Foundations:
Interests, Interactions, and Institutions
Actors: individuals... or groups with common interests

Levels of Analysis:

- Individuals
- State
- Transnational actors
- System (Not usually an actor, but is a level of analysis)

What do we typically think are the interests of these actors?
Commonly theorized interests:
survival, prosperity, power, status, normative commitments

- Motivations, dispositions, pathologies of individuals explains international affairs
- “Human nature” matters
- Quest for power/status essential because that is what individuals care about

Associated with scholars like Thomas Hobbes, Rose McDermott, and (sometimes) me.
If human nature is a constant, how does it explain changes in international affairs?

“Human nature may in some sense have been the cause of war in 1914, but by the same token it was the cause of peace in 1910” (Waltz)

Real foreign policy decisions are made by groups, with standard operating procedures, not individuals with individual pathologies.

The first critique is easy to dismiss: individual variation in “human nature” explains variation in outcomes.

The second critique often applies.
Domestic political structures ("institutions") or ideological commitments determine foreign policies, which then drive foreign relations.

▶ Relevant actors in these theories are typically not the state! Executive, Legislature, the public, the military, firms, societal groups.

▶ Commonly theorized interests: survival, prosperity, power, status, normative commitments
Example: political structure may change incentives for states to go to war.

- In democracies leaders want to get re-elected (interest: power)
- In autocracies, leaders don't want to get killed in a coup (interest: power/security)

Can lead to incentives for:

- the “Democratic Peace” (Democracies rarely fight each other)
- diversionary war
- resource grabs to satisfy coalition keeping leader in power

Associated with scholars like Immanuel Kant and Bruce Bueno De Mesquita.
Perhaps the personalities of individuals leading states matter.

If domestic system stays the same but war happens sometimes and not others, what explains this?

Does the domestic system stay fixed when survival is at risk?
Anarchic system determines relations between states

► Relevant actors in these theories are states

► Commonly theorized interests:
  - survival, prosperity, power, status, normative commitments

Different system configurations cause different outcomes.

► Multipolar vs. Bipolar vs. Unipolar systems

Key variables: alliances, shifting power (e.g., another country getting nuclear weapons)

Associated with scholars like Thucydides and Waltz
System-level explanations
Example: Is Bipolarity or Multipolarity more dangerous?

If system is anarchic and interactions are zero-sum:

- Information will be important (to know other’s intentions) but hard to get from your enemies.

- Less likelihood of systemic wars in bipolar world
  - only one spot of friction
  - information is only withheld between two sides
  - only need to reassure one side
“Anarchy is what states make of it” (Wendt)
Not all states are equivalent (e.g., “failed states”)
States aren’t the only actors
Overlooked by many traditional IR theories yet increasingly important.

- Relevant actors: firms, social movements, activist networks, terror groups, ... and states.

- Commonly theorized interests:
  survival, prosperity, power, status, normative commitments

Associated with scholars like Martha Finnemore, Kathryn Sikkink, and (sometimes) me.
**Interactions**: the ways in which the choices of two or more actors combine to produce political outcomes.

**Strategic** interactions: Each actor’s strategy depends on the anticipated strategy of the others

- Two assumptions:
  - Actors are purposive
  - Actors adopt strategies that are the best response to anticipated strategies of others (a “best response” strategy)
What are the best response strategies?

» rock, paper, scissors

» to an adversary developing weapons

» to trading partners using the metric system to measure goods

» to other countries committing to protect the environment
Strategic interactions can be grouped into two broad categories:

- **Cooperation**: occurs when two or more actors adopt policies that makes at least one actor better off than it would otherwise be.

- **Bargaining**: describes an interaction in which actors must choose outcomes that make one better off at the expense of another.
**FIGURE 2.1** Cooperation

- **State B's Welfare**
  - B gets $1,000, A gets $0
  - B gets $800, A gets $200
  - B gets $200, A gets $200
  - B gets $200, A gets $200

- **State A's Welfare**
  - A gets $800, B gets $200
  - A gets $1,000, B gets $0

**Pareto Frontier**
Left of diagonal line are possible outcomes produced by different combinations of policies chosen by the two actors.

Diagonal line is called the *Pareto frontier*

- Named after Italian economist Vilfredo Pareto (1848-1923)
- On the Pareto frontier, one player cannot become better off without making the other worse off
At status quo (q) actors are not doing as well as they could.

Any policy combination that leads to an outcome in the area qba makes both actors better off

Any policy combination on the Pareto frontier between b and a makes the actors as well off as possible
► At status quo (q) actors are not doing as well as they could.
► Any policy combination that leads to an outcome in the area qba makes both actors better off
► Any policy combination on the Pareto frontier between b and a makes the actors as well off as possible

What could push the Pareto frontier outward?
Bargaining: an interaction in which actors must choose outcomes that make one better off at the expense of others.

When actors bargain, they move along the Pareto frontier.

Any improvement in A’s welfare comes at the expense of B’s welfare.

A zero-sum game:
- Gains for one side perfectly match the losses of the other
FIGURE 2.2 Bargaining

STATE B’S WELFARE

A GETS $1000
B GETS $0

STATE A’s WELFARE

A GETS $1000
B GETS $0

PARETO FRONTIER
**Figure 2.2** Bargaining

- **State B's Welfare**
  - A gets $0, B gets $0
  - A gets $1,000, B gets $0

- **State A's Welfare**
  - A gets $0, B gets $0
  - A gets $1,000, B gets $0

- **Pareto Frontier**

- **State B's Ideal Outcome**
  - B gets $1,000, A gets $0

- **Possible Deal 1**

- **Possible Deal 2**

- **State A's Ideal Outcome**
  - A gets $1,000, B gets $0
Power: the ability of Actor A to get Actor B to do something that it would not otherwise do

The more power an actor has, the more it can expect to get in the final outcome of bargaining.

Three basic ways of exercising power:
- coercion
- outside options
- agenda setting
Coercion: the threat or imposition of costs on others to reduce the value of the reversion outcome and thus change their behavior.

- Means of international coercion include:
  - Military force and economic sanctions
Outside Options: When an actor receives acceptable payoffs if they refuse to bargain.

- Examples:
  - Developing countries can seek development aid from multiple donors
  - Forum shopping in international dispute resolution
  - A militarily strong state bargaining over disputed territory
Agenda setting: When an actor can influence which options are considered when.
How do institutions matter in world politics?

- setting standards
- monitoring compliance
- adjudicating disputes
- enforcement (but with difficulty)
- reducing transaction costs
Clear standards of behavior help reduce ambiguity and enhance cooperation.

- Identifying violations
- Allowing enforcement procedures to function

Establish what is and is not acceptable (Constructivism?).

Crucial for the operation of any legal system.
Example: UN Convention Against Torture

► Article 2 (of 33):

1. Each State Party shall take effective legislative, administrative, judicial or other measures to prevent acts of torture in any territory under its jurisdiction.
2. No exceptional circumstances whatsoever, whether a state of war or a threat or war, internal political instability or any other public emergency, may be invoked as a justification of torture.
3. An order from a superior officer or a public authority may not be invoked as a justification of torture.
But standards still face politics

Example: Agricultural interests face foreign competition. Claim that imports are unsafe.

- The WTO Sanitary and Phytosanitary agreement establishes some scientific criteria for allowing a country to exclude the importation of a product based on safety concerns.

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The availability of information affects the likelihood of cooperation.

- May be easy to observe whether a partner cooperates or defects

- May be hard to observe or distinguish

Example: emissions hard to monitor in climate change agreements.

Example: IAEA scientists touring nuclear facilities in Iran

Cooperation may fail because of uncertainty and misperception.
Institutions provide mechanisms for resolving disputes between parties by:

- Increasing actors’ expectations that others will uphold their commitments
- Preventing retaliation from escalating
- Resolving ambiguities in agreements
Several International Institutions sanctioned South Africa as a punishment for apartheid.


▶ In 1968 the IMF refused to purchase gold from South Africa at prices in excess of $35 per ounce.

▶ OPEC countries implemented an oil embargo in 1973. Iran refuses to comply.

Full timeline here:
- bias towards past winners of bargaining.
- Example: why are some states permanently on the UN security council? (UK, France, US, Russia, China)
Whom do institutions benefit?
Why follow the rules if the institutions are biased?