perspective 00	pragmatism 00
counterfactual reasoning 00	individual level of analysis 00	rationalist methods 00
critical theory perspective 00	judgment 00	realist perspective 00
domestic level of analysis 00	levels of analysis 00	relativism 00
ethics 00	liberal perspective 00	systemic level of
foreign policy level of	methods 00	analysis 00
analysis 00	morality 00	universalism 00

Study Questions

1. Why is ethnic conflict that occurs in one part of the world front page news but not ethnic conflict in another?
2. Do you think terrorism is caused by American imperialism or American diplomacy? Which answer reflects the realist perspective? Which reflects the liberal perspective?
3. How would you test your perspective that American imperialism is the cause of terrorism—by measuring relative power over different periods of time 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?