

the well-known truth that what the United States does abroad will be determined as much by factors at home—the influence of interest groups, the role of institutions, and the power of ideas—as it will be by external opportunities and threats. It is perhaps too much of a cliché to say that all politics is domestic and that all foreign policy merely a reflection of what happens domestically. But as many of the chapters here reveal, there is no Chinese wall dividing the international from the internal, the global from the specifically local. This is why the book has commissioned a number of original chapters to think about this large problem, one of which (by Michael Foley) deals squarely with the relationship between Congress and the President, a second (by Piers Robinson) assesses the impact of the media and public opinion on the making of US foreign policy, and yet a third (by Peter Trubowitz) advances the original claim that if we are to make sense of US foreign policy we should deconstruct the notion of the United States itself and assess its foreign policy as the by-product of shifting regional coalitions and not some eternal notion of what may or may not constitute the American national interest. Furthermore, as the Gowan and Stokes chapter reminds us, foreign policy is not merely a reflection of domestic politics but economic capabilities too, perhaps more so than ever in an increasingly globalized world economic system where power is not only measured in terms of how many weapons one might possess, but also by one's ability to innovate and compete. Foreign policy can never be reduced to economics as some seem to believe. But any study on US foreign policy that ignored material power and economic pressures—which many more conventional texts appear to do—would be seriously incomplete in our view, especially in the wake of the global financial crisis of 2008. This does not mean however, that US power in its totality can be reduced to either military or economic power, and as the Nye chapter on soft power and the Obama administration shows, the symbolism of America is as important as its capacity to project 'hard' power across borders.

This brings us then to the issue of perspective or what is sometimes referred to as 'balance'. As we suggested at the outset, US foreign policy over the past few years has been the subject of intense political debate. Everybody it seems has an opinion on the United States, even, possibly especially, those who have never studied the subject in any great depth. This is not something that can be said about the many expert authors gathered together here.

Many, it would be fair to say—Paul Rogers being amongst them—are critical of the way the Bush administration defined the war on terror. Some (including Brian Schmidt in his chapter on theory) are also deeply concerned about the impact that Bush's apparent abandonment of realist thinking in favour of dreams of empire will have on the United States and the world over the longer term. None of the authors, however, seeks either to denounce the United States or cast it in the role of the world's biggest 'rogue state', in spite of its fairly abysmal record in one of the key challenges confronting the international system—global environment (a topic dealt with by Eckersley in her chapter). Still, having strongly held views, as all the authors here most obviously do, does not preclude them from seeking to explore in depth how US foreign policy is made, why policy makers arrive at the decisions they do, and with what consequences. Indeed, it could be argued that only by approaching the subject with sufficient critical distance is it possible to engage in any meaningful—and engaging—way with their respective topics.

Finally, the authors here all accept the self-evident fact that whatever one might think of the United States past, present, or future, it is simply too important to be ignored. As the different perspectives provided by Wolforth, Brooks, and Layne show, there is a huge debate that continues to rumble on concerning the future of American power and whether or not the US can remain hegemonic for ever. There is no easy answer to this very big question. Still, whether one is a radical critic, a conservative defender, liberal supporter, or of the opinion that American hegemony is a threat to world peace, it is absolutely vital to find out how the United States, with its vast national security apparatus, remarkably dynamic economy, complex array of alliances, and highly exportable popular culture will shape what some are now calling a 'post-American' world. During the seemingly predictable years before 1989, and the optimistic decade that followed, the task of understanding the United States was difficult enough. In the altogether different world we live in now with its political uncertainties and economic insecurities, it has become even more so, thus the need for a volume on such an important subject in our view. Ideas we are often told matter a great deal. This is true. But material facts like states matter as well—none more so than the United States, whose policies in the future (as much as its decisions in the past) are bound to impact on us all, for good or ill, well into the twenty-first century.

1 Theories of US foreign policy

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Chapter contents

Introduction	5
Theories of American foreign policy	8
Systemic theories	8
Internal, domestic theories	11
Toward a synthesis: neoclassical realism	13
Constructivism	13
The origins of the Cold War	14
Grand strategy	16
Conclusion	19

Introduction

This chapter examines some of the competing theories that have been put forth to explain American foreign policy. In the quest to explain the foreign policy of the United States, a number of competing theories have been developed by International Relations scholars. Some theories focus on the role of the international system in shaping American foreign policy while others argue that various domestic factors inside the United States are the driving force. Still others attempt to combine both external and internal sources. The chapter begins with an introduction to some of the obstacles to constructing a theory of foreign policy. The following section provides a general survey of some of the

competing theories of American foreign policy. The next section turns to the theoretical debate over the origins of the Cold War. The chapter concludes by examining the debate over the most appropriate grand strategy that the United States should follow in the post-Cold War era.

The task of explaining American foreign policy is infinitely complex. Part of the difficulty arises from the fact that there are so many diverse factors at play that it is often difficult to determine the underlying reason for a given policy. President Obama's decision to withdraw from Iraq and commit additional troops and resources to the war in Afghanistan clearly reveals a complex array

of factors that led to this foreign policy. The problem confronting the foreign policy analyst is what set of factors to focus on in order to explain the external behaviour of the United States. Should one focus on the personality of President Obama and the members of his inner circle of advisors? Should one focus on the alleged threat that the Taliban and al-Qaeda pose to the United States and regional stability in Central Asia? Or should one look inside the United States to see how the values of liberty and freedom shape the goals that America attempts to achieve in its external relations with other states in general, and Afghanistan in particular?

As a result of this complexity, most of those who attempt to explain American foreign policy have recognized the centrality of theory. Theory is both necessary and unavoidable when it comes to understanding international politics. Unavoidable because both policy-makers and scholars approach the world from a specific paradigm or world-view that in turn generates specific theories. Theories are necessary in that they tell us what to focus on and what to ignore. We need theories to help us organize all the information that can overwhelm us on a daily basis. While students of foreign policy recognize the centrality of theory, the goal of achieving an over-arching theory to explain the foreign policy behaviour of the United States has proven to be illusive. Instead we have a number of competing theories that focus on different levels of analysis to account for the behaviour of the United States.

An insightful attempt to construct a theoretical framework for identifying the main sources of a state's foreign policy was developed by the renowned political scientist James N. Rosenau (1971). Rosenau identified five potential sources that influence a state's foreign policy: the external environment of the international system, the domestic/societal environment of a nation state, the governmental structure that specifies the policy-making process, the bureaucratic roles occupied by individual policy makers, and finally the personal

characteristics and idiosyncrasies of individual foreign policy officials and government elites (see Figure 1.1). Each of these five sources can be considered independent variables that either individually or collectively help to explain the foreign policy behaviour of the United States, the dependent variable.

The external or systemic sources of foreign policy draw our attention to the point that the formulation of American foreign policy does not take place in a vacuum, rather the United States, like any other country, must take account of, and respond to, events taking place in the realm of international politics. The terrorist attacks against the United States on 11 September 2001 dramatically illustrate how an event perpetuated by an external actor, in this case by the al-Qaeda terrorist network spearheaded by Osama bin Laden, elicits a foreign policy response. The terrorist attacks against the World Trade Center in New York City and the Pentagon in Washington, DC did not determine the specific course of action that the United States decided to take—the global war on terrorism—but the event itself did necessitate a response. On any given day numerous developments take place around the world that American foreign policy officials must respond to even if they were previously preoccupied with a different region or issue area. Moreover, as we will see, the systemic source also highlights the underlying distribution of power in the international system and the effect this has on American foreign policy.

However, many analysts insist that the domestic sources of foreign policy are more important than external sources. The societal source accentuates the non-governmental aspects of a country's society that influences its foreign policy behaviour. The national character and value orientation of a country cannot be discounted as many believe that foreign policy should seek to promote the core values and ideology of the domestic political system. Many have observed that this view has been especially strong in the case of the

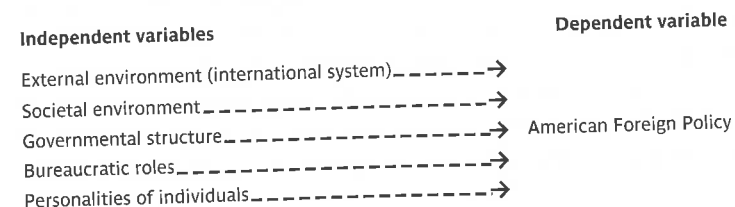


Fig. 1.1 The multiple sources of American foreign policy.

United States as reflected by America's liberal, democratic character and by its desire to promote this political ideology around the world (Smith 1994). Indeed one alleged contributing factor to the decision to wage war against Iraq was the desire by the United States to spread liberty and democracy to the Middle East.

In addition to the societal sources of American foreign policy, there is also the particular governmental structure of the United States that plays a key role in the formulation and implementation of foreign policy. The Constitution of the United States establishes an elaborate, and some would argue cumbersome, framework for the formulation of foreign policy. The constitutional separation and division of power between the executive and legislative branches has led to what some refer to as 'an invitation to struggle' over the shaping of American foreign policy. Compared to other political systems, the United States political system allows for a vast array of actors to have a role in the formulation of American foreign policy. This includes the President, cabinet officials such as the Secretary of Defense, Secretary of State, and the Secretary of Commerce, advisors to the President such as the National Security Advisor and the Director of the Central Intelligence Agency, members of the United States Congress, lobbyists, both foreign and domestic, and interest groups. This is only a partial list and one can identify a host of additional actors that have a role in the formulation of American foreign policy.

The actors who are involved in the formulation of foreign policy draw our attention to the role played by large bureaucratic agencies such as the Department of Defense, the State Department, and the Central Intelligence Agency. Those who study the behaviour of bureaucratic organizations often make the point that the individuals who work for a particular agency are socialized to reflect their own agency's interests and needs. In a sense, the characteristics of the bureaucracy are more important than the characteristics and personality of the individuals. Thus even when an individual gains access to the foreign policy-making process, role theory suggests that a person's influence is circumscribed by the policy-making roles they occupy. The basic insight of the role source is captured by the adage, 'where you stand depends on where you sit'. Thus the position that a person takes on an issue of foreign policy depends on the bureaucracy that they represent.

The individual source category argues quite simply that individuals—their personality, past experiences, upbringing, personal convictions—matter greatly. Since American foreign policy behaviour follows from decisions made by elites, and often by decisions made by the President of the United States, the individual source prompts us to investigate the personal characteristics of the decision maker. The thesis is that the idiosyncratic characteristics of leaders influence American foreign policy behaviour. For many, it seems impossible to explain the direction of American foreign policy without highlighting the personality traits and beliefs of the current President.

Rosenau's framework is a simplifying device that helps us to identify the multiple sources of American foreign policy. In this sense it fulfils one of the core functions of theory: it helps us to identify what to focus on in our attempt to explain foreign policy. But Rosenau did not provide a full-blown theory of foreign policy, rather he offered what he termed a 'pre-theory' of foreign policy. He did not specify how each of his five sources directly influences foreign policy behaviour nor did he assess the relative influence of each of the sources. Ideally we want to know which of the sources is most important, because if we needed all five we would not have a parsimonious theory, that is, one that uses the fewest variables but nevertheless offers the most explanatory power. We might have a good description of a state's foreign policy, but we would not really have an explanatory theory. Those who have attempted to construct a theory of foreign policy have disagreed about the most important source of a state's external behaviour. We now turn to some of the theories that have been put forth to explain American foreign policy.

KEY POINTS

- The task of explaining foreign policy is infinitely complex.
- In order to explain foreign policy we need theory.
- James Rosenau identified five sources that influence a state's foreign policy: the international system, the societal environment of a nation-state, the governmental setting, the bureaucratic roles played by policy makers, and the individual characteristics of foreign policy elites.

“ KEY QUOTES 1.1: Competing theories of international relations

Realism has no place for an expectation that democracies will not fight each other. To the degree we establish that peace between democracies is a fact, and are able to explain it theoretically, we build an alternative view of the world with great import for expectations and for policy.

(Russett 1993: 24)

The sad fact is that international politics has always been a ruthless and dangerous business, and it is likely to remain

that way. Although the intensity of their competition waxes and wanes, great powers fear each other and always compete with each other for power.

(Mearsheimer 2001: 2)

Self-help and power politics are institutions, not essential features of anarchy. Anarchy is what states make of it.

(Wendt 1992: 396)

Theories of American foreign policy

The previous section argued that theory is essential to the task of explaining American foreign policy. Yet even if we agree that theory is necessary, this does not establish that it is possible to construct a theory of foreign policy. Kenneth Waltz (1996), one of the leading American scholars of international politics, argues that given the complexity of the foreign policy-making process, and the fact that foreign policy is shaped by both domestic and international factors, it is impossible to construct a theory of foreign policy. According to Waltz, the best that we can hope to achieve is a theory of international politics; that is, one that 'describes the range of likely outcomes of the actions and interactions of states within a given system and shows how the range of expectations varies as systems change' (Waltz 1979: 71).

Many scholars, however, want more than this—they also want to be able to explain the specific foreign policies of particular countries. These scholars have ventured to create a theory of foreign policy, one that seeks 'to explain what states try to achieve in the external realm and when they try to achieve it' (Rose 1998: 145). Compared to a theory of international politics, which is interested in explaining general patterns of behaviour such as the causes of war, a theory of foreign policy seeks to explain why a particular state pursued a specific policy at a certain point in time. A theory of foreign policy is dedicated to answering the question of what causes a state to adopt a specific type of foreign policy.

Systemic theories

As a first cut, we can divide theories of American foreign policy into those that accentuate external or systemic factors versus those that emphasize internal or domestic factors. Here we have a profound theoretical debate over whether American foreign policy should be understood as shaped primarily by the external environment or primarily by the internal environment of the United States. Those that emphasize systemic factors argue that the most important influence on American foreign policy is the international

system and specifically the relative amount of power that the United States possesses. According to this view, which Fared Zakaria (1992) associates with the concept of the *Primat der Aussenpolitik* (the primacy of foreign policy), a state's foreign policy is a consequence of pressures emanating from the distribution of power in the international system. In other words, the international distribution of power is an autonomous force that has a direct influence on the behaviour of states.

Defensive realism and offensive realism are two theories which argue that systemic pressures play a decisive role in shaping the foreign policy behaviour of the United States. Both theories share a number of similar assumptions about the international system that they believe greatly impacts the foreign policy behaviour of all states. First, defensive and offensive realists agree that the international system is anarchic, meaning that there is no higher, centralized authority above states. This follows logically from the second assumption that the most important actors in the international system are sovereign states. The attribute of sovereignty means that each state regards itself as the highest authority and can order its domestic affairs according to how it sees fit. A third assumption is that states act on the basis of self-help, meaning that they each must take the appropriate steps to ensure their own survival. Fourth, because both defensive and offensive realists believe that states must take the necessary steps to ensure their own survival, they argue that power is the main currency of international politics. Systemic theories argue that the key to understanding a state's foreign policy rests with its relative amount of power. The amount of power that the United States possesses at a particular time in history compared to other states in the international system largely determines the character of its foreign policy. For realists it is a truism that capabilities (power) largely determine interests. Thus after the Second World War, as the power of the United States increased relative to that of other states, so did its interests. Many argue that this trend of an expansion of American power and interests continues to this day.

Defensive realism

What effect does the international distribution of power have on the behaviour of a state's foreign policy? According to defensive realists, states are fundamentally security maximizers. The international system, according to defensive realists, only provides incentives for moderate behaviour, and expansionistic policies to achieve security are generally not required and often prove to be counterproductive. This means that in order to ensure its own survival in the self-help, anarchic international system, a prudent foreign policy for the United States is only to seek an appropriate amount

of power. Defensive realists argue that expansionist and aggressive behaviour most often results in other states forming a counterbalancing coalition. As a result of the belief that states are strongly inclined to balance against aggressive powers, they are, in Joseph Grieco's terms, 'defensive positionalists' and 'will only seek the minimum level of power that is needed to attain and to maintain their security and survival' (Greico 1997: 167). According to many defensive realists, a direct consequence of the expansionistic foreign policy that the United States pursued in the aftermath of 9/11 is that we are beginning to see an active attempt by other states to balance American power. The recent character and extent of balancing behaviour against the United States is further discussed in Controversies 1.1. In addition to balancing inhibiting an excessive power-seeking foreign policy, defensive realists introduce the concept of the offence–defence balance and argue that as a result of variables such as geography, technology, and, most importantly, military doctrine, conquest rarely pays and that security can be readily achieved under anarchy.¹

While defensive realism predicts that the foreign policy behaviour of the United States should be one of restraint, especially since America, partly owing to geography, enjoys a high degree of security, one could argue that the history of American foreign policy belies this prediction. Writers such as Noam Chomsky (2004) have argued that the United States has pursued a policy of hegemony and has frequently sought opportunities to increase its power relative to other states. As a fall-back position, defensive realists posit that a variety of domestic pathologies can prevent a state from conforming to the imperatives of the international system.² Thus when the United States or any other state over-expands or pursues empire, defensive realists argue that the cause of this behaviour is rooted at the domestic level.

Offensive realism

Offensive realists like John Mearsheimer reach a different conclusion about the effect that the distribution of power has on the foreign policy behaviour of states. Rather than security maximizers, offensive realists argue that states are power maximizers, meaning that they are continually searching for opportunities to gain more power relative to other states. Unlike defensive realists,



CONTROVERSIES 1.1: Balancing against the United States?

For realists, the balance of power is an enduring feature of international politics. Although various meanings have been attributed to the concept of the balance of power, the most common definition holds that if the survival of a state or a number of weak states is threatened by a hegemonic state or coalition of stronger states, they each seek to increase their own military capabilities (internal balancing) or join forces, establish a formal alliance (external balancing), and seek to preserve their own independence by checking the power of the opposing side. The mechanism of the balance of power seeks to ensure an equilibrium of power in which case no one state or coalition of states is in a position to dominate all the others.

Today, the controversy is whether the United States is so powerful that the balance of power is no longer an operating principle of international politics. Some argue that the United States enjoys such an overwhelming abundance of power relative to other states that counterbalancing is prohibitively costly (Brooks and Wohlforth 2008). In addition to the preponderance of power argument is the liberal claim that the United States is a benign hegemon and that as a result of a number of institutional constraints, other states do not find

American power to be threatening (Ikenberry 2002). According to these two perspectives, states are not actively seeking to counterbalance the United States.

Other scholars argue that as a result of both unprecedented American power and its recent aggressive unilateral foreign policy behaviour, states are beginning to counterbalance against the United States. The best evidence of this might not be traditional 'hard balancing' in the form of countervailing alliances, but rather in the form of 'soft balancing', which Robert Pape defines as 'nonmilitary tools to delay, frustrate, and undermine aggressive unilateral US military policies' (2005: 10). Some interpret the refusal of the Permanent Members of the Security Council to pass a resolution authorizing the use of force against Iraq as an example of soft balancing. This action did not prevent the United States from invading Iraq, but it did complicate the mission and certainly increased the costs of the war. And while states like China, France, and Russia have so far only adopted institutional and diplomatic strategies to constrain US power, proponents of soft balancing do not rule out the possibility of states turning to hard balancing; especially if the United States unilaterally takes militarily action against additional states.

offensive realists do not believe that security in the international system is plentiful. They also do not believe that balancing behaviour is as frequent and efficient as defensive realists contend. According to Mearsheimer, the anarchical international system and the uncertainty that exists about the current and future intentions of other states such as China compels the United States to maximize its relative power position. For Mearsheimer, the logic of offensive realism leads states to 'understand that the best way to ensure their survival is to be the most powerful state in the system' (2001: 33). Global hegemony, according to offensive realism, is the highest goal of every state's foreign policy. Unfortunately, however, Mearsheimer argues that it is impossible because of the 'stopping power of water', which makes it impracticable for any state to project its power over vast distances and to conquer and hold distant territory. While global hegemony is impossible, regional hegemony is not and Mearsheimer argues that the United States is the only state in history to achieve this esteemed position. In light of the nineteenth-century history of American

foreign policy as it expanded across North America and acquired a number of offshore territories in wake of the Spanish-American War (1898), Mearsheimer concludes that the United States is 'well-suited to be the poster child for offensive realism' (Mearsheimer 2001: 238). Once America achieved regional hegemony in the western hemisphere, offensive realism predicts that its main foreign policy goal was to prevent the emergence of a hegemon in other regions of the world. According to this theory, the United States has actively sought to prevent the emergence of a hegemon in either Europe or Asia. Offensive realists favour an 'offshore balancing' grand strategy and, according to Mearsheimer, this is largely the strategy that the United States has followed since the end of the Second World War. While many realists endorse an offshore balancing grand strategy, it is certainly debatable whether this is the strategy that the United States has followed. For realists and non-realists alike, it is not self-evident that water has prevented the United States from achieving the position of global hegemon (Layne 2006).

Internal, domestic theories

Theories that accentuate domestic factors are sceptical of the ability of systemic theories to explain American foreign policy. These theories follow the tradition of *Innenpolitik* and emphasize the influence of internal, domestic factors on foreign policy. Rather than an outside-in explanation, these theories reverse the chain of causation to an inside-out explanation. Pressures from within a state determine the character of its foreign policy. Elections, public opinion polls, the condition of the domestic economy, and the degree of national unity are all factors that foreign policy officials, and especially the President, must take into account when pursuing foreign policy objectives. Rather than the international system determining the foreign policy of the United States, the political and economic structure of the American polity is argued to be of fundamental importance to explaining America's external behaviour.

Liberalism

Liberalism is one of the most prominent domestic theories of American foreign policy. This should not be surprising because the United States is a quintessential liberal state (Hartz 1991). The logic of liberalism dictates that America's foreign policy should replicate the liberal democratic character of the American polity. According to liberalism, one of the core objectives of American foreign policy is to promote the expansion of individual liberty across the globe. This is argued to be beneficial both to the United States, in that its own security is enhanced by the presence of a large number of like-minded liberal states, and to the rest of the world as liberalism is a political ideology that champions the rights and liberties of all individuals. While liberals agree that American foreign policy should be a manifestation of its domestic political values, there is disagreement on the best way to promote liberal democracy.

For many, liberalism is most closely associated with the foreign policy of President Woodrow Wilson (1913–21). Indeed the association is so close that liberalism and Wilsonianism are almost interchangeable

terms. On the eve of the United States' belated decision to enter the First World War, Wilson articulated a new vision of the world, and America's role in it, that was informed by ideas that constitute the essence of a liberal theory of foreign policy. Most fundamentally, Wilson rejected the so-called timeless principles of realism by arguing that common interests needed to replace the focus on national interests and called for a collective security system to replace the flawed balance of power system. More specifically, Wilson advocated democratic forms of government, free-trade, the creation of international institutions to help maintain the peace, and the self-determination of peoples. In order to realize these ideals, liberals from Wilson to the present have argued that the United States must take the lead in actively promoting them. This is frequently referred to as liberal internationalism whereby the United States, as a liberal democracy, must take on the role of world leadership and actively construct a peaceful liberal order through multilateral cooperation and effective international organizations.

Today, democracy promotion is one of the main elements of a liberal theory of American foreign policy. Not only does democracy promote the advancement of liberty, but it has been proven that democratic states do not fight other democratic states. Liberals argue that it is in the national interest of the United States to promote the spread of democracy. The notion that democratic states do not fight wars with other democracies is what proponents term the democratic peace.³ If one accepts the empirical finding that democracies do not fight one another, then the issue becomes the best way to encourage democratization so as to enlarge the club of democratic states. Different presidential administrations have been torn between, on the one hand, indirectly promoting democracy through leading by example, foreign aid to support pro-democracy movements, diplomatic encouragement, and, on the other hand, directly promoting democracy by using military force to remove dictators and bring about regime change. Democracy promotion was one of the rationales put

forth by the George W. Bush administration to justify the 2003 invasion of Iraq. A democratic Iraq, it was argued, would remove the alleged threat Saddam Hussein posed to the United States and help jumpstart democratic transitions throughout the Middle East. This is one of the reasons why many liberals supported the Iraq War while realists, who are not only suspicious of the so-called democratic peace but also critical of crusading foreign policies to remake the world in America's image, were generally opposed to the war.

The promotion of free trade and the belief that international institutions help to facilitate international cooperation are two of the other main pillars of a liberal theory of American foreign policy. For a liberal thinker such as G. John Ikenberry, each one of the elements—democracy, free-trade, and international institutions—are mutually reinforcing and simultaneously help to advance American interests and contribute to a pacific world order (Ikenberry 2000). Thus liberals are strong supporters of free-trade agreements such as NAFTA, as well as membership of international institutions such as the United Nations. We will return to the three cornerstones of liberal internationalism in the section on American grand strategy.

Marxism

Marxist theories are another example of an inside-out explanation in that they emphasize the economic determinants of American foreign policy. Rather than accentuating the structure of the domestic political system, Marxism underlines the capitalist economy of the United States and the pressures that it exerts on an expansionistic and imperialistic foreign policy. By one account, the foreign policy of the United States simply serves the interests of the capitalist class and the large corporations that they own. Proponents of this theory argue that most of the interventions, covert or otherwise, that the United States has perpetrated in Latin America, the Caribbean, the Middle East, and elsewhere all stem from the needs of the American economy for markets and cheap sources of raw materials, for example oil

(Kolko 1969). Marxist theories interpret the history of American foreign policy as one of imperialism and empire building, and locate the source of this behaviour in the capitalist economic system of the United States (Chomsky 2004). The American economy, like that of other capitalist economies, is prone to crises—unemployment, over-production, downturns—and Marxists argue that elites attempt to solve them by searching for new sources of capital, raw materials, and markets abroad. In order to satisfy the interests of the capitalist class, Marxists argue that American foreign policy promotes their interests by providing a stable international environment for the expansion of capitalism. Marxists argue that the military power of the United States and the wars that it has fought in places like Vietnam, Bosnia, and Iraq are meant to provide the international stability that capitalists require in order to invest in foreign lands and accrue greater rates of profit.

The Open Door school of American diplomacy, which was largely inspired by a non-dogmatic Marxism, holds that the mainspring of United States foreign policy has been the search for markets and the desire to integrate the entire world into an open, free-trade economic system. The most famous proponent of the Open Door interpretation of American foreign policy was William Appleman Williams in his classic book *The Tragedy of American Diplomacy* (1972). According to Williams, the United States has attempted to solve its domestic economic problems by expanding abroad in search of overseas markets, cheap raw materials, and investment opportunities. Expansion was deemed to be the answer to America's woes and Williams argues that the foreign policy of the United States is determined by domestic factors. For policy makers who embraced the Open Door outlook on the world, America's prosperity at home depended on access to markets abroad. For Williams, the result of the United States pursuit of an Open Door foreign policy was the creation of an American empire. These views became the bedrock of the revisionist interpretation of the Cold War, which held that America's Open Door economic interests, and not Soviet expansionism, were largely responsible for US intervention in the third world.

Toward a synthesis: neoclassical realism

We would be amiss if we did not mention attempts to combine systemic and domestic factors into a comprehensive theory of foreign policy. A recent example of this undertaking is the theory of neoclassical realism. According to neoclassical realism the only way to explain the foreign policy of the United States is to consider the manner in which systemic and domestic factors interact with one another. Systemic factors, especially the relative amount of power that a state has, are important for establishing the broad parameters of foreign policy; they help to establish what is and what is not possible. Yet the distribution of power alone cannot, according to neoclassical realism, explain the particular foreign policy behaviour of the

United States. Neoclassical realists argue that domestic factors are needed to explain how systemic factors are actually translated into specific foreign policy decisions. Stephen Walt explains that the causal logic of neoclassical realism 'places domestic politics as an intervening variable between the distribution of power and foreign policy behavior' (Walt 2002: 211). Two important intervening variables that neoclassical realism highlights are decision makers' perceptions of the distribution of power and domestic state structure. In other words, for neoclassical realists, both individual decision makers and domestic politics, including the governmental structure, matter in understanding the foreign policy of the United States.

Constructivism

Whereas the previous theories all tended to emphasize material factors to explain American foreign policy, constructivists accentuate the role of ideas and identity that they argue play a major role in foreign policy. Constructivists treat identities and interests as malleable social constructions and are interested in the social processes that lead foreign policy officials to regard America as an 'exceptional' state or a 'virtuous city on the hill'. National identity, according to constructivism, should be the starting point of foreign policy analysis. The identity of the United States is, in part, a function of both its domestic self-image and foreign policy. Constructivist scholars note that identity is never self-referential, but rather is always relational and emerges by differentiating oneself from others. Thus the identity of the United States during the Cold War as the defender of liberal democracy and freedom was, in part, derived by juxtaposing itself to the evil and totalitarian Soviet Union. Constructivists can point to the role of ideas in fostering these identities in documents such as NSC-68, which outlined the United States Cold War policy of containment and sharply differentiated the national identities of the United States and the Soviet Union.

One of the reasons why constructivist approaches to the study of American foreign policy consider identity

to be so important is because constructivists argue it is the basis of interests that greatly affect the formulation of foreign policy. Contrary to theories such as realism, which consider interests to be a function of material capabilities, constructivists argue that they are largely a function of ideas. The ideas that American foreign policy officials hold about the United States form the basis of the American national interest. From a constructivist point of view, one way to understand the United States global war on terror is in terms of the identity of America as the global guardian of liberty and freedom. And this interest of defending liberty and freedom in order to preserve the identity of America obviously has important implications for the conduct of foreign policy. Yet American foreign policy is always susceptible to change because identities and interests are malleable. According to constructivists, the interests of the United States are derived endogenously through the process of social interaction. This helps to explain why the United States behaves one way when interacting with other liberal democracies and another way when interacting with non-democracies. By emphasizing ideas, norms, and the social construction of identity, constructivists have a keen interest in explaining the sources of change in American foreign policy (Dueck 2006).

KEY POINTS

- ❑ Systemic theories such as defensive and offensive realism argue that the most important influence on America's foreign policy is the international system and the relative amount of power that the United States possesses.
- ❑ Defensive and offensive realism disagree about the manner in which the international system influences the conduct of American foreign policy.
- ❑ Theories that follow the tradition of *Innenpolitik* stress the influence of domestic factors on foreign policy.
- ❑ Liberalism and Marxism are two examples of theories that accentuate internal factors to explain American foreign policy.
- ❑ Neoclassical realism is a theory of American foreign policy that simultaneously seeks to combine systemic and domestic level factors.
- ❑ Constructivism emphasizes the role of ideas and identity in American foreign policy.

The origins of the Cold War

The theoretical controversy over whether American foreign policy should be understood as shaped primarily by the external or internal environment has impacted the debate on the origins of the Cold War. A number of different answers have been given to the question of who was responsible for the Cold War. This period of American foreign policy (1945–89) has been a subject of intense interest for political scientists and diplomatic historians. The conventional wisdom is that American foreign policy underwent a tremendous transformation between the time the United States entered the First World War in 1941 following the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor and when the United States and the allies emerged victorious over Germany and Japan. This is often described as a change from isolationism to globalism in which the United States used its preponderant power to assert itself on the world stage. Yet throughout the post-Second World War period American power was challenged by the Soviet Union, which resulted in a tense Cold War that was most dramatically illustrated by the nuclear weapons arms race between the two countries. A key question shaping the historiography of the Cold War is what led the United States and the Soviet Union to go from allies during the Second World War to bitter rivals locked in a global struggle for power from 1945 to 1989?

External explanations

From a purely systemic viewpoint, neither the United States nor the Soviet Union is to blame for the Cold War. The Second World War created a vacuum of power in Europe that was filled by the only two great powers that remained standing: the United States and the Soviet Union. According to this view, the ensuing rivalry and competition between the United States and the Soviet Union can be simply explained in terms of the bipolar distribution of power that existed after 1945. One problem with this account is that there is no agency; there are no villains in which to assess blame and responsibility for the origins of the conflict.

Another external, realist explanation of the Cold War holds that in addition to a bipolar distribution of power after 1945, one of the two poles, the Soviet Union, was an expansionist power that was bent on world domination. According to this view, United States foreign policy throughout the Cold War was a successful response to the threatening and expansionist behaviour of the Kremlin. Within diplomatic history, this is referred to as the orthodox account of the origins of the Cold War and, not surprisingly, is popular with many American historians. The orthodox explanation places the blame for the Cold War squarely on the shoulders of the Soviet

Union and its leader Joseph Stalin. The United States, in documents such as the famous NSC-68, interpreted Soviet intentions as inherently aggressive and a direct threat to American national security. Given this interpretation of Soviet intentions, the United States had no choice but to respond to this threat and actively check the power of the Soviet Union. This formed the basis of the American policy of containment that is often credited to George Kennan, who was a prominent diplomat stationed in Moscow. On the basis of Kennan's understanding of the Soviet's ideology, he argued 'it is clear that the main element of any United States policy toward the Soviet Union must be that of a long-term, patient but firm and vigilant containment of Russian expansive tendencies' (Kennan 1984: 119).

Internal explanations

As the Cold War dragged on a new set of historians arose that challenged the notion that American foreign policy was simply a response to the alleged threat posed by the Soviet Union. Instead of assigning responsibility to the bipolar distribution of power and to the expansionistic ideology of the Soviet Empire for America's behaviour throughout the Cold War, the revisionist school of historians looked inside the United States. And when they closely examined the domestic interests of the United States, the revisionists argued that since at least the late 1800s the overriding goal of American foreign policy was to promote the spread of capitalism so as to ensure a world of free markets that would provide access to American goods and services. This economic thesis was most eloquently put forth by William Appleman Williams (1972), who argued that the promotion of an Open Door world whereby other states embraced America's liberal ideology and opened their markets to US economic expansion was a constant pattern of behaviour in American foreign policy. Thus for the revisionists, especially those writing during and after the Vietnam War, the United States' expansionistic and even imperialist behaviour was responsible for the onset of the Cold War. The only threat that the Soviet Union posed after the Second World War was that it openly challenged America's vision of an open, liberal economic world run and managed by the United States. Here Williams went beyond a Marxist analysis

as he also underlined the liberal ideological dimension of US foreign policy whereby American policy makers believed that domestic prosperity and tranquility at home depended on continuous expansion overseas.

Neoclassical explanations

A neoclassical explanation holds that both external and internal factors are necessary to understand the origins of the Cold War. The starting point for a neoclassical explanation is the distribution of power that existed in the international system after the Second World War. Here neoclassical realists such as Chris Layne concur that in 1945 the United States held a significant power advantage over all the other states in the international system. This favourable distribution of power provided the opportunity for the United States to expand its interests around the globe. But for Layne (2006), it is domestic factors, namely Open Door economic and ideological imperatives, which explain why the United States chose to expand its interests and deliberately pursue a Cold War with the Soviet Union from 1945 to 1989. Layne puts forth an extraregional hegemony theory to argue that even if the Soviet Union had not existed after the Second World War, 'America's Open Door aims on the Continent would have led to the establishment of US hegemony in Western Europe' (Layne 2006: 70).

KEY POINTS

- ❑ Different answers have been given to the question of who was responsible for the Cold War.
- ❑ External explanations emphasize the bipolar distribution of power that existed after the Second World War and argue that the Soviet Union was inherently expansionistic and the United States attempted to contain the spread of communism.
- ❑ Internal explanations argue that the United States' economic expansionistic and even imperialist behaviour was responsible for the onset of the Cold War.
- ❑ Neoclassical explanations argue that the United States' favorable position in the international system coupled with the domestic imperatives of the Open Door explain why it pursued a Cold War with the Soviet Union.

Grand strategy

Grand strategy is defined as the overall vision of a state's national security goals and a determination of the most appropriate means to achieve these goals. Competing grand strategies provide different views about the character of international politics and the role that the United States must play in order to achieve its core national security interests. Since the end of the Cold War, there has been a general consensus that the United States has been pursuing a grand strategy of primacy. Yet, for many, the grand strategy of the Bush administration differed greatly from that of President Clinton's. With the election of President Obama in 2008, many are expecting that US grand strategy will once again change. The aim of this section is to provide an overview of three different grand strategies—primacy, liberal internationalism, and offshore balancing—and to underline the theory of American foreign policy that informs each of these competing strategies.

Primacy

A grand strategy of primacy seeks to preserve America's position as the undisputed preeminent power in the international system. Peace among the great powers and American security are held to rest on a preponderance of US power. The goal of, but certainly not the quest for, primacy was stymied by the existence of the Soviet Union. In the aftermath of the Cold War, the United States has occupied the unique position of being the sole super power in the international system. Proponents of primacy view this as an extremely advantageous position and argue that America's grand strategy should be one of preventing any future great powers from challenging the power of the United States. Thus the United States should militarily outspend other states to preserve its military dominance, continue to station troops in, and underwrite the security of, countries such as Germany and Japan, and actively work to prevent the rise of states such as China that could pose a challenge to American primacy.

In order to preserve American primacy, the United States not only needs to be more powerful than anyone else, but it must also exercise leadership. While

recognizing that multilateralism has certain advantages, proponents of primacy argue that unipolar powers have the benefit of being able to act unilaterally to advance their own interests regardless of what other states think. Thus when the situation warrants, such as when dealing with rogue states armed with weapons of mass destruction, advocates of primacy do not hesitate to recommend that the United States act alone. Institutions such as the United Nations are regarded with a degree of suspicion as they are largely viewed as restraining rather than enabling American power. Finally, proponents of primacy do not believe that the promotion of democracy should trump other vital US interests. Primacy is largely informed by a power-maximizing version of structural realism that does not give much weight to the character of domestic regimes. Thus if the promotion of democracy in a country such as Iraq erodes US power relative to other great powers such as China, proponents of primacy would conclude that this is antithetical to American national interests. Yet some proponents of US primacy, such as neoconservatives in the Bush administration, argue that democracy promotion is a vital component of American grand strategy.⁴ All advocates of US primacy, however, agree that keeping America in its preeminent position and the rest of the world off balance is the core national interest.

The Bush Doctrine embodied important elements of a strategy of preserving America's dominant position in the international system (see Major debates and their impact 1.1). The Bush Doctrine explicitly embraced America's commitment to preserving its unipolar position. The 2002 *National Security Strategy* declares that the US military will be 'strong enough to dissuade potential adversaries from pursuing a military build-up in hopes of surpassing, or equaling, the power of the United States'. The Bush Doctrine also declares America's willingness to act unilaterally, which is most evident in its controversial policy of preemptive and even preventive war. The Bush administration's unsympathetic view of international institutions was revealed by its decision to invade Iraq without the authorization of the United Nations

Security Council. Critics contend that the strategy of primacy is ultimately self-defeating as the US inevitably succumbs to the imperial temptation of overextending itself by fighting unnecessary wars and by other states actively seeking to counterbalance American power (see Controversies 1.1).

Liberal internationalism

Many associate a liberal internationalist grand strategy with President Clinton as evidenced by his *National Security Strategy of Engagement and Enlargement* (The White House 1995). Proponents of liberal internationalism agree that it is in the United States' interest to preserve its preeminent position in the world, but disagree with the policies that the Bush administration pursued to keep America number one. The Bush Doctrine, with its call for unilateral preemptive war, disdain for multilateralism, and disregard for reigning rules and norms, is seen by many liberals as a bold new grand strategy that is destined to fail (see Major debates and their impact 1.1). By pursuing its interests unilaterally and shunning key international institutions, liberals argue that America's prestige and ability to lead has faltered. Throughout the second-half of the twentieth century, the United States, as a liberal hegemon, played a vital role in maintaining international order that directly benefited both the United States and much of the rest of the world. Ikenberry (2002) argues that in addition to the realist-based containment order that existed after the Second World War, the United States also

established a liberal democratic order that was based on economic openness, international institutions such as the United Nations and the Bretton Woods system, and democracy. While the United States played a key role in the creation of these multilateral institutions, the argument is that they continue to serve American interests by providing legitimacy and a rule-based setting for its foreign policy behaviour. Liberals such as Ikenberry argue that before the Bush administration, most states did not fear US power because of its institutionalized, legalized, and democratic character. Liberals conclude that it makes strategic sense for the US to continue to adhere to the institutions and rules that it helped to build after the Second World War and a key issue for the Obama administration is whether the United States can return to a liberal internationalist grand strategy.

It should be self-evident that a liberal internationalist grand strategy is firmly anchored to the theory of liberalism. Most fundamentally, the strategy calls on America to promote the spread of democracy and liberty around the world. This is viewed as both a moral duty and a strategy that actually improves American security. The United States is better able to pursue its interests and reduce security threats when other states are also democracies. Closely related to the argument about the pacifying effect of democracy is the liberal idea that the promotion of free trade increases the prosperity of more and more people, which, in turn, creates the conditions for democratic governance. Free trade is believed to foster greater interdependence



MAJOR DEBATES AND THEIR IMPACT 1.1: Bush Doctrine—realist or liberal?

There has been a great deal of debate and controversy regarding the Bush Doctrine. One debate centres on whether the doctrine is based more on the principles of realism or liberalism. For many, it seems self-evident that the doctrine is based on a muscular version of realism. The call for the preservation of American primacy, the willingness to use force against enemies who challenge US power and interests, and the enthusiasm to pursue a go-it-alone strategy in order to secure American interests in a hostile world seems to fit comfortably in a realist world view. Yet many realists are critical of the Bush Doctrine, especially with respect to how

it justified the Iraq War. Realists point to a fourth component of the Bush Doctrine: democracy promotion. A key rationale for the invasion of Iraq was that regime change was necessary in order to install a democratic government in Iraq. Liberals who supported the war argued that democracy in Iraq would help to spread freedom and liberty throughout the Middle East, which would be beneficial to the US since democratic states do not fight democratic states. Thus rather than being based on the principles of realism, some argue that the Bush Doctrine is grounded on liberal Wilsonianism or what John Mearsheimer describes as 'Wilsonianism with teeth'.

among states that diminishes the economic gains that any state could expect to incur by going to war. Thus the greater degree of economic interdependence between the United States and China is believed to lessen the chance of conflict. Finally, the creation of international institutions and norms are viewed as the best mechanisms for managing the array of political, economic, and environmental problems that arise in an interdependent world. In this manner the three key ideas of liberal theory—democracy, interdependence, and institutions—are vital elements of a liberal internationalist grand strategy.

Offshore balancing

Apart from a few proponents of neo-isolationism, those advocating an offshore balancing grand strategy are the only ones who question both the wisdom and viability of preserving America's preeminent position in the international system. Rather than trying to preserve the impossible, namely unipolarity, many realists advocate a policy of offshore balancing that attempts to maintain America's relative power and protect its national interests in an emerging multipolar world. An offshore balancing grand strategy is firmly rooted in a realist balance of power theory. According to this theory, any state that attempts to make a bid for hegemony will be opposed by a coalition of other states that will seek to restore a rough balance of power. Moreover, as evidenced by the actions of the United States since the end of the Cold War, states that possess a preponderance of power are prone to misuse it.

By embracing multipolarity, proponents of offshore balancing argue that the United States will accrue a number of important geostrategic benefits. First, by giving up the quest to dominate the entire international system, the United States can actually preserve, if not augment, its relative power position in the international system. This can be achieved by requiring other countries, such as Germany, South Korea, and Japan, rather than the United States, to provide for their own security. Second, it allows the United States to distance itself from the power struggles in Europe and Asia, and focus on its own domestic and international interests. Third, offshore balancing circumscribes

America's national interests and limits its involvement to areas of the globe that are of vital strategic importance. Fourth, offshore balancing augments American national security by allowing it to take advantage of its insular geographical position in the western hemisphere and heed the advice of George Washington to steer clear of permanent alliances. Finally, by eschewing primacy, the United States would be able to put the break on the liberal world order building project that has entailed fighting unnecessary wars in the hope of promoting democracy and preserving the American empire.

Given the serious budget deficit and financial problems that America currently faces, it is uncertain whether the US can any longer afford the ambitious and expensive grand strategy it has been following. Proponents of offshore balancing also question whether primacy has in fact made America more secure. Rather than overwhelming power being the appropriate strategy to achieving American security, Benjamin Schwartz and Chris Layne consider the ironic possibility 'that the very preponderance of American power may now make us not more secure but less secure' (2002: 36). With respect to the threat of terrorism, an offshore balancing strategy recommends that the United States exercises restraint, reduces its overseas military presence, and refrains from meddling in the affairs of other states.

KEY POINTS

- ❑ Debates about grand strategy are explicitly related to different theories of American foreign policy.
- ❑ Primacy argues that the overriding goal of US grand strategy should be to preserve indefinitely America's position as the undisputed preeminent power in the international system.
- ❑ Liberal internationalism advocates continued American leadership of the world through multilateral institutions and the promotion of democracy and free trade.
- ❑ Offshore balancing is a grand strategy for a multipolar world and argues that the US must exercise greater constraint and shift some of its burdens to other states.

Conclusion

This chapter has attempted to demonstrate that the study of American foreign policy is dependent on theory. At the same time, there are a variety of different theories that attempt to explain American foreign policy. Some theories accentuate the impact that external, systemic factors have on American foreign policy while others highlight the influence of internal, domestic factors. And

there are also those that attempt to combine systemic and domestic factors. Theories of American foreign policy are important for understanding past debates such as the origins of the Cold War as well as for the contemporary debate over American grand strategy. While complex, theory is unavoidable when it comes to the task of attempting to explain American foreign policy.

? Questions

1. Which of the five sources of American foreign policy identified by James Rosenau do you believe is the most important for understanding the external behaviour of the United States?
2. How would you explain the United States' decision to invade Iraq in light of each of the five sources of American foreign policy outlined by Rosenau?
3. Do you agree or disagree that it is impossible to construct a theory of American foreign policy?
4. What are the main sources of disagreement between offensive and defensive realists?
5. Compare and contrast 'inside-out' with 'outside-in' explanations of American foreign policy.
6. Whose interpretation of the origins of the Cold War do you believe is most persuasive?
7. Is Chris Layne's explanation of the Cold War able to bridge the divide between internal and external accounts of the Cold War?
8. Which of the three grand strategies do you believe the US should be following today?
9. Do you agree or disagree that states are attempting to counterbalance the US?
10. Which theory do you believe the Bush Doctrine is based on?

» Further Reading

For a general survey of the main theories in the field

- Dunne, T., Kurki, M., and Smith S. eds (2010), *International Relations Theories: Discipline and Diversity*, 2nd edn (Oxford: Oxford University Press).
- Snyder, J. (2004). One world, rival theories, *Foreign Policy*, 145: 53–62.

On the Cold War

- Gaddis, J. L. (1997), *We Now Know: Rethinking Cold War History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press).
- LaFeber, W. (2002), *America, Russia, and the Cold War, 1945–2000*, 9th edn (Boston: McGraw-Hill).

On grand strategy

- Ikenberry, G. J. (2001), *After Victory: Institutions, Strategic Restraint, and the Rebuilding of Order After Major Wars* (Princeton: Princeton University Press).
- Mearsheimer, J. J. (2001), *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics* (New York: W.W. Norton).



Endnotes

1. For a discussion of the offence–defence balance, see Jervis (1978) and Lynn-Jones (1995).
2. Snyder (1991) and domestic pathologies.
3. On the theory that democratic states do not fight wars against other democratic states see Russett (1993). For a criticism of this theory see Layne (1994).
4. For an informative discussion of neo-conservatism and American foreign policy see Schmidt and Williams (2008).



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2 American exceptionalism

Daniel Deudney and Jeffrey Meiser

Chapter contents

Introduction: American difference and exceptionality	21
Difference, exceptionality, and success	22
Liberal exceptionalism	25
Peculiar Americanism	28
Exceptionality and foreign policy	31
Conclusion: Obama—new turn?	36

Introduction: American difference and exceptionality

Since its founding almost a quarter of a millennium ago, the United States of America has thought of itself as, and been widely perceived to be, exceptional. The United States is unlike other nation states in myriad ways. Most obviously, the United States is different from other states and nations because it is by far the most successful great power in late modern times. This success is manifest in its current unprecedented status as the world's sole superpower. It is the seat of the world's largest economy. And it is the ideological leader of the most powerful, appealing, and successful form of political, economic, and social organization in modern times: liberal capitalist democracy. Because of its extraordinary success as a great power, the United

States has the capabilities to shape the world in a variety of ways that reflect its preference for how the world should be ordered, a preference rooted ideologically in its conception of itself and its special mission. Extraordinary success also has greatly magnified the effect of every aspect of America on the world, from the sublime to the shameful. This success and influence makes an understanding of the United States and its agenda vital to understand major features of contemporary world politics. Understanding how America is different and how it is exceptional is, for better or worse, essential for understanding not just US foreign policy, but major aspects of contemporary world politics.