Introduction: Neoclassical realism, the state, and foreign policy

JEFFREY W. TALIAFERRO, STEVEN E. LOBELL, AND NORRIN M. RIPSMAN

How do states, or more specifically the decision-makers and institutions that act on their behalf, assess international threats and opportunities? What happens when there is disagreement about the nature of foreign threats? Who ultimately decides the range of acceptable and unacceptable foreign policy alternatives? To what extent, and under what conditions, can domestic actors bargain with state leaders and influence foreign or security policies? How and under what circumstances will domestic factors impede states from pursuing the types of strategies predicted by balance of power theory and balance of threat theory? Finally, how do states go about extracting and mobilizing resources necessary to implement foreign and security policies? These are important questions that cannot be answered by the dominant neorealist or liberal theories of international politics.

Consider the following: in 1945, and again in 1990, the United States emerged victorious from a major war or an enduring rivalry. In each postwar period, officials in Washington faced the daunting task of assessing and responding to new and unfamiliar international threats. However, the resulting shifts in grand strategy were not predictable solely based upon an analysis of relative power distributions or the dynamics of American domestic politics at the time.


2 Kenneth N. Waltz repeatedly states that his is not a theory of foreign policy and that it only purports to explain broad patterns of systemic outcomes. See Waltz, Theory of International Politics (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1979), pp. 39, 48–9,
The bipolar distribution of power following the Second World War does not explain why the United States embarked upon a grand strategy of containment, which eventually mixed both realpolitik and liberal internationalist ends and means, over the alternative of competitive cooperation with the Soviet Union through a sphere-of-influence arrangement in Europe. As others have noted, in an international system with only two first-tier great powers, some type of competition between them is likely. However, the system could not dictate how the superpowers would define their competitive relationship, let alone the nuances and evolution of their respective grand strategies.

Neither a purely systemic theory of international outcomes, such as neorealist balance of power theory, nor a purely Innenpolitik theory of foreign policy, such as liberal or democratic peace theory, can explain why the George H. W. Bush and Clinton administrations sought to preserve and expand US influence in Europe and East Asia in the 1990s, despite the absence of a great power competitor (at least in the near term) and despite strong domestic pressure to reap the benefits of the so-called peace dividend following the Cold War.
Instead, a combination of international opportunities, relatively low external threat levels, and domestic political constraints appear to account for the underlying continuities in US grand strategy during that decade.

Relative power and shifts in the level of external threat alone cannot explain the nuances of the George W. Bush administration’s grand strategy after the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks. Certainly, any presidential administration (Republican or Democratic) would have responded to the Al Qaeda attacks on New York City and Washington, DC by using American military might to topple the Taliban regime in Afghanistan and destroy Al Qaeda safe havens in that country. However, other aspects of the Bush administration’s behavior defy simply systemic or domestic-level explanations. Instead, the so-called Bush doctrine, the March 2003 invasion of Iraq, and the administration’s subsequent campaign to eliminate Islamist terrorism by fostering liberal democracy in the Middle East resulted from a veritable witches’ brew of systemic and domestic-level factors. In other words, while external threats and preponderant American power set the parameters for a US military response, unit-level factors such as executive branch dominance in national security, policy entrepreneurship by neoconservatives within the administration and the think tank community, and the dominance of Wilsonian (or liberal) ideals in US foreign policy discourse determined both the character and the venue of that response.6

In each example, international imperatives filtered through the medium of state structure and affected how top officials assessed likely threats, identified viable strategies in response to those threats,

International Institutions,” *International Security* 19, no. 3 (winter 1994/5), pp. 5–49; and Eric J. Labs, “Beyond Victory: Offensive Realism and the Expansion of War Aims,” *Security Studies* 6, no. 4 (summer 1997), pp. 1–49. We consider the performance of neoclassical realism against offensive realism and rationalist approaches to foreign policy in our concluding chapter.

and ultimately extracted and mobilized the societal resources necessary to implement and sustain those strategies. Furthermore, complex relationships between systemic and unit-level variables in shaping foreign policy are not unique to the United States. Unit-level variables constrain or facilitate the ability of all types of states – great powers as well as lesser states – to respond to systemic imperatives.

This volume examines the intervening role of the “state” in neoclassical realism, an emerging school of foreign policy theories. Specifically, it seeks to explain why, how, and under what conditions the internal characteristics of states – the extractive and mobilization capacity of politico-military institutions, the influence of domestic societal actors and interest groups, the degree of state autonomy from society, and the level of elite or societal cohesion – intervene between the leaders’ assessment of international threats and opportunities and the actual diplomatic, military, and foreign economic policies those leaders pursue. Neoclassical realism posits an imperfect “transmission belt” between systemic incentives and constraints, on the one hand, and the actual diplomatic, military, and foreign economic policies states select, on the other. Over the long term, international political outcomes generally mirror the actual distribution of power among states. In the shorter term, however, the policies states pursue are rarely objectively efficient or predictable based upon a purely systemic analysis.

Proponents of neoclassical realism draw upon the rigor and theoretical insights of the neorealism (or structural realism) of Kenneth N. Waltz, Robert Gilpin, and others without sacrificing the practical insights about foreign policy and the complexity of statecraft found in the classical realism of Hans J. Morgenthau, Henry Kissinger, Arnold Wolfers, and others. Like other variants of realism, neoclassical realism assumes that politics is a perpetual struggle among different states for material power and security in a world of scarce resources and pervasive uncertainty. Anarchy – the absence of a universal sovereign or worldwide government – is the permissive cause of international conflict. Systemic forces create incentives for all states to strive for greater efficiency in providing security for themselves.

Relative power distributions and trends set broad parameters for states’ external behavior. Thucydides’ observation about state behavior still holds true: “The strong do what they have the power to
do and the weak accept what they have to accept.”
However, as Gideon Rose observes in the 1998 World Politics review article that coined the term “neoclassical realism”:

Neoclassical realism argues that the scope and ambition of a country’s foreign policy is driven first and foremost by the country’s relative material power. Yet it contends that the impact of power capabilities on foreign policy is indirect and complex, because systemic pressures must be translated through intervening unit-level variables such as decision-makers’ perceptions and state structure.

The succeeding chapters examine different ways in which the state – that is, the central apparatus or institutions of government – inhibits or facilitates the ability to assess international threats and opportunities; to undertake grand strategic adjustments; and to implement specific military, diplomatic, and foreign economic policies.

The remainder of this chapter has five sections: the next one discusses the three overall objectives of this volume. A discussion of the relationship among classical realism, neorealism, and neoclassical realism follows in the second section. The third and fourth sections discuss the neoclassical realist conceptions of the state and the international system. The final section identifies questions that guide the rest of the volume and provides an overview of the following chapters.

Objectives of the volume

This volume has three overriding objectives. First, we seek to refine and systematize neoclassical realism and establish new avenues for research. Second, we seek to differentiate neoclassical realism from classical realism and neorealism, as well as from other schools of international relations theories. Finally, we seek to develop the concept of the state more fully as both an analytical concept in security studies and as an intervening variable in the study of foreign policy. Below, we discuss each of these goals in detail.

Rose coined the term “neoclassical realism” specifically in reference to books by Thomas Christensen, Randall Schweller, William Wohlforth,
and Fareed Zakaria, as well as an anthology of articles previously published in the journal *International Security*. These authors seek to explain the grand strategy of a particular modern great power at a specific time or place and not recurrent patterns of international political outcomes. Christensen argues that hostility between China and the United States in the early years of the Cold War was an unintended consequence of strategies Mao Zedong and the Truman administration used to mobilize societal resources for national security. Ultimately shifts in the international distribution of power drove Chinese and US foreign policies, but in both countries domestic politics led to the pursuit of overly competitive policies in secondary regions to secure broad support for necessary policies in primary regions. Soviet grand strategy during the Cold War, according to Wohlforth, was an outgrowth of disagreements between the Kremlin and Washington about the actual post-World War II distribution of power in Europe and the influence of Communist ideology on Soviet net assessments. Schweller argues that the tripolar international system of the late 1930s and early 1940s, as well as the distribution of revisionist and status quo interests among the three poles – Germany, the Soviet Union, and the United States – actually facilitated Adolf Hitler’s expansionist grand strategy. Finally, Zakaria argues that the relatively weak extractive and mobilization capacity of the federal government (i.e. state power) delayed the United States’ emergence as a great power in the late nineteenth century, despite a dramatic growth in population and economic capabilities (i.e. national power) in the decades following the American Civil War.9

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Rose argues that these books constitute a coherent school of foreign policy theories because they posit a single independent or explanatory variable (relative power), a common set of intervening variables (state structure and leaders’ perceptions and calculations of relative power), have explicit scope conditions,\(^\text{10}\) and share a distinct methodological perspective characterized by detailed historical analysis and attention to causal mechanisms. Drawing upon neorealism, they emphasize the importance of the anarchic international system, relative power distributions, and pervasive uncertainty. However, they see anarchy as a permissive condition, rather than an independent causal force. In this sense, these authors represent a return to the earlier views of Morgenthau, Kissinger, Wolfers, and other classical realists.\(^\text{11}\)

In the short run, anarchy gives states considerable latitude in defining their security interests, and the relative distribution of power merely sets parameters for grand strategy. The actual task of assessing power and the intentions of other states is fraught with difficulty. The calculations and perceptions of leaders can inhibit a timely and objectively efficient response or policy adaptation to shifts in the external environment. In addition, leaders almost always face a two-level game in devising and implementing grand strategy: on the one hand, they must respond to the external environment, but, on the other, they must extract and mobilize resources from domestic society, work through existing domestic institutions, and maintain the support of key stakeholders. Over the long run, however, regimes or leaders who consistently fail to respond to systemic incentives put their state’s very survival at risk.\(^\text{12}\) Thus, while the international system may socialize states to respond properly to its constraints over time, as

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Waltz contends, it cannot alone explain the shorter-term policy choices that states make, which can have dramatic consequences for both national security and the structure of the international system.13

Since the publication of Rose’s article, other scholars have employed neoclassical realist approaches to address an array of theoretical, historical, and policy debates, including: the politics of threat assessment and alliance formation in Britain and France before the two world wars and in Argentina, Brazil, and Paraguay before the 1870 War of the Triple Alliance;14 the origins of Italy’s revisionist grand strategy in the 1920s and 1930s;15 the interventions of Wilhelmine Germany, Imperial Japan, and the United States in peripheral regions,16 the dilemmas of assessing the intentions and capabilities of rising great powers;17 the impact of individual leaders and ideology on grand strategy;18 domestic constraints on great powers’ ability to construct durable settlements after major wars;19 the origins of containment and the evolution of the US military commitment to

western Europe between the 1940s and the 1960s; the interaction of relative power shifts, the changing nature of global production, and domestic constraints on the Soviet leadership’s response to deep relative decline in the 1980s; US, South Korean, and Japanese strategies in the current North Korean nuclear crisis; the evolution of US monetary policy after the demise of the Bretton Woods monetary regime in 1973; the origins of the Bush doctrine and the 2003 US invasion of Iraq; the possibility of ontological convergence between neoclassical realism and constructivism, and debates over the usefulness of Imre Lakatos’ methodology of scientific research programs (MSRP) in appraising theoretical progress in international relations.

While there are numerous empirical applications and three frequently cited review or theoretical articles, we seek to develop

20 James McAllister, No Exit: America and the German Problem, 1943–1954 (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University, 2002); Aharon Barth, “American Military Commitments in Europe: Power, Perceptions, and Neoclassical Realism” (PhD dissertation, Georgetown University, 2005); Dueck, Reluctant Crusader, chap. 4; and Layne, Peace of Illusions, chaps. 3–5.


24 See Layne, Peace of Illusions, pp. 159–205; and Dueck, Reluctant Crusader, pp. 169–71.


neoclassical realism theoretically, expand its empirical applications, and establish its limits as well. As the following chapters illustrate, there is no single neoclassical realist theory of foreign policy, but rather a diversity of neoclassical realist theories. This volume, therefore, contains a mix of theoretical and empirical chapters dealing with the grand strategies of current and former great powers as well as second-tier states, such as Canada, Italy, and Taiwan, across different historical periods. Furthermore, several contributors address the theoretical and empirical limits of neoclassical realism, both from within this research program and from the perspective of Innenpolitik theories of foreign policy. In this way, we seek to highlight how the neoclassical realist conception of the state differs from those of nonrealist schools of international relations theories.

The second objective is to differentiate neoclassical realism from classical realism and neorealism. (In this introduction, we focus particularly on the differences between neoclassical realism and its classical realist and neorealist antecedents. In the concluding chapter, we will further differentiate neoclassical realism from liberal and other approaches to foreign policy.) We believe there is considerable ambiguity over the empirical scope of neoclassical realism, the contingent nature of its hypotheses and policy prescriptions, and its exact relationship to other variants of realism. As a result, other international relations scholars criticize neoclassical realism on epistemological, methodological, and theoretical grounds. The following section addresses the relationship among neoclassical realism, neorealism, and classical realism in greater detail.

This volume’s third goal is to fill a gap in the security studies literature about the role of the “state” and the interactions of systemic and unit-level variables in shaping foreign policies. For almost twenty years following the publication of Waltz’s Theory of International Politics, much of the international relations literature focused on systemic or environmental constraints or inducements on actors’ behavior, or on the outcomes of actors’ interactions given certain background conditions. The emergence of constructivism and the

democratic peace literature in the late 1980s and early 1990s shifted the focus of scholarly debates away from the rather static conception of the international system found in neorealism and neoliberal institutionalism. However, neither constructivism nor the democratic peace thesis and other variants of liberal international relations theory have managed to integrate systemic and unit-level variables in a deductively consistent manner.

Consider, for example, the democratic peace literature, which derives from the statistical observation that since 1815 pairs of liberal democracies have never waged war on each other.28 Much of the quantitative literature treats democratic and non-democratic states as unitary actors: democratic states do not fight other democracies, democratic states tend to ally on the same side, democratic states tend to win the wars they fight, and democratic states are more trustworthy due to transparency. Only a few qualitative studies have attempted to disaggregate democracies and examine how the different institutional arrangements of different democratic states (such as presidential versus Westminster parliamentary systems) might constrain foreign policy choice.29 Thus, democratic peace theorists have a very static and undifferentiated understanding of the democratic state.30 Like other variants of liberal international relations theory, the democratic peace literature rests upon a "ground-up" or pluralist conception of the state. It assumes the state is a relatively passive set of institutions that merely serve as an arena for competition among different interest groups and that different


groups or coalitions occasionally capture it. The quantitative and the qualitative work on the democratic peace thesis, therefore, focuses primarily on interest group preferences and bargaining, the institutional arrangements within states (such as executive accountability to the legislature, separation of powers, and the recurrence of free elections), or ideational variables as constraints on leaders’ ability to make foreign and security policies, with little regard for the international environment.

For their part, systemic liberal approaches, such as (neoliberal) institutionalist theory, have an even more problematic and truncated conception of the state. By encouraging certain behaviors while discouraging others, institutions or processes – whether operating at the domestic level or at the international level in the form of international organizations and regimes – become a primary causal determinant for actors’ interests and behaviors as well as for bargaining outcomes. Systemic liberalism assumes that actors will strive toward the most objectively efficient course of action, which is generally synonymous with cooperative behavior. As Jennifer Sterling-Folker notes, there are at least two contradictions here. First, much of the early institutionalist literature assumed that states functioned as unitary rational actors. At the same time, institutionalist arguments rely on state officials as the vehicles through which international institutions or regimes teach states new behavior. Regardless of the fact that elected leaders, bureaucrats, and interest groups actually engage in very different domestic processes or face different institutional constraints, and would therefore have very different interests and behaviors, according to institutionalist arguments they all reach the same conclusion that more and more cooperation is the best – in fact, the only – solution to the problem facing them. Second, there can, however, be no “objective” most efficient course of action, since actors’ interests, identities, and behaviors are grounded in process. Actors should then define efficiency according to ongoing processes

and would have no means of recognizing what was “objectively” in their own best interests.\(^{33}\)

In contrast to the comparative politics subfield of political science and the political economy wing of international relations, the state – as both a political entity and an analytical concept – is arguably underdeveloped in the security studies literature.\(^{34}\) This problem is especially endemic to realism. As many self-proclaimed realists acknowledge, realism in general, and neorealism in particular, lacks a well-articulated theory of the state.\(^{35}\) Neoclassical realists have begun to fill that gap in the literature.

**Classical realism, neorealism, and neoclassical realism**

Neoclassical realism builds upon the complex relationship between the state and society found in classical realism without sacrificing the central insight of neorealism about the constraints of the international system. Nonetheless, several key questions about the relationship among classical realism, neoclassical realism, and neorealism must be answered: is neoclassical realism merely an attempt to supplement neorealism with unit-level variables – a move that Waltz clearly and repeatedly rejects? Alternatively, does neoclassical realism represent a new research program? By incorporating both systemic and unit-level variables, is neoclassical realism guilty of reductionism – the tendency to explain the whole with reference to

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the internal attributes and the individual behavior of the units? By incorporating unit-level variables does neoclassical realism violate the structural logic of realism?

Realism, like Marxism and liberalism, is first and foremost a philosophical position, not a single theory subject to empirical confirmation or disconfirmation. Neoclassical realism, neorealism, and classical realism are heirs to a philosophical tradition dating to the writings of Thucydides and Sun Tzu in the fifth century BCE. What unites all self-described realists are the following: a profoundly pessimistic view of the human condition and the prospects for change in human behavior; a rejection of teleological conceptions of politics or notions of an “end of history”;36 a “skeptical attitude toward schemes for pacific international order”;37 and the recognition that ethics and morality are products of power and material interests, not the other way around.38

Scholars compile different lists of realism’s first principles and core assumptions, but we identify three. First, human beings cannot survive as individuals, but rather as members of larger groups that command their loyalty and provide some measure of security from external enemies. Tribalism is an immutable fact of political and social life. Thus all variants of realism are inherently group-centric. Second, politics is a perpetual struggle among self-interested groups under conditions of general scarcity and uncertainty. The scarce commodities in question might be material capabilities, or they might be social resources, such as prestige and status. Groups face pervasive uncertainty about one another’s present and future intentions.39 Third, power is a necessary requirement for any group to

36 By “teleology” we mean the notion that politics (whether within the state or among states) and history must ultimately result in some pre-ordained end or that they have some higher (and possibly divinely inspired) purpose.
secure its goals, whether those goals are universal domination or simply self-preservation.40

Certainly there are disagreements among classical realists about whether the permissive cause of conflict lies in the external environment or in human nature.41 There are debates among neorealists over the amount of unnecessary or unintended conflict generated by the international system and the resulting implications for how states should assess one another’s intentions and best promote security for themselves.42 There are also disagreements among both classical realists and neorealists over the prevalence of international systems characterized by hierarchic (or hegemonic) or equilibria (balance of power) power distributions and the likelihood of major war across different types of systems.43 Nonetheless, the above-mentioned first principles make it possible to speak of a coherent tradition that encompasses writings of philosophers, statesmen, historians, social scientists, and military strategists as diverse as Niccolò Machiavelli, Thomas Hobbes, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Alexander Hamilton, Carl von Clausewitz, Max Weber, Raymond Aron, Winston S. Churchill,


The terms “classical realism” and “neorealism” did not come into widespread use in the international relations field until Richard Ashley drew a sharp distinction between Waltz’s *Theory of International Politics* and the work of earlier realists. Since numerous books and articles examine the areas of divergence and convergence between classical realism and neorealism, we present only a brief summary here.

Classical realism is primarily concerned with the sources and uses of national power in international politics and the problems that leaders encounter in conducting foreign policy. These issues lead scholars to focus on power distributions among states, as well as the character of states and their relation to domestic society. Twentieth-century classical realists offer either philosophical reflections on the enduring principles of statesmanship or create inductive theories of foreign policy drawn largely from the experiences of European great powers from the sixteenth to the mid-twentieth century. Morgenthau, Kissinger, Wolfers, and others write extensively about the state and national power, but say little about the constraints of the international system. Finally, what we now call classical realism was never a coherent research program, but rather a vast repository of texts written by different authors for different purposes and in different contexts over the course of 2,500 years. Most classical realists were not social scientists; even the twentieth-century classical realists rarely adhered to what are now widely accepted standards of social science methodology.

In contrast, the focus of neorealism is on explaining common patterns of international behavior over time. In particular, neorealists address many of the big questions of international politics, such as:

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Why do wars occur? Why do states tend to balance against powerful states? Why is cooperation difficult and fleeting between states? They address these questions in a self-consciously scientific manner, with an attempt to harness the positivist methodological rigor that the classical realists lacked. They trace the recurring patterns of world politics to the structure of the international system and its defining characteristic, anarchy, which compels states to pursue similar strategies to secure themselves. Utilizing their most important variable, the relative distribution of capabilities, or the balance of power, they explain a vast array of great power behavior and systemic outcomes.

Waltz’s balance of power theory is just one (albeit the most prominent) of the theories that fall under the rubric of neorealism.47 Waltz creates a deductive theory to explain recurrent patterns of international outcomes, namely the recurrence of balances of power and the absence of sustained hegemonic international systems across history. He posits a single independent variable, the systemic distribution of power as measured by the number of great powers (or polarity). It makes two probabilistic predictions: (1) across different international systems, balances of power tend to form, and (2) states tend to emulate the successful practices of others.

Drawing upon analogies from microeconomics, Waltz focuses on the properties and constraints imposed by the international system on all states (especially the great powers) and abstracts from the internal characteristics of individual states. The state, in effect, becomes a “black box.” What distinguishes international and domestic political systems are differences in ordering principle (anarchy versus hierarchy), the attributes of the units (functional similarity versus difference), and the distribution of material capabilities among those units (uneven). This has two implications for the present volume. First,

balance of power theory assumes that, on average, most states correctly respond to systemic incentives and engage in balancing and emulation. This adaptive behavior, which states undertake to enhance their competitive advantage and probability of survival, has the unintended effect of perpetuating an anarchic international system. However, in an anarchic system, Waltz argues, “Those who do not help themselves, or who do so less effectively than others, will fail to prosper, will lay themselves open to danger, will suffer.”48 Second, balance of power theory assumes states have unlimited ability to extract and mobilize domestic resources, such that aggregate resources are equivalent to actual military and economic power and international influences.49 Of course, these assumptions are simplifications of reality that are useful for constructing an elegant systemic theory.

Other versions of neorealist theory make similar simplifying assumptions. Offensive realism, for example, departs from Waltz’s balance of power theory with its contention that states can never be certain how much power is necessary to achieve security for themselves now and in the future. Therefore, all states strive to maximize their relative share of material power as the only sure path to security. Great powers, in particular, engage in calculated bids of expansion and look for opportunities to weaken potential adversaries, with the ultimate goal of attaining regional or global hegemony.50 Offensive realists, too, tend to treat the state as a black box and assume that all states will pursue similar strategies faced with similar systemic

48 Waltz, Theory of International Politics, p. 118.
50 Mearsheimer, Tragedy of Great Power Politics, pp. 33–54. The question of whether great powers strive for regional hegemony (the status of being the only great power in its region of the globe) or global hegemony (the status of being the only great power in the international system) is one that divides offensive realists. Mearsheimer argues that great powers can only strive for regional hegemony because geography (namely large oceans) makes the attainment of global hegemony impossible. Others disagree. See, Christopher Layne, “The ‘Poster Child for Offensive Realism’: America as Global Hegemon,” Security Studies 12, no. 2 (winter 2002/03), pp. 119–63; Layne, Peace of Illusions, chap. 1; and Gerald Geunwook Lee, “To Be Long or Not to Be Long: The Contradiction of Time Horizons in Offensive Realism,” Security Studies 12, no. 2 (winter 2002/3), pp. 196–217.
incentives, regardless of domestic political arrangements. The same is true of expected utility theory, which contends that states make foreign policy decisions fluidly on the basis of the expected utility of their actions, determined by calculations of systemic factors such as, inter alia, relative capability, the power of allies, and geographical distance. None of these structural realist approaches considers that states may differ in their ability to control the policy agenda, select policy options, or mobilize resources to respond to systemic incentives.

Neoclassical realism shares classical realism’s concern for the state and its relation to domestic society. It also defines its mission largely in terms of building theories of foreign policy, rather than theories of the system within which states interact. Nonetheless, neoclassical realists aspire to greater methodological sophistication than their classical realist predecessors. Moreover, they begin with the fundamental assumption of neorealists that the international system structures and constrains the policy choices of states.

What then is the relationship between neorealism and neoclassical realism? Both schools begin with assumptions about the conflictual nature of politics, the centrality of conflict groups, and the importance of relative power distributions. Both research programs assign causal primacy to systemic independent variables. Specific neorealist and neoclassical realist theories, in turn, generate testable and probabilistic hypotheses. It is clear, however, that neorealism and neoclassical realism differ from each other based on the range of phenomena each seeks to explain, or the dependent variable. The former seeks to explain recurring patterns of international outcomes, defined as the range of likely outcomes resulting from the interaction of two or more units in an anarchic environment. Examples would be the likelihood of major war across different types of international systems, the prevalence of hegemonic orders versus balances of power (defined in terms of state capabilities), and patterns of alliance behavior among states. Table 1.1 illustrates the areas of convergence and divergence among classical realism, neorealism, and neoclassical realism.

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52 For example, Bruce Bueno de Mesquita, _The War Trap_ (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1981); and Bruce Bueno de Mesquita and David Lalman, _War and Reason_ (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1992).
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research program</th>
<th>Epistemology and methodology</th>
<th>View of the international system</th>
<th>View of the units</th>
<th>Dependent variable</th>
<th>Underlying causal logic</th>
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<tr>
<td>CLASSICAL REALISM</td>
<td>Inductive theories; philosophical reflection on nature of politics or detailed historical analysis (generally drawn from W. European history)</td>
<td>Somewhat important</td>
<td>Differentiated</td>
<td>Foreign policies of states</td>
<td>Power distributions or distribution of interests (revisionist vs. status quo) → foreign policy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NEOREALISM</td>
<td>Deductive theories; competitive hypothesis testing using qualitative and sometimes quantitative methods</td>
<td>Very important; inherently competitive and uncertain</td>
<td>Undifferentiated</td>
<td>International political outcomes</td>
<td>Relative power distributions (independent variable) → international outcomes (dependent variable)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NEOCLASSICAL REALISM</td>
<td>Deductive theorizing; competitive hypothesis testing using qualitative methods</td>
<td>Important; implications of anarchy are variable and sometimes opaque to decision-makers</td>
<td>Differentiated</td>
<td>Foreign policies of states</td>
<td>Relative power distributions (independent variable) → domestic constraints and elite perceptions (intervening variables) → foreign policy (dependent variable)</td>
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Neoclassical realism is not simply a refinement of Waltz’s balance of power theory nor an attempt to smuggle unit-level variables into the theory to explain anomalies. Nor is it correct to characterize realism as a tightly constructed Lakatosian research program whose “hard core” is synonymous with Waltz’s theory, thus rendering any departure from that theory as evidence of a “degenerative problem shift.” Neoclassical realism seeks to explain variation in the foreign policies of the same state over time or across different states facing similar external constraints. It makes no pretense about explaining broad patterns of systemic or recurring outcomes. Thus, a neoclassical realist hypothesis might explain the likely diplomatic, economic, and military responses of particular states to systemic imperatives, but it cannot explain the systemic consequences of those responses.

A related question concerns reductionism – efforts to explain variation in the properties and characteristics of the system by only examining the behavior of the units and their relation to one another within that system. Waltz is highly critical of reductionist theories of international politics. The interaction of differently configured states produces similar as well as different international outcomes. Likewise, the interaction of similar states produces different as well as similar international outcomes. The same causes sometimes lead to different effects, and the same effects sometimes follow from different causes. Since neoclassical realism locates causal properties at both the structural and unit levels, the unit-level factors help to explain state external behavior. A critic might argue there is no way to avoid the reductionist trap, so long as unit-level factors have causal property. The charge that neoclassical realism is reductionist, though, is mistaken. Reductionist theories locate the causes of systemic outcomes – such as, the likelihood of interstate war or general patterns of alliance formation in the international system – in the internal attributes of states. Waltz is quite clear on this point: “One cannot infer the condition of international politics from the internal composition of states, nor can one arrive at an understanding of international politics by summing the foreign policies and the external behavior of states.”

54 See Waltz, *Theory of International Politics*, p. 64. Waltz also notes that theories of foreign policy can and should include causal factors at the unit and systemic
Neoclassical realism does not do so. It uses the internal characteristics of states as a guide only to national responses to international constraints.

Some critics, such as John A. Vasquez, and Jeffrey Legro and Andrew Moravcsik, fault neoclassical realism for its alleged repudiation of core assumptions of realism in general, and Waltz’s theory in particular. By positing an intervening role for elite perceptions of systemic variables, neoclassical realism allegedly violates the assumption that states act rationally in pursuit of their intended goals. However, as many scholars note, while some realist theories make strong assumptions about state rationality, such assumptions are not essential to realism. Both Waltz and Morgenthau reject the assumption that states act rationally. Waltz clearly states that his theory requires no rationality assumption and that over time the international system conditions states’ behavior through socialization and competition. Morgenthau’s writings contain denunciations of both rationalist inquiry and the possibility of creating a so-called political science.
A third criticism is that neoclassical realism lacks theoretical rigor and predictive power because it eschews a mono-causal focus on either domestic or systemic variables. We contend that parsimony must be balanced against explanatory power; on that score, neoclassical realism does quite well relative to other bodies of international relations theory. Almost all of the extant applications of neoclassical realism entail conscious efforts to derive testable hypotheses, specify the predictions or observable implications of those hypotheses, and finally to test the relative explanatory power of neoclassical realist and alternative hypotheses against empirical evidence. Furthermore, in this volume, we include several chapters that present new neoclassical realist hypotheses specifying the intervening role of unit-level variables, as well as circumstances under which such domestic constraints will likely have a major influence on foreign policy.

Finally, some critics might charge that by incorporating unit-level variables, neoclassical realism violates the structural logic of neorealism. By focusing on non-systemic variables, critics claim that neoclassical realists are really incorporating elements of liberal and institutionalist theories in an effort to salvage neorealism. This criticism stems from a mistaken reading of the role of unit-level variables in realist theories in general, and neoclassical realism in particular. As we explain below, there is no deductive reason why neoclassical realism cannot incorporate unit-level variables, while at the same time maintaining the causal primacy of structural variables.

Neoclassical realist conceptions of the state

As we stated earlier, neoclassical realism builds upon the complex relationship between state and society found in classical realism without sacrificing the central insight about systemic constraints and opportunities found in neorealism. What exactly does this mean?

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60 See Patrick James, International Relations and Scientific Progress: Structural Realism Reconsidered (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2002).


What is neoclassical realism’s conception of the state and how, if at all, does that conception improve upon the treatments of the state found in neorealism and other schools of international relations theory?

Neoclassical realism identifies states as the most important actors in international politics. Gilpin writes, “The essence of social reality is the group. The building blocks and ultimate units of social and political life are not the individuals of liberal thought nor the classes of Marxism [but instead] conflict groups.”63 Tribalism is an immutable aspect of the human condition and political life. Human beings cannot survive in an anarchic environment as individuals, but only as members of a larger group. While groups may come into existence for a variety of reasons, the one necessary condition is that they differ from some outside entity. Fear plays a crucial role in group formation, if only because physical security is a prerequisite for the pursuit of any other individual or collective goal. Metus hostilis or the fear of enemies – whether manifested in the form of xenophobia directed at internal minorities or a fear of external groups – is indispensable for the creation and maintenance of political groups, because it offers a way of overcoming collective action barriers. The concept of the metus hostilis appears, in one form or another, in the writings of Thucydides, Hobbes, Morgenthau, Waltz, and Mearsheimer.64 Research in the fields of evolutionary biology and social psychology provides additional support for long-standing realist assumptions about the centrality of in-group/out-group discrimination, intergroup comparison, and competition in political life.65

We acknowledge there is no universally accepted definition of the “state,” and the term itself has different connotations within the disciplines of anthropology, history, and sociology, and in the comparative politics and international relations subfields of political science. Nonetheless, Max Weber’s classic definition is often a starting point: “A state is a human community that (successfully) claims the

*monopoly of the legitimate use* of physical force within a given territory. Note that ‘territory’ is one of the characteristics of the state.” While Weber’s definition captures the essential coercive nature of political authority and the existence of an administrative apparatus, it fails to encompass cases where territorial control is incomplete (or non-existent) or where the monopoly on the legitimate use of force is contested. Most international relations theorists would conceive of the state as: (1) a set of institutions, (2) placed within a geographically bounded territory that (3) at least claims a monopoly on legitimate rule within that defined territory.

Neoclassical realism presents a “top-down” conception of the state, which means systemic forces ultimately drive external behavior. To this end it views the states as epitomized by a national security executive, comprised of the head of government and the ministers and officials charged with making foreign security policy. This executive, sitting at the juncture of the state and the international system, with access to privileged information from the state’s politico-military apparatus, is best equipped to perceive systemic constraints and deduce the national interest. Nonetheless, while the executive is potentially autonomous from society, in many contexts political arrangements frequently compel it to bargain with domestic actors (such as the legislature, political parties, economic sectors, classes, or the public as a whole) in order to enact policy and extract resources to implement policy choices. Therefore, in contrast to liberalism and Marxism, neoclassical realism does not see states as simply aggregating the demands of different societal interest groups or economic classes. Rather, leaders define the “national interests” and conduct

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foreign policy based upon their assessment of relative power and other states’ intentions, but always subject to domestic constraints. This means that substate actors are far from irrelevant and that the definition and articulation of national interests is not without controversy. On the contrary, threat assessment, strategic adjustment, and policy implementation are inherently difficult and may entail considerable bargaining within the state’s leadership and with other stakeholders within society.

In this volume we use the term “state” as a generic term for a variety of autonomous polities with different geographic scopes, internal attributes, and relative material capabilities that coexist and interact in an anarchic environment. We would not confine the term to the sovereign territorial states that first appeared in early modern Europe and later spread throughout the world. For our purposes, polities as varied as ancient Greek city-states (the polis), the Roman, Byzantine, and Chinese empires, the principalities and kingdoms of medieval Europe and pre-colonial India, and the city-state leagues of the Holy Roman Empire and Italy fall under the generic category of “states.”

States are not necessarily synonymous with nations, as the many examples of stateless nations, multinational or multiethnic states, and contested national identities between and within different states, illustrate. While states may claim a monopoly on legitimate rule within a defined territory, we recognize the actual degree of territorial control by central political institutions varies. Finally, while we do not equate statehood with what Stephen Krasner calls “international legal sovereignty” or Westphalian sovereignty, we do exclude colonies, protectorates, tributaries, and other polities based on formal hierarchic relationships and de facto territorial control by another state.70

Neoclassical realism builds upon the explicit distinction between the state and society made by German classical realists like Weber, Otto Hintze, and Leopold von Ranke and carried over into the writings of their Anglo-American counterparts.71 Classical realism

and neoclassical realism do not see the state – that is, the central politico-military institutions and top officials of the polity – as completely autonomous from society. On the contrary, Morgenthau, Kissinger, and other classical realists lament the gradual erosion of state autonomy from society in the European great powers in the nineteenth century. Greater accountability to legislatures and greater vulnerability to the whims of nationalism and public opinion diminished statesmen’s ability to pursue policies necessary to preserve the balance of power. Nonetheless, the national security executive has interests which transcend any class or sector, namely the national interest. Moreover, since the executive receives privileged information from state agencies, it is frequently more aware of the national interest and the dictates of the international system than are other domestic actors. Limitations on executive autonomy in different national contexts, however, may undermine their ability to respond as necessary to shifts in the balance of power. Neoclassical realists consequently view policy responses as a product of state–society coordination and, at times, struggle. Less autonomous states must frequently build coalitions and make compromises to mobilize social and political actors in order to enact policy, as George H. W. Bush did in preparation for the 1991 Gulf War. Most states must also frequently bargain with societal actors in order to secure the provision of key national security goods to implement policy. Thus, for example, as Michael Barnett has demonstrated, the Egyptian and Israeli states had to make considerable policy concessions and barter away degrees of executive autonomy in order to prosecute the 1967 and 1973 Arab–Israeli wars.

As several contributors show, the degree of state autonomy vis-à-vis society varies over time and across different states. This variation, in turn, affects whether states respond to international pressures in a timely and efficient fashion. Finally, neoclassical realism recognizes

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73 For a discussion of executive autonomy in the conduct of foreign policy, see Ripsman, Peacemaking by Democracies, pp. 43–57.
75 See Ripsman, Peacemaking by Democracies, chap. 5; and Michael Mastanduno, David A. Lake, and G. John Ikenberry, “Toward a Realist
that many states or regimes do not necessarily function as “unitary” actors. Elite consensus or disagreement about the nature and extent of international threats, persistent internal divisions within the leadership, social cohesion, and the regime’s vulnerability to violent overthrow all inhibit the state’s ability to respond to systemic pressures.  

The neoclassical realist conception of the international system

Neoclassical realism identifies elite calculations and perceptions of relative power and domestic constraints as intervening variables between international pressures and states’ foreign policies. Relative power sets parameters for how states (or rather, those who act on their behalf) define their interests and pursue particular ends. But what is the neoclassical realist conception of the international system? After all, as even Waltz admits, the international system does not dictate exactly how each state will respond within those parameters. David Dessler’s office-building analogy is illustrative. The exterior walls and the configuration of the internal spaces generate broad behavioral patterns for the people working within them. Most office workers do not attempt to walk through walls, crawl through air conditioning ducts, or leave the building via windows on the twentieth floor.

Pervasive uncertainty and potential threats are central to the conception of anarchy in neorealism and neoclassical realism. To return to the office-building analogy, the workers may be aware of hidden trapdoors and that the consequence of falling through them is severe injury or death, but they have no knowledge or control over the placement of these traps. It is not simply that anarchy leaves states unregulated and unsupervised so that war may break out at any time, Jennifer Sterling-Folker observes, “It is instead that the anarchic environment allows death to occur in the first place while providing no guidance for how to avoid it in the short-term and ultimately no means of doing so in the long-term.” This lack of guidance automatically renders anarchy a self-help environment. It also suggests that systemic incentives and

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76 Schweller, *Unanswered Threats*, pp. 46–68.
78 Sterling-Folker, *Theories of International Cooperation*, p. 73.
threats, at least in the short run, are rarely unambiguous. This means there is often not a single, optimal response to such incentives and, due to the operation of the security dilemma, actions designed to counter threats may actually make states less secure.

State leaders, like the employees in Dessler’s office analogy, try to anticipate other states’ likely reactions and future power trends. However, feedback may be delayed and indirect. The difficulties leaders encounter in assessing relative power shifts and systemic feedback are persistent themes in the neoclassical realist literature. For example, Wohlforth details how, in the late 1970s and early 1980s, Soviet leaders faced the dual dilemma of assessing the extent of relative decline and discerning whether the Reagan administration’s defense buildup was *sui generis* or feedback to the Brezhnev doctrine, the invasion of Afghanistan, and Kremlin support for revolutions in the Third World.79 Similarly, Aaron L. Friedberg chronicles the difficulties competing Whitehall departments and ministers serving under prime ministers Lord Salisbury and Alfred James Balfour experienced in assessing and responding to the relative decline of Britain between 1895 and 1905. In both the Soviet and British examples, debates among top decision-makers and within state bureaucracies over the appropriate power measures made strategic adjustment even more difficult, because, as Wohlforth observes:

Power cannot be tested; different elements of power possess different utilities at different times; the relation of perceived power to material resources can be capricious; the mechanics of power are surrounded by uncertainty; states possess different conversion ratios and comparative advantages; the perceived prestige hierarchy and the military distribution may not coincide for prolonged periods; states adopt asymmetrical strategies to maximize their positions and undercut rivals; signals get confused among allies, rivals, and domestic audiences.80

In addition to long-term trends, feedback can also come in the form of exogenous shocks, such as the sudden defeat of a frontline ally or the unexpected escalation of a crisis. These shocks can suddenly make leaders aware of the cumulative effect of long-term power trends. For example, Christensen notes that the extent of Britain’s collapse in

spring 1947 shocked the Truman administration into recognizing the true bipolar distribution of power and shifting toward active containment of the Soviet Union. Elsewhere, Christensen argues that ambiguity about the distribution of military power in Europe in the 1860s led the French emperor Napoleon III and his generals to overestimate Austria’s ability to withstand a war with Prussia. Consequently, French leaders did not seek a prewar alliance with Austria. Zakaria notes the resounding US victory over Spain in the 1898 Spanish–American War solidified the perception of increasing US state power both at home and abroad. Conversely, the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941 or the terrorist attacks on New York City and Washington on September 11, 2001 solidified perceptions of homeland vulnerability, while the Vietnam War solidified perceptions of the limits of US military power. Feedback, whether positive (or self-amplifying) or negative (or dampening), is often subject to multiple interpretations by top decision-makers and national security bureaucracies. Furthermore, the interaction of different states’ strategies may produce unforeseen or unintended systemic outcomes. While explaining the likelihood of such systemic outcomes lies outside the purview of neoclassical realism, several contributors to this volume do address the manner in which states interpret and react to such outcomes.

Neoclassical realism accepts the importance of competitive pressures and socialization effects in shaping the internal composition of states. What motivates such adaptive behavior is not the normative appeal of others’ practices or domestic institutions, but rather the desire to enhance competitive advantage and the probability of survival. “The nation-state is by no means the teleological end-point of group identification,” observes Sterling-Folker, “but its development as the primary constitutive unit of the present global system is explicable as a result of anarchy’s imitative dynamics.” Indeed, as much of the state-building literature argues, the territorial state simply proved more effective than other polities in early modern Europe in

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82 For a discussion of feedback and non-linearity in international politics see Jervis, *Systems Effects*, pp. 125–76.
83 Sterling-Folker, *Theories of International Cooperation*, p. 73.
mobilizing internal resources and responding to external threats. This process of intergroup comparison, emulation, and innovation led to the spread of the territorial state as an institutional form, first throughout Europe and later around the world. It also led to the demise of competing institutional forms over time. Thus, the international system is of paramount importance to neoclassical realists, which distinguishes them from inside-out approaches.

**Research questions and contents of the volume**

We asked the contributors to reflect on several questions about neoclassical realism, the state, and foreign policy. The questions fall into three groups: (1) the politics of threat assessment; (2) the politics of strategic adjustment; and (3) the politics of resource extraction, domestic mobilization, and policy implementation.84

1. **Threat assessment**
   - How do states, or rather the decision-makers and key institutions that act on behalf of states, assess international threats and opportunities?
   - Who are the relevant actors within the state with respect to international threat assessment?
   - How are disagreements within the state over the nature of international threats and appropriate remedies ultimately resolved?

2. **Strategic adjustment**
   - Who decides how to respond to international threats?
   - To what extent can domestic actors bargain with the state and influence foreign and security policies in different state settings?
   - Do domestic actors determine the content of foreign and security policy or merely its style?
   - Which domestic actors have the greatest influence on security policy? Under what circumstances?
   - What bargains do leaders need to strike with domestic actors in order to respond to international threats and opportunities?

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84 One area of neoclassical realism that this volume does not examine is variation in the interests of states. Structural realism assumes that all states have comparable missions, namely to survive in an anarchic international system. Drawing upon classical realism, however, Schweller differentiates between states on the basis of differing motivations, be they status quo or revisionist. See Schweller, *Deadly Imbalances*, esp. pp. 19–36, and pp. 64–91.
3. Resource extraction, domestic mobilization, and policy implementation

- How do states mobilize the resources necessary to pursue their chosen security policies?
- How much power do domestic actors have to obstruct the state when it seeks to mobilize resources in different settings?
- What determines who is more successful in bargaining games between the state and societal groups?

In subsequent chapters, our contributors provide a range of answers to these questions to provide a better understanding of neoclassical realism and the intersection of international and domestic forces in shaping foreign policy. Some, like Randall Schweller, view the role of society as episodic and rare, accounting only for surprising deviations from systemic requirements. Others, like Colin Dueck, contend that societal forces regularly affect foreign policy, but their effects are limited to the style and form of policy choices, rather than the substance of policy. Still others, like Steven Lobell, Mark Brawley, and Benjamin Fordham, view the role of domestic interests as more pervasive and powerful in shaping foreign policy choices. Finally, others, such as Norrin Ripsman, Jeffrey Taliaferro, and Jennifer Sterling-Folker, construct theories positing the conditions under which societal forces will affect foreign policy choices and implementation. The chapters thus posit a variety of neoclassical realist hypotheses that purport to explain variation in different aspects of states’ grand strategies – diplomacy, military doctrine and force structure, and foreign economic policy. Some chapters are largely theoretical, while others test hypotheses against historical and contemporary cases.

The process of strategic adjustment must begin with elites’ recognition of impending shifts in the distribution of power, changes in the intentions of other states and non-state actors, or feedback that suggests existing strategies are suboptimal or counterproductive. However, neoclassical realism suggests that elite perceptions and calculations of international pressures and a lack of consensus within the top leadership and national security bureaucracies often skew the process of net assessment. Furthermore, even if elites correctly perceive the nature and magnitude of international threats, domestic political dynamics can nonetheless force them into pursuing arguably counterproductive foreign and security policies.
In chapter 2, Steven E. Lobell lays out a complex threat identification model within neoclassical realism. Contrary to neorealist balance of power theory, he argues states not only respond to aggregate shifts in the international distribution of power, but also to shifts in power differentials and specific components of other states’ material capabilities. Divisions among the top officials of the state charged with the formulation of grand strategy – what Lobell calls the foreign policy executive (FPE) – and key societal elites can adversely affect the threat assessment process and ultimately strategic adjustment. The result is often the pursuit of grand strategies that appear anomalous from the standpoint of neorealist balance of power and balance of threat theories.

Lobell’s complex threat identification model begins with the observation that the FPE stands at the intersection of international and domestic politics. The FPE has responsibility for grand strategic planning, including the identification of changes in the global or regional balance of power. Yet, in order to implement foreign and security policies, the FPE must forge and maintain a coalition with various societal elites. These societal elites include the leaders of different economic sectors (such as finance, heavy industry, agriculture, and manufacturing), state actors (such as the military, the diplomatic service, and colonial bureaucrats), and domestic interest groups. These groups, in turn, have a material interest in the pursuit of different types of foreign economic policies and often focus on different components of rising or threatening states’ material capabilities.

Lobell argues that where a shift in a component of power of a foreign state enables a foreign security policy coalition (that is, consensus among FPE and key societal supporters), the FPE will be unconstrained in assessing international threats. Consensus on threat assessment enables more timely and efficient balancing against rising or threatening adversaries abroad to occur. Conversely, where a shift in an element of power of a foreign country disables a foreign security policy coalition (that is, where there is no consensus among FPE and societal supporters), the FPE will be constrained since there is no agreement on threat assessment. As a result, the ability of the FPE to pursue balancing strategies against overly powerful or threatening states will be curtailed or delayed. To illustrate his argument, Lobell draws on the examples of the British threat assessment of Germany before the two world wars.
In chapter 3, Mark Brawley examines the dilemmas of threat assessment and strategic adjustment in permissive international environments – postwar periods marked by considerable ambiguity among the victorious great powers and their vanquished foes over long-term power trends, future intentions, and potential patterns of alignment and enmity. In such environments, systemic constraints on the victorious great powers are relatively weak or indeterminate, thus leading to considerable variation in how they define the core security interests, make tradeoffs between short-term military security and longer-term economic prosperity, and discount the future. However, the types of strategic tradeoffs great powers make can effect subsequent strategic adjustment, when systemic constraints are stronger and international threats are immediate. Brawley reexamines the dilemmas encountered by Britain, France, and the Soviet Union in responding to the latent (and later the proximate) threat of Germany in the 1920s and 1930s.

Initially, the trauma and costs of the First World War, along with the fact that the Weimar Republic was in no position to instigate another conflict in the near future, shaped British, French, and Soviet strategic thinking. Officials in London, Paris, and Moscow could consider various strategies for balancing or deterring Germany in the long term. Moreover, all leaders believed that in the case of another war, it would take considerable time and effort to get their economies back on a wartime footing. Expectations about the time frame for balancing German power, and assumptions about the difficulties in converting economic assets into military power, shaped decisions in the 1920s. Since the threat was not proximate, British, French, and Soviet leaders proposed different strategies for achieving the same end. In the permissive environment of the immediate postwar years, their preferences reflected factors typically ignored by neorealists, but at the heart of neoclassical realism. As Germany recovered in the 1930s, the leaders of these countries reassessed the time-horizon in which they needed to balance the German threat, leading them to prefer different strategies. Their decisions in the 1920s drove them to incompatible stances in the 1930s, however. Therefore, the failure of Britain, France, and the USSR to balance against Nazi Germany did not stem from disagreements or misperceptions about the nature and the location of the threat, but rather from the difficulties associated with changing long-standing strategies.
Why do states continue to perceive each other as security threats despite increased economic interdependence between them? How is it possible for military rivals to continue trading with each other despite the continuing risk that their rivalry might escalate to war? Why does the so-called peace dividend predicted by advocates of greater economic cooperation often fail to materialize? Liberal theories (particularly complex interdependence and neoliberal institutionalism) posit a causal connection between economic interdependence and a greater likelihood of peace. States learn that cooperation is the most functionally efficient means to maximize societal wealth. Likewise, consumers, firms, and other societal groups tend to become dependent on overseas markets and will withdraw support from leaders who pursue foreign policies that are commercially harmful.

In chapter 4, Jennifer Sterling-Folker presents a neoclassical realist framework that challenges this interdependence/peace dividend thesis. Liberal theories ignore nationalism and unilateralism entirely, or treat them as irrational “historical residues” to be overcome through ever greater institutionalized cooperation. Consequently, they cannot explain how states (and their leaders) can simultaneously view and treat one another both as valued trading partners and security threats. Neoclassical realism, according to Sterling-Folker, can resolve this seeming paradox, in part because it builds upon a core realist assumption about the immutability of tribalism and centrality of conflict groups. Group (or national) identity differentiation plays an enduring role in the domestic politics and foreign policies of nation-states. That is, just as states compete with one another over the allocation of scarce resources at the international level, within each state different groups compete with one another over the allocation of resources to group members and who has the ability and legitimacy to make these decisions for the state. Since international (or interstate) competition has ramifications for intra-national (or intra-state) competition, and vice versa, one cannot be isolated from the other.

To illustrate the utility of this framework, Sterling-Folker examines relations between the United States, China, and Taiwan. While trade and direct investment between China and Taiwan has dramatically increased since the late 1980s, security tensions between the two have remained high, peaking during the 1995 Taiwan Straits crisis and again during the 2000 and 2004 Taiwanese presidential elections. Similarly, although economic linkages between the United States and
China have increased, each continues to define the other as its principal adversary in the Asia-Pacific region. Sterling-Folker argues that an interactive combination of national subgroups in Taiwan, China, and the United States each drove their respective countries toward more confrontational foreign and security policies, despite increasing economic ties and clear power asymmetries. In the United States, competition between the free trade and national security wings of the Republican and Democratic parties led the Clinton and the George W. Bush administrations to increase military aid to Taiwan and to grant entry visas to Taiwanese president Lee Teng-hui and his successor Chen Shui-bian, despite Beijing’s protests. In Taiwan, questions of national identity and the island’s ultimate political status became intertwined in the electoral competition between the Kuomintang (KMT) and the Democratic People’s Party (DPP). Consequently, Lee and later Chen pursued policies to assert Taiwanese nationalism and political equality on the mainland, even at the risk of military confrontation with China. Finally, although the mainland’s economic boom is largely due to increased trade with Taiwan and the United States, the Chinese Communist Party has become increasingly dependent upon Chinese nationalism to justify its continued monopoly on political power. Consequently, any perceived move by Taiwan to assert its independence from the mainland prompts a forceful diplomatic (and sometimes military) response from the PRC, despite the risk of confrontation with the United States.

Successive presidents of the United States have engaged in major military interventions abroad, but existing theoretical explanations of such intervention often emphasize either third image (international) or second image (domestic) factors. In chapter 5, Colin Dueck presents a neoclassical realist theory to show exactly how, why, and to what extent domestic politics matters in shaping such interventions. According to this theory, when facing the possibility of major military intervention, presidents usually begin by consulting what they perceive to be the national interests. Subsequently, however, they consider how best to pursue those conceptions of the national interest in the light of domestic political incentives and constraints. These

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85 The classic discussion of the three images of international politics is in Kenneth N. Waltz, *Man, the State, and War* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1959).
constraints frequently lead presidents to implement the precise conduct, framing, and timing of US intervention in a manner that may appear suboptimal or dysfunctional from a neorealist perspective. In this sense, domestic politics “matters,” not as a primary cause of intervention, but rather as a powerful influence on its exact form. Dueck lays out the theoretical rationale for this approach, and illustrates its plausibility in case studies of the Truman administration’s decision to intervene in the Korean War in June 1950 and the Johnson administration’s decision to escalate US involvement in the Vietnam War in 1964 and 1965. He concludes with observations and implications regarding the current war in Iraq.

When are systemic forces more likely to override domestic politics in shaping states’ external behavior? Alternatively, when are domestic political institutions and the preferences of societal actors more likely to inhibit leaders’ responses to the external environment? In chapter 6, Norrin M. Ripsman seeks to delimit the scope of neoclassical realism and the relative causal importance of domestic-level and systemic variables within it. He hypothesizes that, in general, the more influential domestic actors will be those with sufficient power to remove national executives from office (whether through the ballot box, legislative no-confidence votes, or coups d’etat), those that can act as “veto players” to obstruct the government’s programmatic goals, or those that can shape the definition of the national interests. These actors are more likely to have a significant impact on foreign and national policies when the international threat level is low, when leaders have a weak hold on power, and when the national security executive lacks structural autonomy. In general, however, neoclassical realism suggests domestic actors are far more likely to influence the timing and style of a state’s national security policies, rather than the basic definition of the national interest, which is usually determined from without, unless the state inhabits a security-abundant environment. Ripsman’s chapter illustrates the plausibility of these hypotheses with examples drawn from Great Britain, France, the United States, the Soviet Union, Turkey, Israel, and Egypt over the past century.

Threat assessment and strategic adjustment are inherently difficult processes, even in those rare situations where international threats and opportunities are unambiguous and elite consensus exists on the appropriate foreign and military strategies to address them. Nonetheless, states still face the considerable task of extracting the material
and human resources of their societies and directing them into measurable economic and military power in the pursuit of national security objectives. Neoclassical realism identifies states’ extractive and mobilization capacity as a crucial intervening variable between systemic imperatives and the actual foreign and defense policies states pursue. However, extractive and mobilization capacity are not simply a function either of a state’s bureaucracy or of the composition of a regime’s power base. In addition to institutions, ideational factors such as ideology and nationalism can play an instrumental role in helping the leadership extract, mobilize, and direct societal resources and cultivate support among its power base. Chapters 7, 8, and 9 examine the ways in which institutions, nationalism, and political ideology interact to constrain or facilitate states’ ability to exact and mobilize resources for national security, and consequently the types of national security policies states will likely pursue.

Under what circumstances will states emulate the successful military institutions, governing practices, and technologies of more powerful states? When confronted with similarly threatening international environments, why do some states emulate, while others fail to do so? Under what circumstances will states create entirely new military institutions, practices, and technologies in an effort to offset the perceived advantages of rival states? Neorealist balance of power theory holds that the international system compels states to adopt similar adaptive strategies – namely, balancing and emulation – or risk possible elimination as independent entities. Yet, in practice, states do not always emulate the successful practices of the system’s leading states in a timely and uniform fashion. Moreover, states can also respond to external threats by persisting in existing security strategies or by developing entirely new military practices, doctrines, technologies, and institutions. In chapter 7, Jeffrey W. Taliaferro outlines a “resource extraction” model of the state in neoclassical realism. External vulnerability provides incentives for states to emulate others’ practices or to counter such practices through innovation. However, neoclassical realism suggests that state power, defined as the relative ability of the state to extract and mobilize resources from domestic society, shapes the types of internal balancing strategies countries are likely to pursue. State power, in turn, is a function of the politico-military institutions of the state, as well as nationalism and ideology.
Taliaferro argues that states with higher extraction and mobilization capacity, but that also face high external vulnerability, are more likely to emulate the military, governing, and technological practices of the system’s most successful states, at least in the short run. On the other hand, states with low extraction and mobilization capacity but confronting high external vulnerability will have greater difficulty in pursuing emulation, at least in the short run. States with higher extraction and mobilization capacity but low external vulnerability have the luxury of engaging in innovation to enhance their long-term security and power. Conversely, states lacking high mobilization and extraction capacity, but facing low external vulnerability, are less likely to pursue emulation or innovation. In the long term, states can try to increase their extractive and mobilization capabilities, and consequently their ability to pursue emulation or innovation, by purveying nationalism or statist ideologies. Lack of nationalist sentiment or an anti-statist ideology, however, can limit the state’s ability to emulate or innovate. In these circumstances, vulnerable states will likely persist in existing strategies. To illustrate the plausibility of these hypotheses, Taliaferro uses historical examples from the experiences of seven rising or declining great powers over the past 300 years: China, France, Britain, Japan, Prussia (later Germany), Russia (Soviet Union), and the United States.

In chapter 8, Randall Schweller addresses the problem of resource mobilization and extraction from a somewhat different perspective. He asks: why have instances of territorial conquest and bids for regional hegemony by modern great powers been relatively rare? After all, offensive realism contends that the international system compels all great powers to maximize relative power as the best route to security. According to Mearsheimer, across history, great powers strive for regional hegemony and will look for opportunities to expand their territorial control and weaken potential rivals.86 Yet, in the twentieth century, only Germany, Japan, and to a lesser extent Italy, embarked upon calculated drives for territorial aggrandizement.

Schweller presents a neoclassical realist theory to explain the phenomena of under-aggression and under-expansion in the age of mass politics – circumstances under which great powers forgo opportunities for regional expansion despite favorable power balances, and systemic

and battlefield opportunities. Contrary to offensive realism and balance of power and balance of threat theories, he contends the barriers to hegemony lie not in the deterrence effect of opposing great power coalitions, but rather the difficulties revisionist great powers (or their leaders) have in mobilizing the domestic resources necessary to make a credible hegemonic bid. Furthermore, leaders have never been able to use appeals to balance of power logic as a means to rally and maintain public support for expensive and risky foreign ventures. Instead, Schweller argues, the keys to extracting and mobilizing the resources necessary for a hegemonic bid lie in the ability of national leaders to mobilize support for expansionist foreign ventures in an age of mass politics. More than any other ideology, fascism provided the necessary political and ideological content missing from realism to implement the principle that states should expand when they can. Fascist ideology in its various manifestations gave the German, Italian, and Japanese states in the 1930s a vehicle through which to mobilize popular support and material resources for total war. Schweller certainly does not endorse fascism; he is quick to point out the social Darwinist and racist elements of Nazism, and Italian and Japanese fascism provided the ideological justification for genocide (in the case of Nazism), war crimes, and the pursuit of reckless grand strategies. Yet he also notes several surprising similarities between the conception of state and society found in realist thought and in fascism.

Benjamin O. Fordham addresses the limits of neoclassical realism in chapter 9. He argues that theories of foreign policy, such as neoclassical realism, err in treating international pressures and domestic political constraints additively – that is, by treating them as separate, but complimentary, influences on a state’s policy choices. One cannot know the policy implications of systemic forces without knowing the preexisting interests and motives of domestic political actors, and one cannot know the policy preferences of domestic political actors without knowing about international conditions. Fordham proposes an additive model of foreign policy that arguably challenges neoclassical realism by positing a symbiotic relationship between domestic and international factors. He presents a case study of US defense spending during the Cold War to illustrate the plausibility of competing neoclassical realist and integrative hypotheses on foreign policy.

Fordham observes that Democratic and Republican parties essentially switched positions over the course of the Cold War, largely in
response to the perceived successes and failures of military policies abroad. House and Senate Democrats moved from being strongly supportive of increased military spending in the 1940s and 1950s to being its major opponents in the 1960s and 1970s. Congressional Republicans followed the opposite course, moving from a relatively skeptical view of higher defense spending in the 1940s and 1950s to favoring large increases in the defense budget in the 1970s and 1980s. This shift also manifested itself in the defense priorities of successive Republican and Democratic administrations. The Truman and Kennedy administrations championed large increases in the defense budget, while the Eisenhower, Nixon, and Ford administrations favored reductions in defense spending. By the mid-1970s, the positions reversed, with the Carter administration only agreeing to defense increases after the 1979 Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, and the Reagan administration presiding over the largest increase in the defense budget (in relative and absolute terms) since the Korean War.

In chapter 10, Ripsman, Taliaferro, and Lobell undertake three tasks. First, they reflect upon the scope of neoclassical realism as set forth in the previous chapters. They conclude that neoclassical realism is a far more coherent and broadly applicable research program than previously realized. Contrary to the assertions of some critics and even some neoclassical realists (such as Schweller), the empirical scope of neoclassical realism is not restricted to cases of arguably dysfunctional or self-defeating foreign policy behavior. Instead, neoclassical realism is most useful in explaining foreign policy behavior where the international system provides unambiguous information about threats and opportunities, but no clear guidance about how states ought to respond. Second, Ripsman, Taliaferro, and Lobell compare the relative performance of neoclassical realism and other leading theories of international relations and foreign policy, including other variants of realism, systemic and domestic-level liberal (or pluralist) theories, other Innenpolitik approaches, and rationalist models of bargaining and foreign policy. Finally, they lay out some potential avenues for future research.