UNDERSTANDING GLOBAL CONFLICT AND COOPERATION

An Introduction to Theory and History

TENTH EDITION

Joseph S. Nye Jr.
David A. Welch

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To Stanley Hoffmann, 1928–2015
Our teacher, colleague, and friend

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Preface

by Joseph S. Nye, Jr.

The fields of political science and International Relations have been criticized in recent years for a growing gap between academic theory and the real world of politics and policy. Policy makers (and students) complain about jargon-laden texts that go on and on about theory yet seem to say more and more about less and less. Do political science and International Relations have nothing to say that could help us understand whether important changes such as the recovery of Asia, Middle East turnmoil, cyberconflicts, and the growing role of nonstate actors will lead to global cooperation or conflict?

In practice, theory is unavoidable. In order to achieve your objectives, you need at least a primitive sense of cause and effect, as well as a means to simplify and interpret reality. If someone asked you to describe what happened to you in the last hour, you would have to simplify, or else you would reproduce sixty minutes of detail. If someone asked you to do something, you would need some idea of what actions would produce what results. The question is not whether theory is relevant to practice, but which theories, and in which contexts. Most people are unaware that they implicitly use theories every day. Even those who are aware often know little or nothing of the origins and limitations of the theories they inevitably use. Most practitioners seem to avoid direct contact with academic theory, and many academics disdain practice and write in a language aimed at other academics. Of the twenty-five most influential scholars recently listed by the magazine *Foreign Policy,* only four had held top-level policy positions: two in the U.S. government and two in the United Nations.

Understanding Global Conflict and Cooperation is designed to bridge that gap. It grows out of an introductory course that I taught as part of the Harvard core curriculum for more than a decade, but it is also informed by five years of experience as a policy maker at the assistant secretary level in three national security bureaucracies in Washington—the State Department, the Pentagon, and the National Intelligence Council. In that world, I discovered that theory and practice had much to contribute to each other. This book aims to introduce students to the complexities of international politics by giving them a good grounding in traditional realist theory before turning to liberal and constructivist approaches that have become more prominent after the Cold War. The aim was to present difficult concepts in clear language with historical examples so students would gain a practical understanding of the basic approaches to international politics.

Twice in the first half of the twentieth century, the great powers engaged in devastating world wars that cost nearly 50 million lives. The second half of the century was wracked by a cold war, regional wars, and the threat of nuclear

weapons. Why did those conflicts happen? Could they happen again in the twenty-first century? Or will rising economic and ecological interdependence, the growth of transnational and international institutions, and the spread of democratic values bring about a new world order? How will globalization and the information revolution influence international politics in this new century? No good teacher can honestly answer such questions with certainty, but we can provide our students with conceptual tools derived from the main approaches of realism, liberalism, and constructivism that will help them shape their own answers as the future unfolds. That is the purpose of this book.

New to This Edition

This is the tenth edition of a book the first seven editions of which went by the title *Understanding International Conflicts*. For the eighth edition, I asked my friend and former student David Welch to join me as a collaborator, and we took the opportunity to change the title to *Understanding Global Conflict and Cooperation.* We did so for two reasons. First, by adding the word "cooperation," we sought to highlight more clearly the fact that conflict and cooperation are in fact two sides of the same problem: namely, resolving disputes. In world politics, disputes can be over mundane things such as technical standards or intellectual property rights, or over emotionally charged things such as territory. They can be over relatively simple problems such as protecting whales, or enormously complex problems such as balancing the interests of poor countries in economic development against the need to reduce worldwide greenhouse gas emissions. Policy makers, pundits, and professors tend to pay more attention to conflict than to cooperation, because conflict always has the potential to get out of hand. As a result, we often fail to notice that most disagreements in the world are actually handled peacefully. We also sometimes fail to notice that finding durable cooperative solutions to conflict can be just as hard as, or even harder than, avoiding wars. We added a great deal of new material designed to bring the complex relationship between conflict and cooperation into clearer view. Second, by changing "international" to "global," we wanted to highlight the fact that, in the twenty-first century, more and more problems confront the world as a whole and involve a much larger array of players than just states.

In a sense, the international is a subset of the global. While looking at the world through the former lens is still important and useful, a truly global perspective often allows us to see more. Students of world politics used to be preoccupied with conflicts between sovereign states. This made sense in the first half of the twentieth century, when sovereign states fought two devastating world wars, and it also made sense during the Cold War, when the United States and the Soviet Union had the capacity to destroy each other many times over with roughly half an hour's warning. Interstate conflict is still an important problem, of course, but the set of challenges facing humanity has both broadened and

deepened. Conflict within states is now more common than between states; yet at the same time, conflict within states almost always reverberates internationally. It has the potential to affect people virtually anywhere, thanks to the speed and intensity of modern communications, the proliferation of nonstate actors, and the globalization of economic and other kinds of interests. It is getting harder to distinguish international problems from domestic ones, or local problems from regional or global ones.

Reaction to the eighth edition was strongly positive, but as with all things, improvement is always possible. This is the second revision of that book, We have gone over the text carefully, bearing in mind the very helpful feedback provided by reviewers, to update, refine, deepen, and clarify. Wherever possible we have sought to draw tighter connections between chapters and to highlight the book's main theme, which is that by reflecting jointly on history and theory it is possible to provide better explanations of events in world politics, to better understand events as they unfold, and, not least importantly, to evaluate them morally and ethically.

Highlights of the Tenth Edition

- The single most significant change to this edition is a dedicated chapter (Chapter 7) to current global flashpoints. These are the places in the world where it is easiest to imagine serious conflict between states, or conflict within states escalating to embroil whole regions. In addition to accounts of the history and dynamics of these flashpoints, we attempt to relate events in each place to the major concepts and themes animating the chapters that come before.
- We also provide new or updated chronologies to make it easier to understand how complex events have unfolded.
- Another important change is an expanded and thoroughly cross-referenced glossary. Any time you come across a word or phrase that may not be entirely clear to you, flip to the glossary, where you will find a clear and concise definition that draws your attention to important related concepts.
- New chapter learning objectives serve as a guide to the important concepts, issues, and ideas that are discussed in each major section of the text.

The interplay between theory and history as a way of seeking to explain, understand, and evaluate world events remains the pillar of this edition, as it has with the previous nine. The text itself is an example of how to think about the complex and confusing domain of international politics. It should be read not for a complete factual account, but for the way it approaches the interplay of theory and history. It is the place to start. Neither theory nor history alone is sufficient. Historians who believe that understanding comes from simply recounting the facts fail to make explicit the hidden principles by which they select some facts rather than others. Equally mistaken are political scientists who

become so isolated and entangled in a maze of abstract theory that they mistake their mental constructs for reality. Only by going back and forth between history and theory can we avoid such mistakes.

This edition is designed to be able to provide the central thread for an introductory course, or for individual readers to teach themselves the equivalent of such a course; but it can also be used as a supplementary text to provide an example of one approach to the subject. Each chapter includes study questions to help guide both instructors and students, as well as suggested "follow-up" readings for students who might wish to explore certain themes in greater depth. In addition to chronologies of the historical events that we discuss in detail, it provides a selection of helpful maps, schematic figures, charts, and tables.

Our hope is that this tenth edition is the most user-friendly yet. As a work in progress of long-standing, it will, we hope, continue to evolve and improve. In fact, it will not be long before we start thinking about the eleventh edition. No doubt the headlines between now and then will give us even more grist for our particular mill—the vital interplay between theory and history.

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Features

As an example of a dialogue between theory and history, this book can provide the central thread for an introductory course or for individual readers to teach themselves the equivalent of such a course. It can also be used as a supplementary text in a course as an example of one approach to the subject.

Each chapter now includes specific learning objectives for each major section, as well as study questions to help guide both instructors and students. Follow-up readings strategically placed at the end of each major section are

intended to steer students toward historically significant and/or cutting edge works on topics they have immediately encountered (in case they are interested in hot pursuit). You will find a variety of new maps, charts, and diagrams, many in color for the first time. You will also find updated chronologies of the historical events that the book discusses in detail. Finally, I have from time to time made use of my own reflections on my experiences in both government and the academy to illustrate the importance of taking both theory and history seriously.

Acknowledgments

This book is based on a Harvard College course titled Historical Studies A-12, *International Conflicts in the Modern World* that I sometimes co-taught with then-junior colleagues Stephan Haggard, Yuen Foong Khong, Michael Mandelbaum, and M. J. Peterson, and mounted over the years with the assistance of a number of extremely capable Head Teaching Fellows: Vin Auger, Peter Feaver, Meryl Kessler, Sean Lynn-Jones, Pam Metz, John Owen, Gideon Rose, and Gordon Silverstein. All were sources of inspiration and insight, and no doubt some of their ideas have surreptitiously crept into the text. The same can also surely be said of Stanley Hoffmann, who taught us both, and Robert Keohane—men of extraordinary intellectual creativity and generosity who have had an impact on the text more than either would imagine, even taking into account their careful reading and extensive comments.

We thank those who reviewed the manuscript in whole or in part and offered constructive feedback for this tenth edition: Holly Boux, Colorado State University; John Riley, Kutztown State University; Robert Portada, Kutztown State University; Hak-Seon Lee, James Madison University; Paul Crumby, Colorado State Univeristy; Timothy Lomperis, St. Louis University; George Guo, Guilford College; and Andrew Katz, Denison University. We remain grateful to others who have provided advice and suggestions for past editions as well: Lawrence Abraham, Emanuel Adler, Aisha Ahmad, Ihsan Alkatib, Bentley Allan, Cristina Badescu, Michael Barnett, Steven Bernstein, David Dressler, June Teufel Dreyer, Colin Dueck, Peter Feaver, Nicole Freiner, Kathie Stromile Golden, Clifford Griffin, Walter Hatch, Matthew Hoffmann, Christopher Housenick, Nathan Jensen, Kelechi Kalu, Peter Katzenstein, Elizabeth Larus, Howard Lehman, James Manicom, Charles Maier, Ernest May, Richard A. Melanson, Edward S. Mihalkanin, Kalpana Misra, Bessma Momani, Hiroshi Nakazato, J. Douglas Nelson, Carla Norrlöf, Diane Paul, Vincent Pouliot, Mark Raymond, Dan Reiter, James Ross, George Shambaugh, Aboulaye Saine, Junichiro Shiratori, Barry Stein, Janice Gross Stein, Jeffrey Togman, Theodore Vastal, Alexander Wendt, John Williams, and Melissa Williams. The book has also benefited from the expert research assistance of Chris Bordeleau, Marcel Dietsch, Zachary Karabell, Matt Kohut, Jenna Meguid, Sean Misko, Carl Nagin, Dan Philpott, Neal Rosendorf, Alex Scacco, and Richard Wood. To all, we are deeply grateful.

—Joseph S. Nye, Jr.

Supplements

Pearson is pleased to offer several resources to qualified adopters of *Understanding Global Conflict and Cooperation* and their students that will make teaching and learning from this book even more effective and enjoyable. Supplements for this book are available at the Instructor Resource Center (IRC), an online hub that allows instructors to quickly download book-specific supplements. Please visit the IRC welcome page at www.pearsonhighered.com/irc to register for access.

Instructors Manual/Test Bank This resource includes learning objectives, lecture outlines, multiple-choice questions, and essay questions for each chapter. Available exclusively on the IRC.

MyTest This powerful assessment generation program includes all of the items in the instructor's manual/test bank. Questions and tests can be easily created, customized, saved online, and then printed, allowing flexibility to manage assessments anytime and anywhere. Available exclusively on the IRC.

Longman Atlas of World Issues (0-205-78020-2) From population and political systems to energy use and women's rights, the *Longman Atlas of World Issues* features full-color thematic maps that examine the forces shaping the world. This atlas includes critical thinking exercises to promote a deeper understanding of how geography affects many global issues.

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About the Authors

Joseph S. Nye is University Distinguished Service Professor and former Dean of Harvard University's Kennedy School of Government. He also served as a Deputy to the Undersecretary of State in the Carter Administration, Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs in the Clinton Administration, and Chair of the National Intelligence Council. His recent books include *The Power Game: A Washington Novel, The Future of Power, Presidential Leadership and the Creation of the American Era* and the latest released in 2015 *Is the American Century Over?*

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Chapter 1

Are There Enduring Logics of Conflict and Cooperation in World Politics?

Photo: Alinari / Art Resource, N.Y.

Marble relief commemorating Athenians who died in the Peloponnesian War

Learning Objectives

1.1 Identify the distinctive features of a sovereign state system and their implications for cooperation and conflict.

1.2 Explain how history can help us understand international politics today.

1.3 Compare and contrast: (a) motives, means, and consequences; and (b) skepticism, state moralism, and cosmopolitanism.

The world is shrinking. The *Mayflower* took three months to cross the Atlantic. In 1924, Charles Lindbergh's flight took 33 hours. Fifty years later, the Concorde did it in three hours. Ballistic missiles can do it in 30 minutes. At the beginning of the twenty-first century, a transatlantic flight cost one-third of what it did in 1950, and a telephone call from New York to London cost only a small percentage of what it did at midcentury. Global Internet communications are nearly instantaneous, and transmission costs are negligible. An environmentalist in Asia or a human rights activist in Africa today has a power of communication once enjoyed only by large organizations such as governments or transnational corporations. On a more somber note, nuclear weapons have added a new dimension to war that one writer calls "double death," meaning that not only could individuals die, but under some circumstances the whole human species could be threatened. And as the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center in New York and the Pentagon ("9/11") illustrated, technology is putting into the hands of nonstate actors destructive powers that once were reserved solely for governments. As the effects of distance shrink, conditions in remote, poor countries such as Afghanistan suddenly become highly relevant to people around the globe.

Yet some other things about international politics have remained the same over the ages. Thucydides' account of Sparta and Athens fighting the Peloponnesian War 2,500 years ago bears an eerie resemblance to the Arab-Israeli conflict after 1947. Pliny the Elder complained about imbalances in Rome's (mutually beneficial) trade with India nearly 2,000 years ago in almost exactly the same

Photo: David A. Welch

Marble memorial commemorating Americans who died in the Vietnam War

language with which members of the U.S. Congress have complained about imbalances in the country's (mutually beneficial) trade with China. There are basic logics to conflict and cooperation that have remained surprisingly constant over the millennia, even if the forms they take and the issues that give rise to them change (the ancient world never had to worry about nuclear weapons, HIV/AIDS, or climate change). The world is a strange cocktail of continuity and change.

The task for students of world politics is to build on the past but not be trapped by it, or, in other words, to understand the continuities as well as the changes. We must learn the traditional theories and then adapt them to current circumstances. The early chapters of this book will provide you with a historical and theoretical context in which to place the phenomena of the information revolution, globalization, interdependence, and transnational actors that are discussed in the later chapters.

> *I found in my experience in government that I could ignore neither the age-old nor the brand-new dimensions of world politics.*
>
> —Joseph S. Nye, Jr.

World politics would be transformed if separate states were abolished, but world government is not around the corner. And although nonstate actors such as transnational corporations, nongovernmental organizations, and terrorist groups present new challenges to governments, they do not replace states. The peoples who live in the nearly 200 states on this planet want their independence, separate cultures, and different languages. In fact, rather than vanishing, nationalism and the demand for separate states have increased. Rather than fewer states, this century will probably see more. World government would not automatically solve the problem of war. Most wars today are civil or ethnic wars. Since the November 1989 fall of the Berlin Wall, 71 armed conflicts occurred in 50 different locations around the world. Eight were interstate wars, and 11 were intrastate wars with foreign intervention.[1] In fact, the bloodiest wars of the nineteenth century were not among the quarreling states of Europe; rather, they were the Taiping Rebellion in China and the American Civil War. We will continue to live in a world of rival communities and separate states for quite some time, and it is important to understand what that means for our prospects.

What Is International Politics?

1.1 Identify the distinctive features of a sovereign state system and their implications for cooperation and conflict.

The world has not always been divided into a system of separate states. Over the centuries, there have been three basic forms of world politics. In an *imperial system*, one government controls most of the world with which it has contact. The greatest example in the Western world was the Roman Empire, but the Sumerian,

Persian, Mongol, Chinese, Aztec, and Mayan empires fell into this category as well. None was a genuine *world* empire; each was a regional empire protected from conflict or competition for a time by lack of communication with the outside word. Their fights with barbarians on the peripheries of their empires were not the same as wars among roughly equal states.

A second basic form of international politics is a *feudal system*, in which human loyalties and political obligations are not fixed primarily by territorial boundaries. Feudalism was common in Europe after the collapse of the Roman Empire. An individual had obligations to a local lord, but might also owe other duties to some distant noble or bishop, as well as to the pope in Rome. Political obligations were determined to a large extent by what happened to one's superiors. If a ruler married, an area and its people might find their obligations rearranged as part of a wedding dowry. Townspeople born French might suddenly find themselves Flemish or even English. Cities and leagues of cities sometimes had a special semi-independent status. The crazy quilt of wars that accompanied the feudal situation did not much resemble modern territorial wars. These wars could occur within as well as across territories and were shaped by cross-cutting, nonterritorial loyalties and conflicts.

A third form of world politics is an *anarchic system of states*, composed of states that are relatively cohesive but with no higher government above them. Examples include the city-states of ancient Greece and Machiavelli's fifteenth-century Italy. Another example of an anarchic state system is the dynastic territorial state whose coherence comes from control by a ruling family. Examples can be found in India and China in the fifth century BCE. Large territorial dynasties reemerged in Europe in about 1500, and other forms of polities such as city-states and loose leagues of territories began to vanish. In 1648, the *Peace of Westphalia* ended Europe's Thirty Years' War, sometimes called the last of the great wars of religion and the first of the wars of modern states. In retrospect, we can see that the Peace of Westphalia enshrined the territorial sovereign state as the dominant political unit. What we now call the "Westphalian system" has included imperial states from time to time; the most successful by far was the nineteenth-century British empire, upon which, it was famously said, "the sun never set" (because Britain had imperial possessions in almost every time zone). Even at its peak, though, the British empire faced challenges from other strong states.

Today when we speak of the international system, we usually mean this Westphalian system of sovereign states, and we define *international politics* as politics in the absence of a common sovereign or politics among entities with no ruler above them. International politics is a self-help system. The English philosopher Thomas Hobbes (1588–1679) called such an anarchic system a "state of nature." For some, the words *state of nature* may conjure up images of a herd of cows grazing peacefully on a farm, but that is not what Hobbes meant. Think of a Texas town without a sheriff in the days of the Old West, or Lebanon after its government broke down in the 1970s, or Somalia in the 1990s. Hobbes did not think of a state of nature as benign; he saw it as a war of all against all, because

there was no higher ruler to enforce order. As Hobbes famously declared, life in such a world would be nasty, brutish, and short.

Because there is no higher authority above states, there are important legal, political, and social differences between domestic and international politics. Domestic law is relatively clear and consistent. Police and courts enforce it. By contrast, international law is patchy, is incomplete, and rests on sometimes vague foundations. There is no common enforcement mechanism. The world lacks a global police force, and although there are a few international courts, they can do little when sovereign states choose to ignore them.

Force plays a different role in domestic and international politics as well. In a well-ordered domestic political system, the government has a monopoly on the legitimate use of force. In international politics, no one has such a monopoly. Because international politics is the realm of self-help and some states are stronger than others, there is always a danger that they may resort to force. When force cannot be ruled out, mistrust and suspicion are common.

Domestic and international politics also differ in their underlying sense of community. In a well-ordered domestic society, a widespread sense of community gives rise to common loyalties, standards of justice, and views of legitimate authority. On a global scale, people have competing loyalties. Any sense of global community is weak. People often disagree about what is just and legitimate. The result is a great gap between two basic political values: order and justice. In such a world, most people place national concerns before international justice. Law and ethics play roles in international politics, but in the absence of a sense of community norms, they are weaker forces than in domestic politics.

Some people speculate that of the three basic systems—world imperial, feudal, and Westphalian—the twenty-first century may see the gradual evolution of a new feudalism, or less plausibly, a new world empire. We will look at those questions in Chapter 10.

Differing Views of Anarchic Politics

International politics is anarchic in the sense that there is no government above sovereign states, but political philosophy offers different views of how harsh a state of nature need be. Hobbes, who wrote in a seventeenth-century England wracked by civil war, emphasized insecurity, force, and survival. He described humanity as being in a constant state of war. A half century later, John Locke (1632–1704), writing in a more stable England, argued that although a state of nature lacked a common sovereign, people could develop ties and make contracts; therefore, anarchy was not necessarily an obstacle to peace. Those two visions of a state of nature are the philosophical precursors of two of the most influential views of international politics, one more pessimistic and one more optimistic: *realism* and *liberalism*.

Realism has been the dominant tradition in thinking about international politics for centuries. For the realist, the central problem of international politics

is war and the use of force, and the central actors are states. Among modern Americans, realism is exemplified by the writings and policies of President Richard Nixon and his secretary of state, Henry Kissinger. The realist starts from the assumption that in an anarchic system of states, the survival of the state is always at least potentially threatened by other states. Accordingly, Kissinger and Nixon sought to ensure that the United States had enough power of its own to minimize the ability of other states to jeopardize U.S. security. According to the realist, international politics is first and foremost about protecting the state from other states.

The other tradition, *liberalism*, can be traced back in Western political philosophy to Baron de Montesquieu and Immanuel Kant in eighteenth-century France and Germany, respectively, and such nineteenth-century British philosophers as Jeremy Bentham and John Stuart Mill. The best modern American examples of liberal thought can be found in the writings and policies of the political scientist and president Woodrow Wilson.

Liberals see a global society that functions alongside states and sets an important part of the context for state action. Trade crosses borders, people have contacts with one another (such as students studying in foreign countries), and international institutions such as the League of Nations and its successor the United Nations mitigate some of the harsher aspects of anarchy. Liberals complain that realists underestimate the importance of such things as people's contacts across borders and the respects in which sovereign states make up a kind of international "society." Realists, claim liberals, overstate the difference between domestic and international politics. Because the realist picture of anarchy as a Hobbesian "state of war" focuses only on extreme situations, in the liberals' view it has a hard time explaining and recognizing the importance of such things as the growth of economic interdependence and the evolution of a transnational global society, both of which can be powerful forces for peace.

Realists respond by quoting Hobbes: "Just as stormy weather does not mean perpetual rain, so a state of war does not mean constant war."[2] Just as Londoners carry umbrellas on sunny April days, the prospect of war in an anarchic system makes states keep armies even in times of peace. Realists point to

1910: The "Unseen Vampire" of War

If there were no other reason for making an end of war, the financial ruin it involves must sooner or later bring the civilized nations of the world to their senses. As President David Starr Jordan of Leland Stanford University said at Tufts College, "Future war is impossible because the nations cannot afford it." In Europe, he says, the war debt is $26 billion, "all owed to the unseen vampire, and which the nations will never pay and which taxes poor people $95 million a year." The burdens of militarism in time of peace are exhausting the strength of the leading nations, already overloaded with debts. The certain result of a great war would be overwhelming bankruptcy.

—*The New York World*[3]

previous liberal predictions that went awry. For example, in 1910, the president of Stanford University said that future war was no longer possible because it was too costly. Liberal writers proclaimed war obsolete; civilization had grown out of it, they argued. Economic interdependence, ties between labor unions and intellectuals, and the flow of capital all made war impossible. Of course, these predictions failed catastrophically when World War I broke out in 1914, and the realists felt vindicated.

Neither history nor the argument between the realists and liberals stopped in 1914. The 1970s saw a resurgence of liberal claims that rising economic and social interdependence was changing the nature of international politics. In the 1980s, Richard Rosecrance wrote that states can increase their power in two ways: either aggressively by territorial conquest or peacefully through trade. He used the experience of Japan as an example. In the 1930s, Japan tried territorial conquest and suffered the disaster of World War II. But after the war, Japan used trade and investment to become the second largest economy in the world (measured by official exchange rates) and a significant power in East Asia. Japan succeeded while spending far less on its military, proportionately to the size of either its population or its economy, than other major powers. Thus Rosecrance and modern liberals argue that the nature of international politics is changing.

Some recent liberals look even further to the future and believe that dramatic growth in ecological interdependence will so blur the differences between domestic and international politics that humanity will evolve toward a world without borders. For example, everyone is affected by greenhouse gas emissions that warm the planet regardless of where they live. Problems such as HIV/AIDS and drugs also cross borders with such ease that we may be on our way to a different world. Professor Richard Falk of Princeton University argues that transnational problems and values will alter the state-centric orientation of the international system that has dominated for the last 400 years. Transnational forces are undoing the Peace of Westphalia, and humanity is evolving toward a new form of international politics.

In the 1980s, analysts on both sides of the realist-liberal divide attempted to emulate microeconomics by developing formal, deductive theories. *Neorealists* such as Kenneth Waltz and *neoliberals* such as Robert Keohane developed structural models of states as rational actors constrained by the international system. Neorealists and neoliberals increased the simplicity and elegance of theory, but they did so at the cost of discarding much of the rich complexity of classical realism and liberalism. As Miles Kahler put it, "By the end of the 1980s, the theoretical contest that might have been was reduced to relatively narrow disagreements within one state-centric rationalist model of international relations."[4]

These divergent views on the nature of international politics and whether (and, if so, how) it is changing will not soon be reconciled. Realists stress continuity; liberals stress change. Both claim to be more "realistic." Liberals tend to see realists as cynics whose fascination with the past blinds them to change. Realists, in turn, think liberals are utopian dreamers peddling "globaloney."

Who is right? Both are right in some respects and wrong in others. A clear-cut answer might be nice, but it would not be accurate, and it would be less interesting than a complicated one. The mix of continuity and change that characterizes today's world makes it impossible to arrive at one simple, synthetic characterization. Moreover, the world is "patchy." In some regions, such as the Middle East, international politics looks quite realist. In others, such as Western Europe, it looks more liberal.

Realism and liberalism are not the only approaches. Recently, a diverse group of theorists called *constructivists* has argued that realism and liberalism both fail to explain long-term change in world politics adequately. For example, neither realists nor liberals predicted the end of the Cold War, nor could they explain it satisfactorily after the fact. Constructivists emphasize the importance of ideas and culture in shaping both the reality and the discourse of international politics. They stress the ultimate subjectivity of interests and the ways in which interests interact with identities. A constructivist might argue, for example, that realism would do a good job of explaining international politics in a world in which states were led by people such as Richard Nixon and Henry Kissinger, while liberalism would do a good job in a world led by people such as Woodrow Wilson. Everything depends on the ideas that dominate at any given time, and ideas change.

Constructivists focus on identities, norms, culture, national interests, and international governance.[5] They believe that leaders and other people are motivated not only by material interests, but also by their sense of identity, morality, and what their society or culture considers appropriate. These norms change over time, partly through interaction with others. Constructivists agree that the international system is anarchic, but they argue that there is a spectrum of anarchies ranging from benign, peaceful, even friendly ones to bitterly hostile, competitive ones. The nature of anarchy at any given time depends on prevailing norms, perceptions, and beliefs. As the prominent constructivist scholar Alexander Wendt puts it, anarchy is what states make of it. That is why Americans worry more about one North Korean nuclear weapon than 500 British nuclear weapons and why war between France and Germany, which occurred twice in the twentieth century, seems unthinkable today.[6]

Realists and liberals take for granted that states seek to promote their "national interest," but they have little to say about how those interests are shaped or change over time. Constructivists draw on different disciplines to examine the processes by which leaders, peoples, and cultures alter their preferences, shape their identities, and learn new behaviors. For example, both slavery in the nineteenth century and racial apartheid in South Africa in the twentieth century were accepted by most states once upon a time, but both later came to be widely condemned. Constructivists ask: Why the change? What role did ideas play? Will the practice of war go the same way someday? What about the concept of the sovereign state? The world is full of political entities such as tribes, nations, and nongovernmental organizations. Only in recent centuries has the sovereign state been dominant. Constructivists suggest that concepts such as "state" and

"sovereignty" that shape our understandings of world politics and that animate our theories are, in fact, socially constructed; they are not given, nor are they permanent. Even our understanding of "security" evolves. Traditional international relations theories used to understand security strictly in terms of preventing violence or war among states, but in today's world, "human security"—a relatively new concept—seems at least as problematic. Moreover, a wider range of phenomena have become "securitized," that is, treated politically as dire threats warranting extraordinary efforts to address them. Scholars and politicians worry today not only about interstate war, but also about poverty, inequality, and economic or ecological catastrophe, as we will see in Chapters 8 and 9.

Constructivism is an approach that rejects neorealism's and neoliberalism's search for scientific laws. Instead, it seeks contingent generalizations and often offers thick description as a form of explanation. Some of the most important debates in world politics today revolve around the meanings of terms such as *sovereignty*, *humanitarian intervention*, *human rights*, and *genocide*, and constructivists have much more to say about these issues than do those advocating older approaches.[7] Constructivism provides both a useful critique and an important supplement to realism and liberalism. Although sometimes loosely formulated and lacking in predictive power, constructivist approaches remind us of what realism and liberalism often miss. As we shall see in Chapter 2, it is important to look beyond the instrumental rationality of pursuing current goals and ask how changing identities and interests can sometimes lead to subtle shifts in states' policies and sometimes to profound changes in international affairs. Constructivists help us understand how preferences are formed and judgments are shaped. In that sense, constructivist thought complements rather than opposes the two main approaches. We will illustrate the questions of understanding long-term change in Chapter 2 and return to it in Chapter 10.

Realism, liberalism, and constructivism disagree on many things, but they tend to agree that the most productive way of understanding international politics is to focus on states as the main actors. Not everyone has held this view. For more than a century, *Marxism* was a popular alternative for many people. Originally developed by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels and subsequently enhanced and adapted by other theorists, Marxism denied that states were the most important actors in international politics and insisted that economic classes—primarily capitalists and workers—were more important. Marxists were particularly interested in the domestic economic structure of capitalist states and tended to explain world politics in terms of class dynamics. Marxism's concentration on economic class, production, and property relations has sometimes been called "economic reductionism" or "historical materialism." Marxists believed that politics is a function of economics and predicted that the greed of capitalists would drive important events in international relations, ultimately proving their own undoing as socialist revolution swept the globe. But Marxists underestimated the forces of nationalism, state power, and geopolitics. Their lack of attention to the importance of diplomacy and the balance of power led to a flawed