

This observation turned out to be a big thing. Time and time again, studies have repeatedly demonstrated that liberal democratic political regimes do not fight one another. There has been a great deal of bickering over the specifics of statistical methods used in analyses, what defines a democracy, what defines a war, and so forth, but this idea of **democratic peace**—a peace between democracies or between countries sharing a characteristic closely associated with modern democracy—is about as close as political scientists ever get to agreeing on anything. It seems that there is something about the way democracies work, something within the mess that realists would stuff inside the black box, that is having a clear and consistent influence on war and peace.

Unfortunately, this agreement over the presence of a democratic peace is not matched by anything close to a consensus on why democracies might choose not to fight one another. How shared democracy creates peace is not at all clear. Explanations from economics and trade, to shared culture, to news flows, to the influence of McDonald's and other international corporations have been offered, but even after several hundred research articles and several dozen books devoted to the subject, it is not clear exactly what is happening. What is clear, however, is that what goes on inside the black box matters. If something as simple as the basic type of government can have such a clear effect, then other aspects of process and domestic politics must also be important to the conduct of international politics.

Another important point is that the democratic peace is a specific area of research and is not a theory of international politics. While some might plausibly argue that Foreign Policy Analysis is a theory of international politics that fits within the liberalism conceptualization of the world* no one would argue that the democratic peace is. The democratic peace is a research topic that fits within the commitment of Foreign Policy Analysis to opening the black box of domestic politics and, perhaps more importantly, is one of the best examples of research conducted from the liberal theoretical perspective. Liberalism is harder to define than either realism or Marxism, but one way to describe it is as the cooperative counterpart of realism, or perhaps an embodiment of the Western ideal of the enlightened individual. It is a collection of theories that presume that human beings are generally cooperative, cooperation provides greater overall benefit for everyone, and that the closer you get to the democratic ideal of informed individuals participating in policy, the more cooperative politics will become. The democratic peace fits that bill perfectly.

The Shadow of the Hegemon†

Another way that realism can be challenged is by questioning the assertion that the world is anarchic. Even in our simplified stories of kids on a deserted isle, anarchy was

*They would probably lose the argument, but they could still make it without being too horribly embarrassed later.

†If you recognize that title, you are a true and certified geek. Congratulations, you can now wear a gold shirt instead of a red shirt when you beam down to Planet Doom and you can pick up your membership certificate from Orson Scott Card at the next World Science Fiction Convention.

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fleeting when it existed. In *Lord of the Flies*, look at how quickly the boys try to take themselves out of anarchy, how quickly

they act to reestablish social structures for interactions. From the minute Piggy starts talking to Ralph, the exchange can be viewed in terms of the two of them trying to establish a hierarchy, a social structure to manage their interaction. Within a few pages, the boys are gathered at the little meeting, with big kids in charge and the conch shell being used to regulate behavior. Is it any less likely that states in the international system would try to establish some form of international social and political structure? After all, trade, exchange, and diplomacy are ancient and persistent activities. In fact, many international relations scholars would be willing to agree with the statement that international economic activity is far more important than war when it comes to the relationships between countries. Trade is common; war is rare. War may be dramatic but trade is pervasive, and half the time, wars are fought over trade or economics anyway.

One of the simplest ways to challenge the realist presumption of an anarchic international environment is to talk about international hegemony. A **hegemon** is simply a dominant power, either some individual or, in the case of international politics, some country that is powerful enough to dominate all others. Through this domination, the hegemon can impose a structure on the anarchical system. Further, many countries will willingly accept this domination. They might even seek it.

Think of it in terms of Mafia movies, where one crime boss, the don, becomes so powerful he can dominate all the criminals in town and impose a form of order and structure on their activities. The don creates rules that disproportionately benefit his bank account and the system is nowhere near fair or just, but it does create a hierarchy that can enforce rules and agreements and it takes the majority of criminals out of anarchy. The typical criminals in this crime-boss governed environment can confidently create numbers rackets, loan sharking operations, prostitution rings, drug distribution cartels, and other forms of criminal investment because they know that if they follow the rules laid down by the don and pay the proper percentage, the Mafia boss will protect them from other criminal bullies who could use their power to take all the fruit of those investments and labor. The criminal version of an economy can work within the rules of the hierarchy imposed by the dominant power.

Something similar can be seen in the international system as well. The underlying dynamic of the international system may be anarchic, but there is seldom if ever any real anarchy. History is in many ways defined by the waxing and waning of dominant powers, or hegemonies, which can impose order and a hierarchy on the system. The Mongols, Persians, Egyptians, Greeks, Romans, Spanish, Dutch, British, and Americans—while it is arguable whether these or any other powers were truly hegemonic—in one way or another, each was able to impose some degree of structure on trade and other aspects of the interactions between the world's independent political entities. A

hegemon creates and enforces rules that allow the weak to invest and trade. In the modern world, these facilitating structures are everywhere; think of the World Bank, the post office, duty-free stores, and the international rugby union. One of the first things you might notice if you travel around the world is how much things are the same and how easy it is to spend your money just about anywhere. A great deal of this ease of exchange is a result of the United States and, earlier, Britain using their power to create and sustain a structure for trade and currency exchange.

While there are examples of brute force being used, particularly in Latin America in the middle of the twentieth century, most of the structures you see formed as part of the U.S. turn as hegemon are reasonably voluntary, or at least nonviolent. As far as we can tell, the United States has not yet sent the marines into any country to force them to adopt the standards that allow computers to link to the Internet or make it possible to place international phone calls, yet these standards are quite common. Putting aside, but not dismissing, the philosophical argument that the very existence of an international hierarchy of dominance relationships precludes anything being truly voluntary, we can ask why any nation might choose to accept U.S. hegemony and its rules for trade.

Consider a Japanese car, built for the Japanese market. It can be sold, used in Australia, then shipped to England when your band becomes famous and you move to Liverpool. Why is this possible? Because Japanese carmakers make most if not all of their cars to meet U.S. safety standards. Why does this matter if we are not even talking about the United States in this example? Well, Australia, Great Britain, and most other developed countries demand safety standards that roughly match those in the United States. Why would they do that? Why would they not set their own standards? It is simple, economics. The U.S. market for cars is huge, most manufacturers want to ship their products to that huge market, and meeting the U.S. standards is required before the product can be sold in Chicago. Since design is such a huge part of the cost of a car, manufacturers use the same design for all or most of their cars, and build all of their cars to meet U.S. standards.

Imagine you are a small country enacting car safety standards. For countries that import cars from Japan, adopting U.S. standards is an easy way to get the cheapest possible new cars for your insane taxi drivers. All the big car companies are already set up to meet the U.S. standards. The whole idea of economies of scale says it is easy and cheap for those companies to just build a few thousand extra of those same cars and ship them to Bulgaria. Even if you have legal standards that are lower than the U.S. standards, if you are a smaller country it would be so expensive to make any kind of significant changes to the assembly of cars that it is unlikely to be worth any savings that might be found in building down to your lower standards. Thus, except for expensive and easily removed items such as air bags, you may as well just say, give us the same standards as the United States. Lowering your standards is unlikely to get you cheaper cars.

In the other direction, unless you are a huge country or a huge common market of cooperating countries like the European Union, setting higher standards than the United States is even more difficult. An import market of a few million people, such as New Zealand, would find it impossibly expensive to unilaterally set higher safety standards than the United States. What manufacturer will make a significant change in the car design to meet the demand of 4 million people when you have billions of people out there ready to buy the U.S. standard? Simply by setting rules for access to the U.S. market, the United States can set the trade rules for a significant portion of the world. To be traded on the New York stock exchange, foreign countries have to meet U.S. accounting standards. To ship carcass pucks to burger joints in Sioux Falls, the cow grinding plants in Brazil have to meet U.S. health standards and in most cases they have to be inspected by U.S. health officials. Other countries wishing to protect the health of their citizens can then take advantage of that and insist that their imports from Brazil be U.S. certified as well. In that way, smaller countries get the United States to do all of the work in assuring safety, and producers get the benefit of a consistent set of standards.

Predictably, the rules that the hegemon sets up are biased to benefit the hegemon. For example, the specifics of a U.S. manufacturer's product are often used as the legal standard and competitors that want to import are forced to adapt, giving the U.S. firm a head start. International banking regulations are set up to match those already existing in the United States and foreign banks are forced to change, while domestic banks get an advantage by already having the system in place. However, hegemony is a double-edged sword. The hegemon has to invest a great deal to keep the system in place. In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, Great Britain had to take on most of the cost of keeping the seas free of piracy so that the global trading system it had set up between its colonies could continue functioning. This required a huge navy that could patrol the entire world. The cost of the ships and sailors was a tremendous drain on the Royal piggy bank. A global naval presence also required ports and bases and colonies spread out all over everywhere, including the Falklands, Zanzibar, Belize, Gibraltar, and all kinds of other places that most Americans have never heard of, like Canada. Some of these colonies and far-flung outposts of empire, like Hong Kong, were profitable, but many—if not most—were not and Britain had to bear this economic burden as part of being hegemon. Other countries could then take advantage of the pirate-free oceans and conduct trade without having to do much if any of the work chasing the pirates away. This was just like letting the United States spend the money to verify health standards, develop and approve drugs, or do all the testing to establish car safety standards. In the eighteenth century, countries could take advantage of the British provision of seas safe for trade without contributing to that security.

Eventually, the costs of being the hegemon and sustaining the system outweigh the benefits, and the dominance of a hegemon begins to fade. Fading hegemonic powers

While many students find Shakespeare's play, *The Merchant of Venice* to be shockingly antisemitic, when forced to look past the Jewish moneylender's demand that a metaphor in the contract be taken literally so that Antonio must surrender an actual pound of flesh when he cannot repay his debt to Shylock, the moneylender, what is most interesting is that the play is set in Venice. Why Venice? In fact, if you ever visit Venice, one of the first questions you might ask is, "Where is the insect-infested-hostel-for-impooverished-college-students?" Once you check in and introduce yourself to your fifty-three thousand roommates, you might reasonably ask, "Why is Venice even here?"

The answer to that second question, as well as the explanation for why the play is called *The Merchant of Venice* and not *The Merchant of Manchester* is simple—it comes down to international politics.

From a construction standpoint, a swampy, sinking island out in the middle of a lagoon is a pretty lousy place to build a city. In fact, the architectural history of Venice is largely a story of abandoning lower floors, filling them in, and building more on top as it all gradually sinks. However, in terms of international politics, that swampy bit of land is the perfect location, and it allowed the tiny little city of Venice to dominate a large portion of the world for generations.

First, the water surrounding the little group of islands kept Venice secure against the armies of the continent. Wealthy people who wanted to protect them-

selves from looting and pillaging really liked the security provided by that natural moat and they moved there in droves. Further, that moat made it easier for the rulers of Venice to defy the latest Italian prince who had assembled a powerful army and was trying to unify the peninsula. It made it easier for Venice to keep consistent tax, trade, and banking rules that encouraged wealth to migrate to and accumulate in Venice.

Second, Venice occupied a key location for trade. Like Amsterdam, London, and New York in the centuries to follow, Venice was in the perfect spot for getting trade goods into and out of Europe. The ports and warehouses in this secure little city provided the perfect location for exchanging and transferring cargo between ships plying the Mediterranean and also to shift cargos from ocean trade routes to overland routes into Europe.

The result was a tiny city that dominated trade to the point that it could set the world standard for contracts, banking, and other laws related to commerce. For fear of being shut out of this most important of ports, no trader would dare defy the laws of Venice. All the most profitable trade routes went through Venice, all of the banks were in Venice, all of the contracts for trade were registered in Venice, and the legal enforcement of those contracts was provided by Venice. Thus, because of the reality of international politics and trade, a sixteenth-century story about a moneylender abusing the courts to inflict serious injury upon a rival had to be set in Venice.

can hold things together for quite a while, but eventually, a rising power will mount a challenge and try to take control of the international system. The result might be referred to as hegemonic war or a system transition war. Several big wars, including the Napoleonic Wars of the early nineteenth century and World War I are talked about in terms of a challenger taking on the hegemon and trying to alter the rules of the game of international trade, sort of like a new crime boss moving into town.

It's the Economy, Stupid: World Systems Theory and Anti-Globalization Sentiment

Another alternative to the classic conceptualization of an anarchic, realist world is to challenge all three assumptions—that unitary states are the primary actors, that the

international system is anarchic, and that power is the fundamental resource to be pursued. Instead, we could assume that the core component of global politics is economic, the basis of **world systems theory**. Politics occurs within an economic structure defined by exploitative trade relationships, with corporate, class, and multinational entities defining the units of action. It is all about wealth and economic exploitation on a global scale. If someone in your class thinks that globalization is the root of all evil and protests against the G-8* this is the part of the text where they will get all excited. They will also probably be at least a little bit disappointed by this section. As with all the other theoretical approaches to the study of international or global politics, there are some aspects of world systems theory that seem to just hit the nail on the head, but it falls far short in other areas.

Building from a foundation of Marxist theory, world systems theory is based on an internationalization of the exploitative economic relations between classes.† Marx talked about this relationship *within* a country—between the capitalists and the proletariat—and he argued that the exploitation caused by the capitalist imperative to compete for efficiency would doom the system to collapse. When the preordained Thursday afternoon passed and capitalism did not collapse on schedule, Lenin argued that Marx had not considered the externalization of capitalism. By expanding from national economies to globe-spanning colonial empires, the collapse had been delayed. Continual growth had allowed capitalists to buy off the most disgruntled workers with gold, goods, and land from far-flung places, making them nice grunted workers again. But the inevitable collapse was still on its way. It was just delayed until the world ran out of places for Europe to colonize.

After another half century without the end of history, Johan Galtung rethought the idea of an economically-defined political world and wrote *A Structural Theory of Imperialism*.²¹ Extending Lenin's basic idea that capitalism had been internationalized, Galtung described a worldwide capitalist system made up of hierarchical relationships between cores and peripheries, illustrated in Figure 12.1. Cores are economic elites, capitalists that invest in the means of production that transform labor into wealth, the controllers of the factories and corporations. The periphery is the working class, the laborers. The argument is simple and elegant, highlighting economic relationships and exchanges that can explain a great deal about how the world works.

Every country in the world is made up of a core and a periphery, a small capitalist elite core and a large working-class periphery. Further, the countries of the world can be divided up into the same categories, a small core of wealthy, elite, capitalist countries

*The G-8 is not a new version of the Xbox. It is the shortened name for the Group of Eight, an informal organization of eight developed countries that meet annually and basically dominate the world's economy—Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, the United Kingdom, the United States, and Russia.

†See, we told you we would get back to Marx.

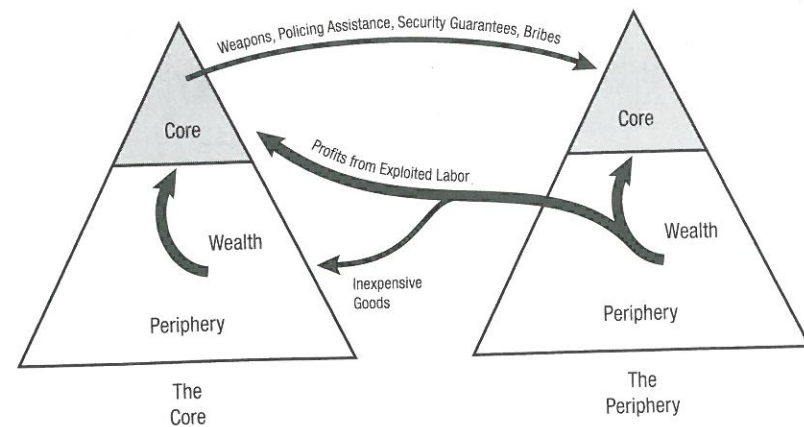


Figure 12.2 The Core and the Periphery in World Systems Theory

Source: An artful and most excellent adaptation from Johan Galtung, "A Structural Theory of Imperialism," *Journal of Peace Research* 8, no. 2 (1971): 81-117

and a much larger periphery of poor, less-developed countries that play a global economic role similar to the worker or proletariat in Marx's analysis of capitalism. The result is a world economic system that replicates the capitalist exploitive relationship on a global scale. What is remarkable is the way that the discussion of a few simple and seemingly obvious aspects of the relationships between these various cores and peripheries can explain a tremendous amount of what we see in early twenty-first century global politics.

The most obvious feature of this global capitalist system is the flow of wealth from peripheries to cores, both within and between countries. The capitalist elite core of every country exploits the labor of its periphery, using control over the means of production to extract wealth from their labor. This is replicated on a global scale by core countries using control of international mechanisms of trade to extract wealth from periphery countries. This extraction of wealth not only enriches the capitalist elite of core countries, it keeps the periphery countries stuck in the periphery by taking the wealth the periphery countries need for investing in their own development. The poor are kept poor so they have to work for the core. Now if this was all there was to the system, it would probably collapse, much as Marx and Lenin expected. The competition among capitalists would push them to extract more and more from the periphery until the poor were pushed to revolt. After all, it would be only a matter of time and education before the periphery population of the core countries and the periphery population of the periphery countries realized their common suffering from exploitation by the core population of the core countries and rebelled against it.

The key to world systems theory and its ability to explain things like dependency and the lack of revolt against the core is in its depiction of how the global system is sustained. The core of the periphery is kept in power because it receives key resources from the core of the core. Weapons and police training are some of the things the core of the core provides to the political and economic elites of the less-developed countries being exploited, but there is also some degree of direct protection offered to the periph-

eral leaders. Would the leaders of Kuwait be back in power if not for the direct actions of the United States? More important than these direct actions is how the global capitalist system keeps the periphery of the core and periphery states from sharing a common economic misery. The core of the core prevents a revolt of its own workers and prevents those workers from finding a reason to join with the periphery of the periphery in changing the system by diverting a significant amount of wealth extracted from the periphery states, to the periphery of the core. As a result, the periphery of the core has no interest in changing the system. They also benefit from the exploitation of the periphery of the periphery. They do not share a common economic cause with the downtrodden masses in less-developed countries. In short, the average person in the United States, Europe, or any other developed capitalist country gets paid off with wealth extracted from the less developed.

What's that, you say? You have not gotten your world systems periphery exploitation check? Well, actually, you are wearing it. Inexpensive clothes are one particularly obvious way that the average person in a core country benefits from the economic exploitation of the periphery. Heard about all of that protesting of Nike's Malaysian sweatshops? Well the use of cheap foreign labor goes to more than just corporate profits. It also leads to less expensive, much less expensive, shoes. Forget the super flashy basketball shoes that will never actually get anywhere close to sweaty feet on a court; go into a discount store and look at the price on an average pair of shoes that a normal human would use to play basketball. We can even be generous and avoid the really cheap stuff and only look at the ones that are marked, say, fifty dollars a pair. What would it have cost to make those in the United States or Europe? Well, find another store and see how much cash it takes to buy a pair of Italian designer shoes. Even at a discount store an average pair of Italian-made shoes will cost at least twice what you lay out for the sneakers. The biggest part of that difference is the cost of the labor. Shirts, pants, coats, even your underwear, they are all far cheaper because they are made by the periphery workers of the periphery states. Even if you do not find cash falling in your wallet, your dollar, yen, pound, or euro buys far more stuff because of the exploitation of the periphery. If you united with the periphery of the periphery and overthrew the global economic system, you would also be giving up all that cheap stuff. We like our cheap stuff.

So you are kept happy and nonrevolutionary with your cheap stuff, and that bit of insight is what separates Galtung and world systems theory from other Marxist or economics-first theories of politics. Galtung not only explains why the system keeps poor countries poor, he also demonstrates how the system is sustained and why it does not collapse. This is also what all the noise regarding anti-globalization is about. The anti-globalization demonstrators who can think beyond the catchy slogans and actually understand why they are harassing the G-8 meetings and smashing the windows of Starbucks, are protesting against the fundamental unfairness of this global economic capitalist system. For wealthy countries, the infrastructure of the global system for trade

acts much as the ownership of factories did for the early industrial capitalists Marx wrote about. By controlling the World Bank, monetary exchange systems, and access to sources of investment capital, developed nations force less developed nations to play by unfair economic rules. Loans, development grants, foreign aid, and trade agreements are all self-serving actions by the developed countries. These actions build economic infrastructures not for local development, but to facilitate the exploitation by the economies of core countries and they tie developed countries to debts that extract capital at an alarming rate through interest payments.

An entrepreneur in the Republic of the Congo has no realistic hope of becoming the next Bill Gates. The infrastructure of the Congo will not provide him the education, nor will it allow him to develop the products needed to bring wealth to the country. As for computers or communications lines, even if you could get access to reliable electricity in the Congo it is almost impossible to buy a lightbulb. If Einstein's smarter brother was reincarnated in the Congo he would have to go to a developed country to succeed in business. He would have to leave to even be educated enough to understand what his less-gifted, crazy-haired brother said. Developed countries not only keep the wealth flowing home, they keep the opportunities at home and extract everything that less-developed countries would need for building an economy that does anything more than service the dominant, wealthy parts of the world. The core even extracts the people from the periphery. Most of the foreign students you see on campus are the brightest and best their country has to offer. They represent the best resource those countries might have for development, and most of those students will stay in the United States or Europe to work. Except for money sent home to families, those students will contribute to developed economies instead of their lesser-developed homelands; they will pay taxes, create businesses, and contribute to your standard of living instead of going home. In the Congo, there is very little work available for molecular biologists. Thus, the Congo and all the other developing countries have little hope of keeping their best and brightest at home to pull the country up economically. The unfairness of all this is what the anti-globalization demonstrators are really protesting about.

Now we said that the anti-globalization crowd would be displeased with this section, and here is the part they really will not like: there are two big problems inherent with the politics and the reality behind all the anti-globalization protests and window smashing. Pointing these things out never fails to really irritate a few people, but if we were worried about upsetting people then it would be awfully hard to teach about politics.

The first problem is that not everything about globalization is bad and evil. That is not to deny that there are truly wretched things that we can blame on the effects of global capitalism, but if you look at all the ways capitalism has changed the world over the last couple centuries, or even over the last half-century, there are several good things. Better or worse are value judgments and they depend greatly on what you, per-

sonally, value, but there is enough of a variety of good things that we can probably find something you think is good.

You are in college, so maybe you like education. We are not going to make any presumptions on this topic, but if you do like education, it might interest you to know that literacy rates around the world are higher now than they have ever been before and more people have access to basic, advanced, and technical education than ever before in history. Maybe you like being alive. Many people do. In that case consider that access to basic health care, vaccinations, the likelihood of surviving childhood are all now higher in just about every country around the world than they were in any country before capitalism became a prominent economic phenomena. What about bananas? Do you like them? Many of the foods you probably enjoy do not natively come from the country you live in, but are available to you through international trade. How about something more esoteric, like human rights? While there are still some notable and ugly exceptions, basic rights for women—almost nonexistent prior to the capitalist economic revolution—now exist in some meaningful form for the vast majority of the better-smelling gender. There are currently more democracies in the world and more people living in democracies than ever before in history. At the very least, before you smash that Starbucks window, you should look at both the good and the bad things that we might reasonably blame on capitalism. For the last half-century, the United Nations has been gathering and publishing data on living conditions around the world. Even a cursory examination of their Web site will show many things that have improved. Some things are worse, some are better, but the balance between the good, the bad, and the ugly is a matter of judgment and personal values. That is a judgment you should make in an informed and considered manner.

The second thing that will displease an anti-globalization protestor is a simple question: What do you think you want? "Stop globalization" may be what you spray paint on the side of the cow you stole and tied to the front door of the McDonald's, but is that possible? Globalization is a phenomena created by advancing technology, increasing worldwide education, and the aggregate economic choices of billions of people around the world, among other things. It is not like the global release of *Gigli*, which somebody could have and very well should have stopped. Is there anyone, any country or any group of countries that could actually stop or reverse globalization? What alternative is there to globalization? The technology is already out there; can we take it away? Certainly there must be things that leaders or countries could do to reduce the negatives and enhance the positives, but can the increasing economic integration of the world be stopped? Can it be reversed? If you cut a country off from all aspects of international trade and international communication, would it really be better off? North Korea suggests the answer might be no, but having an insane dictator might be part of the problem there. Even if you are a leader who wants to give the anti-globalization protesters what they want, what is it that you could give them?

Dude, Think about the Fish

The tragedy of the commons represents another way the study of international politics can mirror the caveman stories from the beginning of the book and yet another way that international politics diverges from the simplistic model of realism. Collapsing fisheries, disappearing forests, transnational pollution, population pressures, and plagues are all issues the world has seen before. The Roman Empire had serious problems with airborne pollution from silver smelting. Historically, deforestation has repeatedly been a problem for naval powers from the Greeks to the British, often sending them to farthest reaches of their trade networks for the timber needed for shipbuilding. Ancient civilizations from Cambodia to Peru appear to have fallen victim to the cumulative effects of intensive agriculture, causing regional, and possibly continental economic and social collapses. Many of these transnational or regional catastrophes, however, occurred in the shadows. The overexploitation and collapse of communal resources left little or no impression in written histories and were usually discovered by archaeologists digging in the dirt rather than historians digging through archives.

Today, the struggle with the forces driving us into the tragedy of the commons has gone global and every year the number of ways that the feeble humans of planet Earth face problems that threaten the global commons increases. From population pressures, to collapsing ocean resources, to ozone depletion, to access to fresh water, to acid rain, to disease control, to reality TV,* a list of global tragedy-of-the-commons issues could grow very long. The length of this list might reasonably be attributed to the forces of globalization. With capitalist pressures becoming ever more universal, the number of ways those economic dynamics drive people to overexploit common resources increase and become all-inclusive. Further, the economic pressure driving overexploitation is now relatively consistent around the world, driving everyone everywhere toward the same tragedies and making it difficult for regional booms and busts to average out.

Fisheries have often been overexploited to the point of collapse. The California anchovy fishery that collapsed right about the time Steinbeck was writing *Cannery Row*,²² is just one example. Previously, however, an event like that was isolated and when the fish were gone, the world's consumers could go elsewhere for another tin of salty pizza toppings. The fishermen would abandon a commercially unworkable area and essentially leave it to recover while they destroyed someplace else. Now, it is all happening at once. The Canadian Atlantic cod fishery has already collapsed and the Icelandic, North Sea (European), Alaskan, Japanese, Peruvian, and Antarctic fisheries are all under intense commercial pressure. Globally, the levels of exploitation appear to be well beyond what might be sustainable and if driven to collapse, there is nowhere else to fish for something to go with your chips.

*Obviously, this is a joke. There is nothing more horrific than reality TV and it should obviously be first on the list of things that threaten the very existence of the human race.

However, part of the increase in attention paid to the exploitation of the commons in international politics might be attributed to an increase in education and awareness. Almost unheard of a half-century ago, environmental and shared resource issues have become such an integral part of education that in 2002, the Europe-Wide Global Education Congress included international environmental cooperation next to literacy, history, and mathematics in the definition of a basic education. Recycling, energy conservation, deforestation, endangered species, acid rain, global warming, the global spread of disease, the French tolerance of body odor—we may not agree on what if anything should be done about these environmental issues, but they are issues on the international political table and they are all new. Fifty years ago, none of them were any part of the mainstream political debate and today they are global issues.

These global tragedy-of-the-commons issues are also well represented in fiction.* The most relevant for today's students might be the movies about a global epidemic, such as *12 Monkeys*. In addition to making it uncomfortably clear that Brad Pitt is just a little too good at playing the part of a lunatic, *12 Monkeys*²³ also shows just how hard it is to generate the collective actions needed to protect even the most precious of global commons. It would not take much to stop the release of the virus that is about to destroy the Earth, but convincing anyone to act against an abstract and seemingly distant threat turns out to be an impossible challenge. If it is that hard to convince just a few people to act, how hard must it be to get the massive and coordinated action necessary to combat bird flu as a likely pandemic?

This is, and likely will continue to be, a significant part of global politics, but there is not a tidy theoretical perspective with a catchy name to attach to the study of the political dynamics of a global tragedy of the commons. Still, a few dynamics are becoming apparent. The first is that it is difficult to label this as international relations. Rather than being part of the politics between nations, it is more of an issue and a dynamic that extends across nations. It is a transnational issue involving nations, but also includes groups and organizations that can't be put in that category. Subnational political units such as cities, political parties, states, and provinces are acting across and beyond national borders. Multinational entities such as the UN, NAFTA, the International Whaling Commission, and the World Bank are involved. Transnational organizations, entities that exist outside and across the geographic definition of states, are involved, such as Greenpeace, the Sierra Club, Doctors Without Borders, and international businesses. Additionally, economic dynamics, political dynamics, and issues of science and research all come into play. How all of these additional factors sort out into a simple model of how the world works is an interesting and complicated question.

*David Brin's *Earth*, James P. Hogan's *Thrice Upon a Time*, Kim Stanley Robinson's *Mars Trilogy*, *Soylent Green*, and *Omega Man* are all stories of environmental collapse. Larry Niven's *Gil Hamilton* stories, and many of his *Known Space* stories are built on themes about population pressures and the limits of the biosphere.

Constructivism

While it can be a challenge to get everyone to agree on a definition of **constructivism**, or even to agree on whether it qualifies as a theory of international relations, it can reasonably be depicted in terms of its **fundamental claim that human beings construct the reality around them—the reality upon which decisions and choices are made—through language and communication.** The conceptual framework used to describe something enables certain actions and prevents others. The analogy chosen for thinking about something defines the logic by which all current and future information on the subject is interpreted. What is, or more importantly, what is not communicated, drives politics because what we do not hear about, we cannot address. From this perspective, **international communication**, both in terms of capabilities and in terms of filters on the content, becomes the **critical consideration in the study of international relations.** With all of the technological, social, and political interest in the recent and rapid advances in communication technology, it should not be surprising that constructivism has garnered a great deal of attention.

In the study of international politics, constructivism is certainly equal to or more significant than many of the perspectives, issues, or ideas highlighted in this chapter, and as a challenge to the realist perspectives, its claim is unquestionable. Arising out of **postmodern critiques directly attacking, if not assaulting realism as a theory,*** it has an anti-realism pedigree that not even Marxism can match. It would appear that all the factors have aligned for a big and flashy section on constructivism, parade and all. However, in addition to the technical challenge of including a parade in a textbook, there are several reasons for exercising caution in regard to constructivism. Three are particularly troublesome:

1. As a theory, **constructivism is new**, very new. It has been less than a decade since it first began coalescing as any kind of coherent approach and there simply has not been a lot of time for academic research to thoroughly sort out its strengths and weaknesses. In contrast, realism, Marxism, and liberalism have all been around longer than almost any of the professors currently studying them. There has been plenty of time to sort through their implications and the limits of how much they can explain in international relations.
2. The **enthusiasm inherent in many of the earliest studies on constructivism may have distorted assessments of its scope and applicability.** The CNN-effect is the primary example. The moment it was suggested that the real-time global news media was driving leaders into actions they would rather avoid, the idea was touted as a revolution in the very nature of international politics even before any

*As an example see, Ashley, Richard C., "The poverty of neorealism," in *Neorealism and Its Critics*, ed. Robert O. Keohane (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986).

significant research had been conducted. Subsequent research has shown that the CNN-effect is extremely limited, particularly in terms of how far it can push a leader against the flow of other influences. In fact, the CNN-effect seems to be largely confined to an influence within the limits of policy action defined by either the economic constraints of the world system or the power constraints of a realist political environment.

3. **Claims that constructivism represents a new way of understanding a new world are a bit questionable.** It may be reasonable to say that it is coalescing into a new way of understanding international politics, but the claim of a new world order is not holding up well in the face of most research. As far back as existing records make it possible to study, the news media have always had a modest but clear influence on international politics. One of the **best explanations for choices the United States made in the Vietnam War is media coverage and the use of analogies to conceptualize and debate the issues.** Another example is the way in which **President Truman's presumptions** and beliefs about the Soviet Union, and the way those cognitive frameworks prevented him from even considering cooperative options, appear to have been **significant factors in the beginning of the cold war.** In short, many of the elements of a constructed reality of politics are not new phenomena that have arisen out of the latest revolution in communication technologies.

However, all of these cautions concern the place of constructivism as equal to liberalism or as supplanting Marxism, not its inherent value as a new and interesting theoretical construct. Research will eventually tell us exactly where it fits; we just have to be patient.

Roaring Mice and Vacation Hotspots

Like everything else in politics, international relations is probably **best discussed not in terms of which theoretical approach is correct, but instead in terms of how different ideas help us understand parts of what is going on.** To conclude this chapter, we ask a simple question, "Why does Barbados exist?"

No, we are not talking about how the island was formed—by volcanoes—but the mere existence of Barbados as an independent country, which is a very interesting thing to consider. **Barbados has absolutely no power in the traditional, international relations sense of the word—no army, no navy, no air force, no Girl Scouts brandishing pointy marshmallow roasting sticks.** The United States could conquer the island without mustering any forces beyond the guys hanging around a typical Minnesota hunting lodge. If the world is anarchic and you can only survive if you have the power to protect yourself, how can Barbados exist? Is the answer economic? Is it a moral issue? Is it just something we haven't gotten around to doing? Watch *The Mouse that Roared*²⁴—

either the movie or the *Pinky and the Brain* cartoon version—and then ponder how it is that a powerless country like Barbados continues to exist as an independent entity. None of the theories of international politics we have offered here can offer a satisfactory answer.

KEY TERMS

balance of power / 287
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CHAPTER SUMMARY

When we think about international relations, we most often think about war. Given the horrors, tension, and fear associated with war, this is understandable. However, given the number of countries that exist, war is rare. In fact, most of international politics concerns cooperation. Thus, a truly interesting question is: why do wars happen? The tendency in fiction to explain wars as accidents flies in the face of reality. Wars are not accidents; they are the result of conscious, rational action. Spurred by the horrors of World War I, scholars were motivated to focus on peace. World events ultimately put a damper on idealism, which led scholars to embrace realism as an explanation. Realism, with its presumptions that one can explain international relations in terms of strategy, rational action, and power in an anarchic environment, did not explain every war. Scholars focusing on foreign policy analysis challenged liberalism's presumptions that the internal workings of governments do not matter. There has been a lot of attention paid to the fact that democracies do not fight one another, although scholars do not agree why this is. Other schools of thought have emerged to explain international relations. Among these, one focuses on the dominance of a nation, another focuses on the global economy, and yet another focuses on the global dominance of one country. Students should learn two very important lessons from this chapter. First, there is no one simple theory that explains global interaction; international relations are complex and multifaceted. War, albeit attention grabbing, is only one part of this complex labyrinth. Second, it will, from now on, be difficult to purchase a pair of sneakers without your mind wandering off to consider cores and peripheries.

STUDY QUESTIONS AND EXERCISES

1. This chapter discusses a number of theories that seek to explain international relations. Which of these theories do you believe best explains the current world situation? Why?

2. What are the three key assumptions that underlie the realist perspective on international relations?
3. What are the flaws in the realist perspective? What are the flaws in the other perspectives?
4. What prompted idealism?
5. Find an article or editorial that discusses the issue of globalization. Do you agree with the perspective in the piece you have selected? Why or why not?
6. What is a hegemon? What role does a hegemon play in international relations?

WEBSITES TO EXPLORE

- http://europa.eu/index_en.htm. The Europa: Gateway to the European Union Web page includes news and information about the EU.
- www.du.edu/~bhughes/ifs.html. Barry B. Hughes' International Futures links to a computer simulation of global systems for classroom and research use.
- www.imf.org/. Here is the Web site for the International Monetary Fund (IMF), an organization of 184 countries that aims to foster global monetary cooperation, secure financial stability, facilitate international trade, promote high employment and sustainable economic growth, and reduce poverty.
- www.library.gsu.edu/research/pages.asp?ldID=41&guideID=101&ID=560. Georgia State University Library's International Relations Resources Web page includes general resources, gateways, proprietary resources, international law resources, and more.
- www.library.yale.edu/ia-resources/polecon.html. Yale University Library's Political Economy & Development Resources Web page provides links to relevant organizations, journals, data, and more.
- www.library.yale.edu/ia-resources/resource.html. Yale University Library's International Affairs Resources Web page includes links to international organizations, news, research institutes, and more.
- www.un.org/. The United Nations Web page provides information about the UN, its member nations, its policies, and more.
- www2.etown.edu/vl/research.html. The World Wide Web Virtual Library: International Affairs Resources contains a list of research institutes focused on international relations.