Olympians

Richard Pell Jordan

College of William and Mary

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholarworks.wm.edu/honorstheses

Recommended Citation

https://scholarworks.wm.edu/honorstheses/717
Olympians

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirement
for the degree of Bachelor of Arts in International Relations from
The College of William & Mary

by

Richard Pell Jordan

Accepted for ____________________________________________
(Honors)

______________________________
David Dessler, Director

______________________________
Michael J. Tierney

______________________________
Laurie Koloski

Williamsburg, VA
April 30, 2010
In the first two chapters of this thesis I outline a theoretical approach to international society and international order. In chapters three and four I examine the Vienna and Versailles systems using the tools and terms of the theory here elaborated. These systems serve to illustrate the theory: they test its coherence and relevance; they do not test hypotheses. In the fifth chapter I conclude with a brief application of this approach to the modern Liberal order and a summary of the major theoretical points. Finally, because definitions serve an essential function to this thesis, I include an appendix of the important terms used throughout the text. An annotated bibliography follows.

In this thesis my main purpose has been to lay out a self-consistent framework and set of definitions to understand great power relations. This work is synthetic, seeking to weave into a single whole disparate explanations of related phenomena.

Most importantly, this work offers a theory of great power relations. I deal only with politics in anarchy; I do not attempt to explain regional politics or hierarchical relations between great and minor powers. Although this omission makes the theory incomplete, those who suggest that we should move to an understanding of international politics on the basis of authority are mistaken. We do not yet have a sound theory of great powers in anarchy. If we do not understand the simplest aspect of international politics, we cannot hope to understand the more complex. Until we understand great power politics in the core, we will never understand regional politics on the periphery.
The model here expounded is one of static order. The effects of power and ideological transition on order are an interesting issue, for which I hope to have provided some analytical tools, but ultimately I do not address them in this thesis.

Finally, because the purpose of political science is not only to help us understand but also to help us influence events, I hope that these arguments demonstrate a general prescription for the maintenance (or destruction) of international order.
There is no city of states. States exist in anarchy, an existence they cannot escape. But unlike among men, anarchy among states is not a state of war—or at least, it does not have to be. This thesis is a theory of great power relations, explaining the conditions of major power war and, therefore, of major power peace. It shows how states, though trapped in anarchy, escape the State of Nature for something higher, how they preserve this higher State, and how this higher State collapses. It shows how Artificial Man necessarily survives in an inescapable anarchy, and how that same mortal god, unconstrained by the limitations of natural men, achieves society without government. It argues that this society cannot endure of its own, but that only an international order preserves this society; that this order comprises three essential elements, a balance of power, a legitimating principle, and a set of rules; that there is no structural imperative for an international order to emerge; that instead, the emergence of an order is contingent upon the statesmen of a time, and that the character of the order is determined largely by the vagaries of an historical moment; that once established the stability of an order is structurally determined; and that the creation or preservation of international order must precede virtually all other international goals. This is the story of politics among the earthly powers, of gods and beasts and the choice between two worlds.
Anarchy and the Structure of International Relations

Whatever else changes in world politics, anarchy remains, and however international relations vary they have at their core this common foundation. Certain consequences follow necessarily from anarchy, including the recurrence of the balance of power; yet states are unlike men, and so anarchy among states need not lead to war. Ultimately, though anarchy is the eternal constraint of international politics, it is also the wellspring of all international opportunity. Whether states seize this opportunity for peace or for war is the choice of men.

Anarchy Among Men and Anarchy Among States

Politics among states necessarily occur in anarchy. They cannot escape this condition: to surrender their sovereignty surrenders their existence. Indeed, for a state to surrender sovereignty is not only suicide: it denies its fundamental identity.

Whether among men or among states, anarchy is the same: in both, it is the absence of hierarchy, nothing more. But the implication of anarchy among states differs from anarchy amongst individuals. Among men, anarchy results in government, the

---

1 This thesis is about great powers, and precisely these are meant by the term state. In this discussion the term state should not be read to include minor powers, pseudo-states or anything similar. Indeed, lesser states exist in a semblance of hierarchy—Wight (1977) calls these relations a suzerain-state system; see also Lake (2009)—and so a discussion of politics in anarchy cannot apply to them. Furthermore, I use the term to denote an entity exercising ultimate authority over a particular realm of politics. That realm need be neither geographical nor vast; hence, in this discussion both 5th-century Athens and 18th-century France are categorized as states. Therefore, the term should not be taken to mean anything peculiar to post-Westphalian international relations, least of all as shorthand for the territorially sovereign state. David A. Lake, *Hierarchy in International Relations* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2009); Martin Wight, *Systems of States* (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1977).


3 This point is Hobbes’s. Mark Heller puts it well: “the function of the state and its life are coterminous…the survival of the state must be a ‘necessary value’ for it, and death must be its ultimate aversion. As an artificial creation of man, it must survive in order to attain its objective.” Mark A. Heller, “The Use & Abuse of Hobbes: The State of Nature in International Relations,” *Polity* 13.1 (1980): 27.
surrender of absolute liberty, personal sovereignty, to gain security. But states do not surrender their sovereignty, and world government does not emerge. Because anarchy is the same, these divergent consequences must stem from a difference in the units, that is, from the difference between men and states.

In anarchy men are absolutely insecure, an existence arising out of the universal vulnerability and inherent equality of human beings. But states cannot die, they need not sleep, and they are not equal. Therefore, unlike men, in anarchy states are not absolutely insecure; in fact, the curse of international relations is that every state enjoys the possibility of achieving absolute security, i.e. hegemony. The potential to realize this goal is the source of all major war.

Here, then, is the crucial difference between Hobbesian and international anarchy: for men, anarchy is a state of war, but they can escape it through government; for states, anarchy is not necessarily a state of war, but it permits no escape.

---

4 The contention that men are ultimately equal opens the thirteenth chapter of *Leviathan*: “when all is reckoned together the difference between man and man, is not so considerable, as that one man can thereupon claim to himselfe any benefit, to which another may not pretend as well as he. For as to the strength of body, the weakest has strength enough to kill the strongest” Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan* (New York: Barnes & Noble, 2004), 75.

5 Political Theorists have long observed these differences between Hobbesian and international anarchy; they have also often criticized overly simple interpretations of Hobbes in the IR literature. See Heller (1980); Williams (1996).

The Recurrence of the Balance of Power

Competition in anarchy must result either in a balance of power\textsuperscript{7} or in hegemony.\textsuperscript{8} Among states there can be no appeal to authority: anarchy ensures that the international arena is a self-help system. Every state desires its own security, the most certain bulwark of which is the achievement of hegemony. But hegemony and the absolute security of one state imply the absolute insecurity for all others. Unable to depend upon others’ benevolence, each state must ensure that nothing can threaten its existence. States will therefore seek to maximize their power in an attempt to achieve hegemony while preventing other states from achieving the same goal. As all states—or at least, those states that survive—attempt hegemony and foil each others’ efforts, a balance of power emerges.\textsuperscript{9}

Still, states sometimes miscalculate. Indeed, in a world of perfect information and rationality, war would never occur.\textsuperscript{10} But states do not perfectly perceive their world, and they operate under chronically incomplete information; moreover, not only do leaders’ incentives not always coincide with the national interest, more often than not they are

\textsuperscript{7} The enunciation of an unimpeachable definition of the balance of power has notoriously eluded theorists of international politics. Indeed, in his \textit{Theory} Waltz noted that by some counts scholars employed the phrase in at least eight different ways. Three decades have only multiplied the uses of the ubiquitous term. Nonetheless, this failure signifies not the bankruptcy of the concept but rather its indispensability; the confusion surrounding the balance of power does not demean its theoretical merits. Here I define it as the neutralization of capabilities—that is, states cease to effect interests wherever there is a balance of power. For further clarification, see Appendix A. Kenneth N. Waltz, \textit{Theory of International Politics} (Reading: Addison-Wesley, 1979), 117.

\textsuperscript{8} This thesis does not deal with hegemony and so in these chapters I omit all further discussion of it.

\textsuperscript{9} This argument is the core of the neorealist approach to international relations, particularly that of offensive realism. I briefly recapitulate it here as it undergirds the theoretical frame I elaborate. See Waltz (1979); John J. Mearsheimer, \textit{The Tragedy of Great Power Politics} (New York: W.W. Norton & Co, 2001).

\textsuperscript{10} NB: in international society the mutual respect of primary goals implies that states do not regard themselves as existentially vulnerable; therefore, the points of neorealism, particularly offensive realism, do not obtain in international society. Once states form an international society and pursue goals beyond elementary ones, interstate politics cease to be zero-sum.

simply incompetent.\textsuperscript{11} Because of the limitations of human perception, balances of power tend to collapse. The first principle of international politics, therefore, is that anarchy causes balances of power to recur.\textsuperscript{12}

**International Society**

In a balance of power, no state can infringe the elementary goals of other states—that is, with its capabilities neutralized a state is unable to threaten another’s existence. This incapacity is the foundation of all diplomacy and international covenants.\textsuperscript{13} Most importantly, this powerlessness is the first precondition of international peace.\textsuperscript{14}

**The Emergence of International Society**

The balance of power guarantees the elementary goals of states and thereby eliminates the structural imperative to pursue hegemony.\textsuperscript{15} With their primary goals

\textsuperscript{11} Such widespread incompetence should not necessarily be viewed in an unfavorable light: after all, were states not beset by such a wide and diverse multitude of problematic conditions and circumstances, politics would be almost as dull as economics.

\textsuperscript{12} The recurrence of a balance of power implies neither that a balance always exists nor that states consciously balance each other. Like the elimination of profits in the market, the balance of power is often the unintended consequence of state interaction. The absence of a balancer or even of a consciousness of the balance does not disprove the claim.

\textsuperscript{13} That the balance of power underpins international society is essential to Bull’s argument: “Both general and local balances of power, where they have existed, have provided the conditions in which other institutions on which international order depends (diplomacy, war, international law, great power management) have been able to operate.” Hedley Bull, *The Anarchical Society: A Study of Order in World Politics* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1977), 107. By contrast, Little has reversed the order of causation when he asserts “the systematic development of diplomacy as a European institution represented an essential structure underpinning the formation of the balance of power.” Richard Little, *The Balance of Power in International Relations: Metaphors, Myths and Models* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 153.

\textsuperscript{14} Major war is impossible in a state of peace. Major war threatens the survival of at least one antagonist; but in international society, states respect the elementary goals (including survival) of other states; therefore, major war cannot occur within an international society. Minor wars may occur as tools of negotiation or honor, but major war is logically impossible.

\textsuperscript{15} Said again, the balance of power can uncertainly extend the shadow of the future such that international relations transition from a prisoner’s dilemma to a stag hunt, with international politics taking on the characteristics of a coordination game.
achieved, states are then able to pursue goals beyond mere aggrandizement. Once power is balanced, states need not seek it. They may still pursue power: after all, hegemony affords benefits beyond absolute security, and nothing in the structure of international relations can drive a state to anything more than a *de facto* recognition of others’ elementary goals.\(^\text{16}\)

Structure creates the possibility of international society, yet no distribution of capabilities, interests, or perceptions can of itself generate one. But, if states—or rather, statesmen—recognize that coexistence is mutually beneficial, that by maintaining peaceful relations they can pursue other aims, and if the realization of these aims outweighs the possibility of achieving hegemony, then they will.\(^\text{17}\) International society allows states to pursue goals beyond simple survival; it gives states the chance not only to live, but to live well.\(^\text{18}\)

---

\(^{16}\) Third image variables cannot explain the emergence of international society. Only 2\(^{nd}\) and 1\(^{st}\)-level explanations that deal with state preferences and individual behaviour can help to predict when international society will arise.

\(^{17}\) Theories of the emergence of international society are universally fuzzy and vacuous. The best of which I know, and the one from which I have primarily drawn this argument, is Barry Buzan’s marriage of the English school with structural realism, wherein he argues that “at some point the regularity and intensity of [states’] interactions will virtually force the development of a degree of recognition and accommodation among them…Once the balance of power is recognized as a possible basis for order, rather than being, like the security dilemma, simply an automatic consequence or mechanism of the anarchic system, then the great powers can, if they agree, consciously manage their relations to preserve a balance.” Barry Buzan, “From International System to International Society: Structural Realism and Regime Theory meet the English school.” *International Organization* 47.3 (1993): 334, 348. Still, Buzan commits the same error against which Waltz warns in his *Theory of International Politics*, i.e. wishing final causes were efficient does not make them so: to wit, Buzan asserts “a common desire for order is the minimum necessary condition to begin the evolution of international society along gesellschaft lines,” but he never shows why anything “must eventually generate” an international society. Buzan, 334, 336.

\(^{18}\) In the English School, “the idea of ‘International Society’ civilizes an otherwise dismal vision of a world of power-seeking states, which would be otherwise moderated in their impulses and appetites only by such transitory and tenuous ‘balances of power’ as may wax and wane in the international affairs of human kind.” R.J. Barry Jones, “The English School and the Construction of International Society,” in *International Society and the Development of International Relations Theory*, ed. B.A. Roberson (London: Continuum, 2002): 241.
International society emerges when states forego the possibility of achieving absolute security in order to enjoy the benefits of peace.\(^\text{19}\) It is defined\(^\text{20}\) simply as states’ mutual respect for elementary goals.\(^\text{21}\)

Within the international system, states which respect the elementary goals of others are *status quo* states; those which do not are revisionist states.\(^\text{22}\) Put another way, a revisionist state will attempt to realize gains which would overthrow the balance of power; a *status quo* state will attempt to realize gains which would not overthrow the balance of power.\(^\text{23}\) Since revisionist states would realize gains despite the elementary needs of other states, they lie outside international society.

---

\(^\text{19}\) Just as a state of war does not imply actual armed conflict, so too a state of peace does not imply harmony and goodwill among nations. Rather, as the state of war is characterized by the ever-present threat of war, the state of peace is characterized by its absence. In a state of peace—that is, in an international society—states treat the elementary goals of other states as given and inviolable. They may not like each other, but they respect each other’s right to exist.

\(^\text{20}\) This definition differs not extraordinarily from that offered in most English School accounts, including Bull, who argues a “society of states (or international society) exists when a group of states, conscious of certain common interests and common values, form a society in the sense that they conceive themselves to be bound by a common set of rules in their relations with one another, and share in the working of common institutions,” Bull, 13. Primarily, the definition I offer is simpler and does not rely upon plumbing state consciousness to understand how they conceive themselves; but in the sense that international society involves those states who recognize common limits to international action, these definitions accord precisely.

\(^\text{21}\) Since Westphalia international society has been understood almost exclusively as states’ mutual recognition of each others’ territorial sovereignty. See for instance Edward Keene, *Beyond the Anarchical Society*, 13.

\(^\text{22}\) The use of these terms, or variants thereof, dates back to classical realism: Morgenthau distinguished status quo from imperialist states, and his chief distinction—that status quo states pursue security, revisionist states, power—I have here sustained, Morgenthau 50; Kissinger distinguished status quo from revolutionary states, Kissinger (1964); see also Carr, 51. Since then, scholars have used the terms in a sundry of ways; I have tried to capture the essence of the most common usage within the theoretical framework here advanced. In addition, I have not adopted the practice of identifying a third class of states, sometimes called isolationist or recluse states—see Davidson (2006)—as these are more a subcategory of *status quo* states than a class in their own right.

\(^\text{23}\) Gains realized by status quo states may alter the balance of power—that is, alter states’ relative power—but they may not alter the balance such that the survival of any state is in jeopardy. International society depends upon the existence of a balance of power, not its constancy.
The Weakness of International Society

By itself, international society is not a state of equilibrium. International society emerges out of a fortuitous balance of power, but states are prone to miscalculate, and no state can defend society.\(^{24}\) Moreover, if ever a state perceives the capability to achieve hegemony, it will do so, since the benefits of hegemony are always more than those of social coexistence. If the balance collapses, whether in reality or only in the perceptions of some states, society must collapse as well: if a balance no longer safeguards a states’ elementary goals, that state must once again pursue hegemony, for, regardless of how happily collegial society has become, no state can afford to trust the good intentions of another.

Still, international society will not disintegrate unless a revisionist state acts to overthrow it; that is, a revisionist challenge is the efficient cause of social collapse.\(^{25}\) Statesmen from Mazarin to Bismarck have sought to preserve international society despite their countries’ rising power, maintaining them as satiated states. Yet, ultimately the opportunity for aggrandizement will prove stronger: the state will turn to revisionism after the removal of this final restraint, whether upon the leader’s death or by his forced ouster from office. By itself, international society cannot long withstand changes in the distribution of power.\(^{26}\)

\(^{24}\) Anarchy cannot be escaped, and international relations are always a self-help system; “with each country constrained to take care of itself, no one can take care of the system.” Waltz, 109.

\(^{25}\) The peaceful resolution of the Cold War, despite the absence of an international order, can be explained by the absence of a revisionist state: to become revisionist, a state must desire gains it does not have; but the Soviet Union was a declining power, so that its current possessions in the international system always exceeded what it stood to gain in a revisionist conflict; in short, the USSR could gain nothing by overturning international society. While the Cold War set the stage for the collapse of international society, an efficient cause never materialized.

\(^{26}\) This section is power transition theory in a nutshell: “when a revisionist latecomer overtakes an erstwhile leader of the international system, war looms.” Chan, 2.
International society emerges out of the *de facto* recognition of elementary goals imposed by a fortuitous balance of power. Yet, left alone frequent crises will mar international society; eventually, it will collapse altogether. The state of peace cannot sustain itself. Mortal men safeguard society with government, but world government will not emerge; the survival of international society, then, rests upon states and the systems they construct.
An international order is a configuration of states which tends to perpetuate international society, that is, a state of peace. It comprises three elements: a contrived balance of power, a set of rules, and a legitimating principle. Its construction will succeed insofar as statesmen abandon utopian visions for a realistic understanding of the world. An order will persist, and peace will persist with it, so long as a status quo alliance will rise to its defense. An order will collapse when any one of its elements fails. Because international society precedes most state goals, and because society endures only when supported by an international order, the first goal of foreign policy should generally be the maintenance of international order.
The Elements of Order

The Contrived Balance of Power

The fortuitous balance of power emerges out of the self-interested actions of states, just as in the market equilibrium emerges out of the free competition among firms. But the number of great powers is limited—the likeness of international politics to economics more nearly approximates oligopoly than perfect competition. Whereas no small firm can alter the market equilibrium, in international relations the actions of one or two great powers can destabilize the balance; consequently, unlike in the perfectly competitive market, the only stable balance is one which most states consciously contrive.

The contrived balance of power, then, is the conscious decision by some states to oppose any threat to international society, that is, to deny any state the capability or interest to alter international society. By definition, only status quo states will consciously counterbalance others. The balance of power, then, is defended by an alliance of status quo states. Furthermore, whereas a fortuitous balance of power reflects

---

27 To my knowledge, a clear formulation of international order does not exist in the literature. While a topic much discussed, neither its elements nor even its nature have ever been precisely defined. In this chapter I seek to at least ameliorate this unpardonable shortcoming in IR scholarship. The most recent major contribution to theories of international order is After Victory, wherein Ikenberry distinguishes three kinds of international order: balance of power, hegemony, and constitutional. Balance of Power rests ultimately upon the sovereignty of states; alliances are only temporary coalitions, and as power shifts, so too will they. Hegemonic order creates a hierarchic structure for international relations. To the third order, constitutionalism, Ikenberry devotes by far the most detail; still, his arguments reduce to one essential, that is, constitutional orders create a mechanism of restraining power. Within the framework I develop here, the Balance of Power is equivalent to international politics without international society, whereas his vision of constitutionalism vaguely approximates the outline of order I develop here. Finally, we ought to reject Ikenberry’s typology, since the three (hegemony, balance of power, and constitutional) are not variations on a common dimension. A more useful typology would first distinguish a hierarchic from an anarchic realm (hegemony from a balance of power), second a social from an antagonistic environment, third an ordered from a disordered international system.

28 The distinction between a contrived and a fortuitous balance of power has a long history in the literature. The conception deployed here is most clearly advanced in Bull’s Anarchical Society.
A unintended stalemate between hegemony-seeking states, a contrived balance must contain at least one status quo state.

A contrived balance is necessary to the perpetuation of international society. This need does not mean states will construct or maintain one. Leaders of states often willfully blind themselves to the necessities of peace, what Kissinger called “the petulance of mediocrity.” Moreover, no state ever defends the balance of power for its own sake, or even for the sake of international society; the balance holds no ideological appeal, and domestic audiences will not countenance the expense of blood and treasure for such wild abstractions as the balance of power and international society. A balance of power is never maintained by the demonstration of its necessity.

Furthermore, even if states commit to a defense of the status quo, the steps necessary to the preservation of international society are not always clear; indeed, “the danger to the equilibrium is never demonstrated until it is already overturned.” Without a clear identification of essential and nonessential interests, a state cannot determine whether actions, including its own, tend to support or undermine the status quo. States tend to miscalculate the needs of the balance of power, whether willfully or by simple mistake. Therefore, even a contrived balance of power is not self-sustaining; that is, left alone, a balance of power will eventually disintegrate.

---

30 This argument underpins Kissinger’s analysis of Metternich’s success and Castlereagh’s failure at the Congress of Vienna—“equilibrium could not be achieved through a demonstration of its necessity,” Kissinger (1956), 272. Note that Kissinger employs the term equilibrium to denote a balance of forces, not as a point from which there is no incentive to deviate. See the discussion of Metternich and Castlereagh in chapter three.
Rules

A contrived balance cannot sustain itself because threats to the balance are not self-evident. To distinguish threats to the balance of power, states require clear definitions of essential and nonessential interests; that is, states need clear rules to alert them to actions that threaten the *status quo*.\(^{32}\)

Rules change perceptions—that is their function. States often misperceive how to maintain order; rules rectify this error. Where otherwise states would not recognize when an action would destabilize international relations, rules regulate politics, and their violation signals a contempt for order and the rights of other states. In short, rules strengthen order inasmuch as they identify threats to international society.\(^{33}\)

An order which permitted no change would not long endure: power, ideas, and perceptions constantly fluctuate, and to exclude the possibility of realizing gains would drive states to revisionism. The challenge of an order, then, is not to prevent change, but to prevent revisionist change—that is, to prevent change that jeopardizes the existence of a major power. To identify revisionist threats, rules must distinguish between interests that are inviolable—that is, any attempt to alter them constitutes a direct threat to international society—and interests that are negotiable.

In this indispensable distinction, essential interests form the core of international society, negotiable interests, the periphery. The core of an international order typically consists of the borders of all major powers and of certain minor powers, for instance the

\(^{32}\) The presence of rules does not imply the presence of an international order; indeed, rules and expectations of behaviour can exist even outside international society. An international order rests not on the existence of rules but on the function those rules serve.

\(^{33}\) Bull notes that “Order in any society is maintained not merely by a sense of common interests in creating order or avoiding disorder, but by rules which spell out the kind of behaviour that is orderly.”\(^{33}\) The emphasis on the important functions rules serve also pervades the liberal literature; see for instance Raymond Cohen, “Rules of the Game in International Politics,” *International Studies Quarterly* 24.1 (1980).
Low Countries; necessarily, the absolute number of great powers also forms part of the core. As well, rules, in the form of institutions, can serve to signal a country’s integration within international society.\textsuperscript{34} Most importantly, rules deflect gains into the periphery, ensuring that changes in the distribution of power and interests are reflected in nonessential areas. In all these, rules help to identify what state behaviour accords with the perpetuation of international society.

\textit{Legitimating Principle}

The balance of power cannot preserve itself; therefore, an order needs rules to prevent revision of the core and regulate state activity in the periphery. Yet the existence of a rule does not guarantee obedience. Actors obey rules for two reasons: they respond to the threat of coercive force or they view the rule as somehow legitimate. Since states exist in anarchy, there is no higher authority to coerce states into compliance. Therefore, states will obey rules inasmuch as they see the rule as legitimate.\textsuperscript{35} But neither the balance of power nor international society have their own legitimacy, and a state will not obey rules in the name of either. Ultimately a state can only recognize one principle as legitimate: its own. To bind states, therefore, the legitimating principle of an international compact must align with that of the signatory states.

International covenants made in accordance with the legitimating principle of a state represent an extension of a that state’s identity; upholding these rules is simply the

\textsuperscript{34} For instance, membership in modern trade organizations or the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty can indicate a country’s readiness to join, or rejoin, international society.

\textsuperscript{35} The importance of the legitimacy of international rules is essential to liberal arguments as well as theories of international law. “[I]n a community organized around rules, compliance is secured—to whatever degree it is—at least in part by perception of a rule as legitimate by those to whom it is addressed…It becomes a crucial factor, however, in the capacity of any rule to secure compliance when, as in the international system, there are no other compliance-inducing mechanisms.” Thomas M. Franck, “Legitimacy in the International System,” The American Journal of International Law 82.4 (1988): 706.
logically appropriate action.36 Put another way, for a state to deny international covenants made in the name of its own legitimating principle denies its justification for existence and, therefore, risks domestic instability; as well, if a state views an international order as defending its particular mode of legitimacy internationally, the state will support the order to strengthen its domestic situation, deterring insurrection and the spread of an international revolutionary contagion.37

Still, no matter how well an order aligns with its legitimating principle, a state will still seize the opportunity for hegemony should it arise. To prevent this eventuality, states must ensure that no state ever has the capability to achieve hegemony—that is, states must ensure that there always exists a balance of power. And thus arise the three elements of order: a balance, a set of rules, and a principle. On these three does order stand: no more, no less.

36 A principle of constructivism is that “the mode of political legitimacy defines the identity of the polity,” Bukovansky 3. Thus, upholding an order on the basis of a shared legitimating principle is simply an extension of a state’s constitutional identity. The formation of state identity has a long history in the constructivist literature; I have simplified their analysis here in order to render the concept theoretically useful. Mlada Bukovansky, Legitimacy and Power Politics: The American and French Revolutions in International Political Culture. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002), 3.
37 The two points are the same; one is in the language of constructivism, the other rational choice theory.
Construction of Order

Nothing in the distribution of capabilities, interests, or perceptions among states can predict the emergence of an international order.\textsuperscript{38} Its construction requires not only the recognition of shared goals but also diplomats skilled enough to weld an order together. As well, while structure will predict the longevity and ultimate success of an order, it cannot predict its character. The structure of international politics may require certain qualities for an order to succeed, but no necessity guarantees political action.

Contingent Emergence and Character

Orders tend to emerge out of major wars and the desire to avoid repeating the past’s mistakes. But major wars do not necessarily lead to the construction of international order: just as often, states retreat from their international responsibilities as they embrace them. The best explanation for the emergence of order is the wartime experience of the major powers, not the resulting distribution of power or interests.

As structure cannot predict the emergence of an international order, neither can it predict its character. The wartime alliances and rhetoric will determine the contrived balances of power and the language justifying a postwar order. As well, the domestic situations of various states will affect the principle around which an order can be built.\textsuperscript{39} Finally, and most importantly, individuals shape postwar settlements, bringing to

\textsuperscript{38} That is, this thesis adopts a transformational approach to structure. David Dessler, “What’s at stake in the agent-structure debate?” \textit{International Organization} 43.3 (1989), 467.

\textsuperscript{39} As constructivists note, constructing an order around a legitimating principle is not simply a process of “add[ing] up the various modes of domestic legitimacy among the great powers…structure (or culture) is constitutive [of states’] very identities,” Bukovansky, 35. That is, the principle of order which emerges is not simply the sum of great power legimitacies; indeed, the very process of constructing an order can affect domestic legitimacy—see this thesis’ discussion of Tsar Alexander in chapter three.
negotiations their own peculiar ideological and material interests, diplomatic eccentricities, and delusions for a future peace and their own historic legacy.

The very unfolding of negotiations shapes the postwar order. For instance, to postpone negotiations of essential issues undermines the core-periphery distinction: to do otherwise than resolve these questions immediately implies the questions’ negotiability, but the essence of the core is that it is non-negotiable. The longer states delay the delineation of core and peripheral interests, the weaker an order becomes.

In all ways, neither the emergence nor the character of an international order can be predicted *ex ante*. Its existence and qualities make sense only in retrospect. Nevertheless, while structure may not determine an order’s emergence, it does determine its success; those who would see their orders endure, therefore, are enjoined to take a full account of political realities when crafting an international order.

*Realism v. Utopianism*

Utopian visions have periodically dominated international politics. These visions have universally failed, unable or unwilling to account for the all the necessities of peace that reality requires. Utopianism may be defined, then, as the failure to recognize as essential one of the elements of international order. Most commonly this failure manifests in a denial of the importance of the balance of power, although equally utopian is the disregard for international norms or common bonds of legitimacy.

---

40 Indeed, the discipline of international relations began in reaction to those utopian idiocies prevalent in the wake of the First World War; see E.H. Carr. Still, scholars tend to employ the words utopian and realist less as scientific labels than as derogatory epithets. In this thesis I have tried to identify what distinguishes a utopian from a realist vision of international order and to demonstrate and urge the superiority of the realist approach. Nevertheless, I do not follow the neorealists and conflate prediction with prescription: realism, as contrasted with utopianism, is an approach which recognizes the requirements reality imposes; it does not, and cannot, judge the merits of different national goals. In this sense, then, a realist approach is separate from a policy of *Realpolitik*, though the two often coincide.
Since order rests on three elements, utopian denials come in three varieties: utopian idealism denies the importance of a balance of power, believing that goodwill and international law can bind states to preserve the peace; utopian rationalism denies the importance of ideology, believing a stable order can be scientifically engineered on the basis of enlightened self-interest and clear rules without appeal to a moral law; and utopian constructivism denies the importance of rules and norms, believing peace can rest solely upon the ideological solidarity of a powerful bloc.\textsuperscript{41}

An international order will evince the character of its age: statesmen and recent events will determine its shape far more than the distribution of capabilities and interests. Ultimately, the construction of an international order will succeed insofar as it abandons utopian fantasies for a realistic appreciation of the requirements of international peace.

**The Status Quo Alliance**

Those states committed to oppose changes to a definite core in the name of a shared legitimating principle form a *status quo* alliance. An order will endure so long as a *status quo* alliance defends it.

As a general rule, a *status quo* alliance best defends the core when the group of states possesses capabilities which overwhelm those of all other states; that is, the core is best defended by a defensive alliance stronger than any possible combination of other states.

\textsuperscript{41} In modern times, liberal internationalists’ myopic embrace of rules and moral frameworks commits the sin of utopian idealism, failing to understand that law and legitimacy alone cannot uphold the *status quo*; by contrast, neoconservatives commit the sin of utopian constructivism, failing to understand that repudiating international law to spread the Liberal order will ultimately undermine the very foundation of the democratic peace.
Only those states that ascribe to the principle of legitimacy underpinning an order will defend it. Other states, though they may be content within the system, will not rise to defend a principle for which they have no affinity; simply put, a principle has no moral claim on those states which do not share it. A state will not defend an order based on a legitimating principle other than its own.\textsuperscript{42}

**Collapse of Order**

Orders collapse when states fail to defend the *status quo*. Just as the construction of order can fall prey to three kinds of flaws, the collapse of order can arise out of three kinds of failure: a failure of balancing, a failure of legitimacy, and a failure of rules. Any one failure ensures the collapse of the entire system—and with it the collapse of international society.\textsuperscript{43}

**The Three Failures**

The purpose of the contrived balance of power is to prevent change in the core. A failure to balance occurs when a state gains—or believes it has gained—the unbalanced capability to alter the core. Because to a large degree states can foresee the future capabilities of rising powers, of all kinds balancing failures should prove the least common. Assuming *status quo* states perceive threats and feel bound to oppose them, they usually do so.

\textsuperscript{42} At least, it will not defend the order for any significant length of time. See the discussion of Castlereagh and Britain’s semi-withdrawal from the Continental balance.

\textsuperscript{43} To a degree any one failure involves the failure of all the others; thus, disentangling the particular failures causing an order to collapse is an imprecise art. Still, at the heart of any collapse lies a single failure, the correction of which would have prevented the order’s demise.
A legitimating principle binds states to the defense of an order and its rules, entangling the preservation of order with a state’s very identity. A failure of legitimacy, then, occurs when the principle underpinning order fails to morally oblige states to a defense of the core. Any principle which politicians can construe to support revision of the core will undermine order. Moreover, any principle that contradicts the identity of a state risks international order, since no state will support an order whose foundation challenges its legitimacy. A failure of legitimacy will also occur should a member of the *status quo* alliance betray the principle, for whatever reason. Finally, ideological change that alters a state’s domestic principle will drive the state to abandon a *status quo* alliance, since it no longer subscribes to the founding principle.

The need for rules arises out of the imperfect perceptions of states. The purpose of rules within international order is to clearly demarcate the core from the periphery; that is, rules clarify the actions necessary to the defense of the *status quo*. A failure of rules, therefore, results when states cannot clearly determine what actions constitute a threat to international society. The proliferation of nonessential rules—that is, rules which do not identify and preserve the core—undermines international order. Thus, the multiplication of international laws can weaken an international order, since they tend rather to obscure than clarify *status quo* responsibilities. By the nature of the system, at any time there exist more rules than are part of an international order; this superfluity of rules tends to retard the proper functioning of order by confusing sovereigns as to which violations of international covenants constitute threats to international society. A statesman wishing to preserve international society should therefore strive to eliminate those rules not essential to order.
There is a fourth failure. Even if states possess the capability to defend the *status quo*, even if rules clearly identify a threat to the *status quo*, and even if a principle binds states to oppose this threat, still an order can collapse. If a majority of states determine to seek hegemony—that is, abandon international society—an order will collapse, since no *status quo* alliance will defend it. Moreover, even if a majority of states are satisfied with the *status quo*, if statesmen lack the will to oppose a threat to order, the best rules and principles and balances will not preserve it. But for all the possibility of these failures of will, neither is likely. If an order fails, it fails because an essential element disappears.

*The Collapse of Order in Historical Perspective*

Historically, orders have collapsed only when both power and ideas have changed; structural change along only one dimension tends not to cause upheaval. That is, a change in the distribution of power does not destroy an order unless accompanied by a change in the distribution of interests and ideas; the reverse also holds true. Generally, *status quo* powers can integrate rising states within the current order if they can appeal to a common principle in accordance with certain institutions: witness the peaceful incorporation of America into Atlantic society. Likewise, a shift in ideology without a shift in the balance of power tends not to upset the system; thus, the rise of Bolshevism in 1917 did not disrupt international peace since the Russians did not gain any power, and eventually they returned to international society.

---

44 This eventuality should almost never occur: declining or static states tend to defend an order, while rising states tend to challenge it; for a majority of states to be rising, their gains in relative power would have to come at the expense of a minority of states; for a minority of states to be powerful enough that numerous states could grow at their expense would imply a predominance bordering on hegemony (or at least bipolarity), in either of which case the older superpowers should be more than potent enough to dispatch a threat from any number of upstart powers.
The Normative Precedence of International Order

International society must exist for the realization of any international goal, excepting only hegemony and the destruction of a state.\textsuperscript{45} Save these, whatever his goals a statesman must act to preserve international society. As an international order is the only instrument whereby international society is stably sustained, statesmen should therefore strive to protect or create an international order.

To achieve any goal, a state must first secure its elementary goals. A state’s elementary goals are only secure under two conditions: either the state acts under a balance of power, or it achieves hegemony. A balance of power is only secure in an international society, and an international society in turn is only secure when maintained by an international order. Therefore, unless a state seeks hegemony, it must construct or preserve an international order to pursue any goals it may have.

That great power order perpetuates unequal relations between major and minor powers does not justify its dissolution.\textsuperscript{46} International politics will always be dominated by a few powerful states; the justice of an order lies not in the equality of states under its rules but the fairness of its legitimating principle. Any state which subscribes to an order’s principle, therefore, should willingly defend it.

\textsuperscript{45} “Thus, not only is order in world politics valuable, there is also a sense in which it is prior to other goals, such as that of justice,” Bull, 97.

A strong union between the States on the principles we have announced will overcome the storm itself

–Metternich

The international order erected after the Napoleonic Wars was the strongest ever devised. Each part functioned in almost perfect tandem with every other; its balance of power, institutions, and legitimating principle reinforced each other without a contradiction. When Metternich constructed his system, he recognized the importance of the three elements of order; because of the strength of these elements established at its founding, his system endured for half a century, and ultimately the Vienna system collapsed only after an irreparable loss of legitimacy.

During the Napoleonic wars France sought Continental hegemony, challenging the sovereignty of every state in Europe. Her attempt destroyed international society. 1815 shows the necessity of international order: without an order, the society of European states degenerated into hegemonic war; with an international order, the society of European states enjoyed peace for half a century.47

Metternich and the Construction of His System

Into the chaos of Napoleonic Europe stepped Metternich.48 Both vilified and deified, Metternich defies all attempts at an impartial appraisal. Even those who belittle

---

47 “The primary difference between the pre-1815 and the post-1815 era lies in the absence of a working international system in the former and its existence in the latter.” Schroeder, 126.
48 Historians often criticize Metternich for his perpetuation of an unjust regime and system. To the truth of this claim I do not care to speak: I use him only as an illustration of how to construct a stable international society, since his creation was, so far as I can tell, the most effective ever devised. I desire to discover the characteristics of stable international societies; whether the perpetuation of these societies is desirable, I leave alone.
him cannot ignore him. The quintessential diplomat, Metternich fashioned a system wherein the three essential components of order worked harmoniously together. The inception of the Vienna system illustrates two points: first, that in addition to balance of power an international order rests upon a legitimating principle and a set of rules; second, that the character of an international order is determined not by structure but by statesmen. By stressing principle and international law during the conduct of the war, Metternich laid the groundwork for the postwar order; at the Congress, Castlereagh’s failure and Metternich’s success at assembling a counterbalancing coalition demonstrates the impossibility of transforming a fortuitous into a contrived balance without an appeal to law and legitimacy; and his accommodation of France within European society ensured she would not revert to revisionism. The success of Metternich’s system is beyond question; what remains is to investigate how such a masterpiece came to be.

Wartime Rhetoric

Better than any other statesman, Metternich understood that the conduct of the war would determine the character of the postwar order. He also knew that Austrian survival depended on a postwar order that embraced Austrian existence as a necessity. Therefore, Metternich strove to ensure that Austria and the Coalition always acted in the name of principles consonant with the survival of the Habsburg monarchy and a conservative peace.

During the war, Metternich took special care when extricating Austria from its alliance with Napoleon. Balance of power concerns dictated that Austria prevent Napoleon from establishing hegemony in Europe. Yet, Metternich could not simply
repudiate the Austrian commitment to France: with characteristic prescience, Metternich understood that to reject international law during the war would undermine any postwar order; moreover, the Austrian monarchy itself was founded upon the sanctity of covenants, the renunciation of which would provoke domestic instability. Wisely, Metternich realized that a stable international society would rest not only on a balance of power but on an ideological commitment to international law—that is, on an international order. “Before Austria enters a war it must secure not only its military but its moral position.” 49

*Castlereagh, Metternich and the Balance of Power*

During the turmoil of the Napoleonic Wars a fortuitous balance formed to combat the possibility of French hegemony. But a fortuitous balance will not preserve the peace: a stable international society must rest upon a consciously constructed balance of power. In this endeavor Metternich had a comrade-in-arms, Lord Castlereagh, who “henceforth, saw his task in translating the fact of the alliance into a consciousness of its necessity.” 50

But a balance of power is never maintained by the demonstration of its necessity. The stability of international society requires more than a fortuitous balance of power; it requires an international order. Because an international order is more than a mere balance of power, its construction requires an appeal to greater purposes than the

---

49 Metternich, qtd. in Kissinger (1964), who summarizes Metternich’s strategy thus: “Everything depended, therefore, not only on the defeat of Napoleon but on the manner in which it was achieved, not only on the creation of a coalition but also on the principle in the name of which it was to fight.” Kissinger (1964), 25.

50 Ibid., 87. Kissinger elaborates the point later in the text on page 147: “There exist two kinds of equilibrium then: a general equilibrium [fortuitous balance] which makes it risky for one power or group of powers to attempt to impose their will on the remainder; and a particular equilibrium [contrived balance] which defines the historical relation of certain powers among each other. The former is a deterrent against general war: the latter the condition of smooth co-operation.” In other words, a general (fortuitous) equilibrium makes international society possible; a particular (contrived) equilibrium makes society stable.
maintenance of the international equilibrium. This need explains why Castlereagh failed and why Metternich succeeded; it also explains why the final status quo alliance excluded Britain.

Castlereagh tried to prove to states that they must unite against the threat of Russian predominance and revolutionary France. He failed. But Metternich did not. Kissinger pinpoints the difference between the two statesmen’s approaches: “if Castlereagh’s failure had proved that the equilibrium could not be achieved through a demonstration of its necessity, Metternich’s almost imperceptible complementary effort had created the moral framework for reopening the issue by an appeal to legitimacy.”

A state will not defend the balance of power for its own sake. The country which at first appears to contradict this dictum in fact confirms it: Britain would not defend the status quo in Europe. She would act to stop the emergence of a hegemon, but would not defend the Treaties; for domestic reasons Castlereagh could not commit to a defense of the Continental balance.

Even the Balancer of Europe would not defend the balance of power. Without some principle tying her to other states, Britain retreated from the alliance of status quo states.

A Legitimate Peace

The purpose of the treaty was the reestablishment and preservation of that international society the Napoleonic wars had destroyed. To prevent a revisionist

---

52 Note: the post-Napoleonic system was built, not by Russia, the leading state in the system, but by Austria, by all accounts the weakest. In effect, Russia was constrained by the Concert without realizing it. This fact rebuts the theory in After Victory, for it implies postwar systems are not necessarily built by the most powerful states to institutionalize their gains, but by weaker states to hold back the stronger. In other words, there is no constitutional bargain—stronger states do not necessarily trade constraints for acquiescence.
challenge to international society, all major powers must view the *status quo* as legitimate, since any state that believes itself wronged by a peace will seek to revise the terms of that peace. In other words, defeated states must be successfully reincorporated into international society or else utterly destroyed. The victorious coalition had neither the will nor the desire to destroy France; therefore, it faced the challenge of her successful reincorporation into international society. Early in negotiations Metternich recognized this necessity; wisely, he did not seek to punish France for her role in the destruction of Europe. Instead, the Powers confined her to her historic boundaries, from which she could not object to the peace on grounds of principle.

The great monarchies regarded their covenants with each other almost as holy, and they would not violate them on principle. As well, they recognized in that restive Republic to the west a mortal threat to absolutism; the regents therefore joined in united opposition to revision and Revolution, both embodied by France. For reasons of monarchic solidarity and domestic necessity, the emperors of the east joined together to quarantine the national disease.

Still, conservative absolutism need not have underpinned the postwar order. Alexander I had long toyed with liberal schemes, including thoughts of a national

---

53 Bridge and Bullen note its purpose “was to restore ‘those relations of reciprocal confidence and goodwill which the fatal effects of the Revolution and of the system of Conquest had for so long a time disturbed.” F.R. Bridge and Roger Bullen, *The Great Powers and the European States System 1815-1914* (London: Longman, 1980), 33.

54 “Metternich was firmly convinced that the period of order and stability that he hoped to inaugurate in Europe could only come out of a peace settlement which all the major Powers believed to be just.” Andrew Milne, *Metternich* (Totowa: Rowman and Littlefield, 1975), 46.

55 “The monarchs of the autocratic monarchies regarded treaties, particularly those which they had concluded with each other, as binding personal commitments which their honour and duty towards God decreed that they must uphold” Bridge, 12.
Poland. His turn toward reaction and zealotry resulted from individual influences upon his psyche, none of which were predictable, and certainly none of which were structural. Had Alexander not embraced conservative solidarity, Metternich was prepared to ally with France to contain the Russian behemoth. Indeed, Russia herself was prepared to ally with France against England. In other words, the formation of an absolutist order could not have been predicted ex ante, as other equally likely alliances could have materialized. They would not have been as stable, true: but therein lies the genius of Metternich, for the order he constructed was the best of all which might have arisen.

Metternich understood, perhaps better than any statesman before or since, the dictates of reality. Unlike Castlereagh, he did not embrace a utopian rationalism; rather, he understood that peace required not only a clear demonstration of the need for a balance of power, but a common ideology to hold the alliance together. He was a paragon of realist diplomacy.

The Era of Metternich: the Long Peace

The stability of an international order is determined by its ability to prevent change within the core. The Vienna system derived its unequalled success from the clarity of its rules, the solidity of its balance, and the solidarity of Powers around its

---

56 Gulick notes that “to Vienna Alexander brought one of the crowning inconsistencies of all, a policy toward Poland which was conceived in terms of nationality and moral duty and was defended on equilibrist grounds.” Edward Vose Gulick, *Europe’s Classical Balance of Power: A Case History of the Theory and Practice of One of the Great Concepts of European Statecraft* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1967), 190.

57 Most notable of these influences was the religious eccentric Madame de Krudener. Alexander I is infamous for his shifting moods: he “consorted first with liberals and ideologues and finally with conservatives and mystics.” Algernon Cecil, *Metternich: A Study of his Period and Personality* (London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1947), 90.

58 Bridge, 35.

59 In other words, the emergence of an absolutist order was determined almost entirely by 1st image variables; 3rd image variables played little or no role. Contingency is the word of the day.
central legitimating principle. Never since have states so successfully defended the *status quo*.

*The Quadruple and Holy Alliances*

As Gentz observed, Metternich and Castlereagh crafted the balance around three states which were “peaceful by necessity”—Austria, Prussia, and England. The Vienna settlement established borders such that neither Britain, Austria nor Prussia could realize gains on the Continent. Because any challenge to the *status quo* would come at their expense, these three states had vested interests in its defense.

Nevertheless, the Quadruple Alliance served mainly to deter the possibility of Russian revisionism, the only goal to which England, lacking ideological ties with Austria and Prussia, would commit. Ultimately, not the Quadruple but the Holy Alliance defended the *status quo*.

After his reactionary turn, Alexander I proposed a Holy Alliance among the conservative powers. Though initially an outgrowth of the Tsar’s eccentricities, the Continental empires embraced it as a buttress against nationalism and French designs. The Revolution, if it spread, promised to undermine the eastern monarchies. At its heart, the absolutist solidarity sprang from the dread of this Terror. In tandem with Austria, Russia desired nothing more than the perpetuation of the Vienna settlement. Thus

---


62 “His [Tsar Nicholas’] policies, in fact, were the same as those of Metternich: to preserve peace and the 1815 treaties” *Ibid.*, 18.
solidified the *status quo* alliance, a balance built by the conservative monarchs to sustain the principle of their existence.

*The Congress System and the Rules of European Diplomacy*

Rules strengthen an international order insofar as they clearly distinguish an immutable core from a negotiable periphery. The Vienna system laid out in indisputable terms the fixed necessities of international society.

The borders established after the defeat of Napoleon were inviolate, the unquestioned foundation of international society. In fact, the Quadruple Alliance explicitly bound the allies to act should any state infringe any of the territorial provisions of the Second Treaty of Paris. In fact, so secure were the territorial settlements that the 1815 divisions of Poland survived unaltered until the First World War.

The borders established at Paris were infrangible. To resolve other conflicts the statesmen established a system of European Congresses. Though they did not always function perfectly, these gatherings established the precedent for the peaceful resolution of conflict.

*A Century of Stability*

An international order comprises a contrived balance of power, a legitimating principle, and a set of rules. Metternich’s system contained all three: the balance of power

---

63 “In 1815 the common obligation to uphold the treaty structure of Europe was given great emphasis by the victorious allies, who regarded the General Act of the Congress of Vienna as the foundation of European territorial order,” Bridge, 11.

64 *Ibid.*, 34.

was built around the three central satisfied states;\textsuperscript{66} the Holy Alliance manifested the legitimating principle of conservative absolutism; and the Congress system contained a set of rules including the inviolable strictures of the Treaties of Paris and the commitment to peaceful settlement of disputes at future Congresses. For decades the Conservative system functioned almost without flaw, and for the entire 19\textsuperscript{th} century the five great powers coexisted, their number constant throughout. For 100 years European international society persisted unchanged. The feat has no rival.

**The Collapse of Metternich’s System**

For all its strength, Metternich’s system was not perfect—no human invention is. Britain produced difficulties, and her gradual retreat from direct involvement on the Continent forced Austria more and more into the arms of Russia. After the Congress of Troppau and the crisis in Naples, Britain largely abandoned the Congress system; moreover, the loss of Castlereagh left Metternich without a partner as committed as he to the preservation of European stability. The increasing reliance on the Russian alliance seriously narrowed Austria’s policy options, and by midcentury the system had ossified. Nonetheless, for all these difficulties, the system held firmly together for half a century, and society held for another half. Its decline should not obscure its remarkable success, still unequalled.

The Conservative Order’s greatest strength was its legitimacy. Metternich’s masterpiece ultimately sprang not from a precise balance of power or perfectly functioning rules but from an exceptional dedication among the status quo states to a

\textsuperscript{66} On the shift from a fortuitous to a contrived balance of power, Gentz noted that “[i]n place of the principle of equilibrium…there has succeeded a principle of general union,” Gentz 71-2.
common legitimating principle. His system failed only when the ideological ties binding together the Holy Alliance unraveled. Austria’s behaviour in Italy and Poland delegitimized her position as a model of absolutist rule in Europe, and the Crimean War betrayed the principle of monarchical solidarity underpinning the Holy Alliance. The national unification of Germany dealt the mortal blow to Metternich’s system, removing any possibility of a renewed *status quo* alliance built on a conservative principle. The collapse of the Conservative Order was a collapse of legitimacy.

The Austrian Loss of Legitimacy

In Italy Austria first felt her legitimacy slip. Metternich intended Italy to showcase Austria as an example to Europe. Instead, she was viewed as oppressive and backward. To his credit, Metternich, despite temptations otherwise, did not annex Italian territory, thereby preserving the borders established at his system’s inception. But Austria’s hand in Italy did nothing to strengthen her legitimacy or claims of enlightened absolutism.

The annexation of Krakow in 1846 dealt another blow to Austrian legitimacy. Metternich built his system on the sanctity of compacts, most especially the 1815 agreements establishing the postwar order. Yet, the annexation of this free city, however seemingly innocuous, dispelled the unbreakable bonds of Paris. If some clauses of the Treaty were negotiable, then all were. Throughout the Napoleonic wars Metternich had avoided at all costs violating preexisting agreements, despite that his forbearance vexed the Coalition and jeopardized the defeat of Napoleon. Yet, by altering the settlement in

---

67 “Austria’s reputation for good government…in Italy, Austria could really present herself as a model for sovereigns to follow” Sked, 19.
Poland, Austria implied that the post-Napoleonic boundaries were not sacrosanct. The annexation of Krakow helped to undermine the distinction between immutable and negotiable interests, the only purpose of international rules.

The Holy Alliance died in the Crimea. An international order persists only so long as an alliance of status quo states will defend it. Austria’s actions during the Crimean War destroyed the conservative solidarity of the Holy Alliance. The snub offended Russia most grievously, particularly after she had saved Austria in Hungary not a decade previously. The Crimea lay on the periphery as the Vienna system defined it, but unfortunately anything on the periphery is fair game. For all its strengths, Metternich’s system could not differentiate the core from the Continent; its inability to deal with potentially balance-shifting conflicts outside Europe weakened the post-Napoleonic order. This weakness enabled the fracture of the Holy Alliance, the failure of legitimacy, and the collapse of international order.

Germany and the End of Order

Though the Austrian loss of legitimacy and its betrayal of the Holy Alliance confronted Metternich’s system with difficulties, these difficulties were not insurmountable: the monarchs could reconcile, and Austria could restore its reputation. But the transformation of Prussia into a national state fatally undermined the foundation of the post-Napoleonic order.

Any well-founded order must rest upon a legitimating principle common to a majority of its major powers. Metternich’s system rested upon the Holy Alliance’s shared
conservatism and opposition to the Revolution. After national unification, Germany could not defend an order in the name of a principle she had forsaken.

Without an identity beyond its own aggrandizement, without a principle binding it to other states, Germany could not be part of a status quo alliance. Neither could it found a new international order: though Bismarck constructed the most intricate alliance network of the modern age, he could not institutionalize it—that is, he could never move international politics beyond mere anarchy into an international order, because he could not create rules and an underlying legitimacy to reinforce his contrived balance of power. His skillful balancing, for all its brilliance, lacked a unifying ideology, and so failed to create a system that would endure in his absence.

Conclusion

While Metternich’s system expired in 1867, his society would endure much longer, and the generations of Europeans which enjoyed the long peace before the Great War owe their prosperity to this man. Vain and reactionary, Metternich bequeathed to Europe the greatest international order in the history of the world.

After the fall of Metternich’s system, Bismarck admirably maintained a relatively stable European peace throughout his long tenure. But that peace could only be transitory, for no international order existed to reproduce it. The increasing instability of the period...

---

68 The legitimacy problem Germany created appears even in its own politics, since, “in contrast to other nation-states, Germany did not possess any integrating philosophical framework…[its] principal purpose was to increase its own power.” Henry Kissinger, Diplomacy (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1994), 169.
69 Bismarck’s “alliance system [was] a ‘conjuring trick…‘expediens’ rather than creativ[e]…Ultimately Bismarck’s alliance system failed because it did not remove the basic causes of international instability.” D.G. Williamson, Bismarck and Germany 1862-1890, 2nd ed. (London: Longman, 1998), 79-80.
70 “The four great-power conflicts of the mid century were not fought a l’outrance: the belligerents were concerned essentially with limited and localized objectives.” Bridge, 1. That is, the mid-nineteenth century wars did not destroy international society, because all states still recognized the elementary goals of the other great powers.
preceding the First World War testifies to the fragility of international society when unsupported by an international order.

To some extent, Metternich’s system was doomed to fail: absolute monarchy could not endure forever, and sooner or later history would sweep out its dated ideas. Had Metternich undertook to reconstitute the empire on principles more in line with the times, a different, perhaps more stable order might have emerged. But to ask of one man that he not only construct the most successful order in international history but also reform an empire burdened with an immense bureaucracy and inhabited by nations whose fiery competition two hundred years have not resolved, is to ask more than any mere mortal could possibly accomplish. Metternich was a man, not a god, and even a great man can accomplish only so much.

Metternich established his system within the language of absolutism and conservatism in Europe, and so it survived for forty years; Bismarck never institutionalized his gains, and so they did not outlive his tenure. International society became increasingly unstable, until at last it collapsed in Sarajevo, 1914. However well Bismarck balanced power, he could not construct an order to preserve his Europe. And so his Europe died.
The center and characteristic of the old order was that unstable thing which we used to call the 'balance of power.'

–Wilson

The preceding chapter broadly discussed Metternich and his system, perhaps the most impressive in history. I now turn to Wilson and his system, perhaps the worst ever devised, resulting in one of the most catastrophic eras ever to wrack humanity. Where Metternich’s system rested soundly on the principles of international politics, Wilson’s spurned the essential elements of order. In this folly it made possible one of history’s greatest tragedies.

**Wilson and the Construction of his System**

*The Language of Victory*

The principle of any postwar order is the principle in the name of which the war was fought. During the Napoleonic Wars, Metternich meticulously articulated the Allies’ opposition in the language of conservative solidarity. Similarly, Wilson ensured that, following American entry into the war, the Allies consistently conducted the war in the name of his universal principles, as laid out in the Fourteen Points. These principles would form the foundation of the settlement at Versailles.

Mindful of the indispensability of American involvement, French and British leaders tolerated Wilson’s idealism. They calculated that words were cheap, that whatever the wartime rhetoric the victors would negotiate peace in the traditional
language of international politics. They were dead wrong. The Allies fell into a common trap: they did not understand that words are weapons, that the manner of victory is as important as its achievement. The old order had passed, and its rules and norms had passed with it; the new order would come with its own language and institutions, ones which would grow out of the conduct of the war.

Yet the old powers also laid the groundwork of order. Whereas Metternich fought an ideology, the villain of the Great War was not the Revolution but Germany, whose culpability would follow it to Versailles. By vilifying Germany the Allies made her smooth reincorporation into international society almost impossible. Reparations were not a matter of material compensation: they were the manifestation of international justice.

The enunciation of the Fourteen Points and their distribution across the Continent determined the normative framework for the postwar order. The war was fought for national self-determination, to make the world safe for democracy; the postwar order could only rest upon those same ideals. The inability of France and Britain to recognize the significance of Wilson’s wartime rhetoric laid the seeds of discord which would erupt at the conference; similarly, the vilification of Germany meant that any postwar terms would be harsh, complicating the much-needed reincorporation of Germany into international society.

Pernicious Utopianism

71 “During the war they [the Allied governments] worked out by secret treaties the main lines of a settlement based on the right of the victors to dictate changes in the status quo, and to make provision for their own security at the expense of the vanquished…Obviously the peace program outlined in the secret treaties was incompatible with Wilson’s program.” Raymond James Sontag, European Diplomatic History 1871-1932 (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, Inc., 1933), 258-9.
Too often Wilson sacrificed the concrete necessities of order for the chimera of a new and brighter world. Wilson faulted the balance of power for the outbreak of World War I, and so he determined to create a new order without that ancient, barbaric principle. He utopian idealism failed to understand the security needs of the European powers. France required a security guarantee—she could not face Germany alone. She received none. Britain still tried to pursue a policy of splendid isolation, unaware that Continental dynamics had changed irreversibly. Worse still, America retreated once more across the Atlantic, unwilling to accept the responsibilities of a major power. All failed to recognize the need for a concerted restraint of Germany. For all their failures, the politicians at Versailles constructed some semblance of a contrived balance. Germany was for all purposes disarmed and the Rhineland demilitarized. Yet, this balance did not reflect potential capabilities, a failure that would see the system swiftly undone.

The balance, such as it was, extended to the seas. At the Washington Conference, Britain, the United States, and Japan settled on naval forces of the ratio 5:5:3. For a time, this agreement ended the naval arms race in the Pacific. The same agreement foisted naval parity with Italy upon France, much to the displeasure of Paris. Yet, like the Continental balance, the Naval Conference did not account for the potential power of states, and by 1936 states had ignored its strictures into obsolescence.

---

72 “They fought to do away with an older order and to establish a new one, and the center and characteristic of the old order was that unstable thing which we used to call the ‘balance of power.’” Arthur S. Link, ed., The Papers of Woodrow Wilson, v.53, November 9, 1918-January 11, 1919 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986), 532.

73 “French strategy was based on one major consideration: the need to find firm guarantees for security in the event of the revival of German power.” Richard Overy, Origins of the Second World War, 3rd ed. (Harlow: Pearson Longman, 2008), 18.

74 The Washington Conference contrasts interestingly with the naval arms race in the North Sea pre-WWI. In the former, Britain yielded its maritime hegemony willingly; in the latter, it strove with Germany to the end. I suspect the difference results from a) states can more easily accept declining power in multipolar systems; b) the conference was after WWI, when Britain was exhausted; and c) the United States is a much more attractive rival than Germany.
Delayed Demarcation

Wilson forwent resolution of essential questions in order to ensure the passage of his pet projects. But this delay violates a fundamental maxim of the construction of international orders: states must resolve questions concerning the core immediately, lest the delay imply the questions’ negotiability.\(^75\)

The Vienna settlement partitioned Poland and firmly identified the new boundaries as inviolable. By the end of the Paris Peace Conference, no one knew quite where Poland began.\(^76\) In fact, the Treaty of Versailles was signed with scarcely a single border resolved east of Vienna.

Of all these unresolved problems, perhaps the most difficult was Austria-Hungary. The Habsburgs may have weathered the war, but they could not survive the peace. Past settlements had seen the reconstitution of the monarchy; Versailles would see its long-awaited demise. The organizing principle of the empire fundamentally contradicted the principle of national self-determination Wilson so vehemently pronounced at Versailles. Austria-Hungary bore no more guilt than Germany for the war; yet, where the one survived, the other was parceled into half a dozen pieces—pieces whose borders lacked any clear definition.

The problem typifies the Versailles settlement: the diplomats failed to settle questions of vital importance, delaying them for later discussion—all in order secure the

\(^75\) Ironically, Wilson insisted upon the establishment of the League during the Conference because he and his opponents partially recognized this same maxim: “for they knew well that if it [the League] were left to some future conference, after all the essential questions in the war with Germany had been settled, it would come to nothing: it would be talked to death.” Ray Stannard Baker, *What Wilson Did at Paris* (Garden City: Doubleday, Page & Company, 1919), 39.

League of Nations and other idealistic fantasies. The ideological blinders with which Wilson entered Paris and upon which the war had been fought hamstrung the peace negotiations. Moreover, Wilson’s blind utopian idealism sacrificed the essentials of international order for the ephemera of a new way of politics. The eventual settlement created an order with a weak balance of power, latent legitimacy conflicts, and underspecified rules. The system could not endure.

The Era of Wilson and Versailles: the Interwar Period

From its inception the Versailles system encountered difficulty. The balance of power required Anglo-French solidarity against a German resurgence. Yet, rather than accept the necessity of alliance with France Britain instead sought to pursue its traditional role as an insular balancer. As well, Europe saw the rise of rival ideologies, and Italy fell under the Duce’s sway. Still, the rise of a hostile ideology alone does not necessitate the collapse of an international order: after all, Italy became a revisionist state only after the rise of Hitler’s Germany. A shifting distribution of power is as important as ideological transformation. Had Wilson and the victors constructed a superior system, one with stronger rules, a balance of power, and, most importantly, a sound legitimating principle, their order might have endured.

The Impossibility of National Self-Determination

---

77 France was “disappointed at the way in which Britain had withdrawn from direct involvement in Europe at the end of the war,” Overy, 18.
78 This argument lets alone the likely valid claim that the settlement itself enabled the rise of Fascist ideology. Davidson (2006) makes the sound point that Italian revisionism only followed the rise of Germany, that is, a shift in both power and ideology.
The principle of national self-determination is irreconcilable with international order. National self-determination assets that a nation has the right to self government, and that every person has a nation. Therefore, an order based on this principle must embrace everyone, that is, there exists nothing outside an international order based on national self-determination. If nothing exists outside an order, then there is no periphery, that is, there are no negotiable interests. As a state increases its power, it will desire to realize gains; but if there are no negotiable interests, there are no gains for it to realize within international society; the state will therefore become revisionist. In effect, national self-determination removes the dynamic stability of international order. Without a periphery on which to bargain, any significant change disrupts the balance of power and engenders a revisionist threat to international society.

Furthermore, national self-determination is incompatible with territorial sovereignty. The dispersion of nations does not coincide with geographic boundaries; any political divisions of territory necessarily will exclude some nationals and include some foreigners. But if these foreigners have a right to their own state, then they can attempt to revise the status quo within the language of its legitimating principle; that is, the language of national self-determination serves not to uphold the status quo but to delegitimize it. In asserting a principle of national self-determination, Wilson attempted to reorganize world politics along a new ordering principle; in fact, he laid the foundation for a revisionist challenge to his system.

_Crisis and Impotence_
In 1931 Japan invaded Manchuria. Legally, the League bound its members to oppose aggression, but without a balance in the Far East, the League had only moral suasion and international law to oppose Japan. Even the rules of the League proved ineffective—without a clear outline of the steps to counter aggression, neither America nor Britain would oppose Japan, each suspecting the other of negligent buck-passing. No status quo alliance arose; the great powers did nothing.

---

79 “The Members of the League undertake to respect and preserve as against external aggression the territorial integrity and existing political independence of all Members of the League,” Walworth, 565.
The Collapse of Wilson’s System

Wilson’s system fell prey to all three failures of order. So total was its demise that retrospective disentanglement of its many failures is almost impossible.

Anarchy is a self-help system; states will not depend upon collective security for their safety. Yet, the politicians at Versailles made almost no arrangements for their mutual defense. France required an alliance with Britain; it settled for third-rate Continental friendships. In 1935, a paper alliance of Britain, the USSR, Italy and France agreed to contain Germany; in reality, it had no force whatsoever, since no one wanted the Red Army to enter central Europe and British isolationism prevented action. Even more absurdly, the great powers deluded themselves into the belief that Poland could help to counterbalance Germany.\(^{80}\) This wishful thinking was nothing more than willful blindness. At Munich, the great powers would not risk Continental war to defend Czechoslovakia. After the Nazi-Soviet pact, Russia would not help Britain and France; what’s more, both of the Western European powers lacked the will to fight for a distant peace.\(^{81}\) After Vienna, statesmen knew the commitments necessary to maintain equilibrium, and they constructed alliances accordingly. Versailles let the powers drift apart, each uncertain how to uphold the balance.

As well, the flaws latent in the principle of national self-determination enabled German revision and prevented the formation of a status quo alliance. Instead of preserving international society, the principle of legitimacy articulated at Versailles

---

80 “the role of a counterweight to Germany would now fall to east-central Europe, an ‘eastern barrier’ in which Poland would be ‘le meilleur rampart.’” Piotr Wandycz, “The Polish Question,” in The Treaty of Versailles: a Reassessment After 75 Years, ed. Manfred Boemeke et al. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 320.

81 “no effective aid would come from Russia…‘nothing that France or [Britain] could do could possibly save Czechoslovakia’…to avert war the Sudeten Germans should be given to Germany,” Raymond J. Sontag, A Broken World: 1919-1939 (New York: Harper & Row, 1971), 339.
undermined it. The contradictory claims to which the principle of self-determination gave rise legitimated German demands in Czechoslovakia. Versailles established national self-determination as the language of justification, but within this language the Western powers could not justify opposition to Hitler.\(^{82}\)

Finally, the Versailles system fell for its inability to identify Hitler as a revisionist threat. Because nothing clearly defined the core of international society, the Western powers could not determine whether the gains Germany sought constituted a threat to the status quo. A policy of appeasement can function, but only if that policy permits no gains outside the periphery: appeasement without delineation of core and peripheral interests is nothing more than cowardice. Confounded by the contradictions of their own principles, blind to the demands of the balance of power, and without any clear conception of their core interests, the leaders of the Western powers sought shelter in a policy of appeasement.

Eventually a status quo alliance emerged to defend the core. But the Allied stand at Poland was too little, too late. By 1939, the western democracies had already allowed the balance of power to collapse, had already allowed the core to disintegrate.\(^{83}\) They recognized that an attack upon Poland was an attack upon the core of international society; they failed to realize that the betrayal of Czechoslovakia a year before had already destroyed international order and the only hope for peace.

\(^{82}\) “Stronger than this [anxiety to avoid war] was the feeling that in the Sudeten question they had a weak moral case...The Sudeten Germans...The Czechs themselves had contributed unconsciously to this frame of mind by insisting that Czechoslovakia was a national state.” A.J.P. Taylor, *Struggles for Supremacy: Diplomatic Essays by A.J.P. Taylor*, ed. Chris Wrigley (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2000), 189.

\(^{83}\) “[T]here was a growing contradiction between the existing international system and the reality of power.” Overy, 10.
Conclusion

By all accounts the Allies at Versailles had an easier task than the Alliance at Vienna: the First World War far exceeded the brutality of the Napoleonic Wars, and even the defeated powers desired peace. Liberalism was ascendant and unified all the victors, and a status quo alliance was ready at hand. Yet in 1919 the politicians failed, and peace lasted less than two decades; in 1815, the statesmen succeeded, and the peace they inaugurated lasted almost a century.

Wilson thought the First World War would be the last. He planned to eliminate Old World diplomacy; now, American-style idealism would govern the world. Collective security, not the balance of power, would henceforth uphold international society, and beyond any shade of doubt a golden age of peace would dawn. Instead came darkness at noon and the twilight of the gods, the collapse of order and the obliteration of the European powers.
Each [state] may and should for the sake of its own security demand that the others enter with it into a constitution similar to the civil constitution, for under such a constitution each can be secure in his right.

—Kant

International politics occur either in a state of nature or a state of nations, a state of war or a state of peace. The structure of international relations creates the opportunity for either to emerge, but the course of history hinges upon the choices of individual statesmen.

The safeguards of peace, the elements of order, do not differ across time. They derive from the eternal constraints of anarchy and the inherent nature of actors. Whenever it lasts, peace endures for the same reasons. The democratic peace, then, simply exemplifies a working international order; it is ultimately no different from the absolutist peace of the 19th century. Metternich’s system rested upon the principle of conservatism, perhaps the soundest principle to underlie an international order: the stability of an order is defined by its ability to resist change, and resistance to change is the definition of conservatism. Still, this aspect addresses only the static stability of international orders. Whether Liberalism is a more dynamic system—that is, it allows redefinition of the core without major upheaval—requires further study.

Indeed, the Liberal order has endured longer than any other. This longevity might reflect the greater justice of its governments, their internal stability strengthening the
larger international order. The question then arises—if the Liberal order is the best possible order, will the current international society ever fall?

Perhaps. After all, Wilson’s order was built on liberal ideals, and it fell. Fortunately, events afforded liberalism a second chance. The post-1945 Liberal Order corrected the mistakes of its predecessor: the Eastern and Western blocs were expressly inviolable, and each side formed alliances around a common ideology, both with the purpose of defending the status quo. But an order rests on more than principle. While the liberal order may rest comfortably on its legitimacy, it must eternally safeguard the other elements of international stability.

These elements are even now in doubt. In modern times, the difficulties presented by Iranian acquisition of nuclear arms may represent a failure of rules, since the major powers have not agreed whether such acquisition constitutes a threat to the international system. Likewise, the unfettered expansion of NATO obscures rather than clarifies the interests that the Western alliance will defend. The delegation of international security to the U.N. Security Council also disrupts international politics: since a status quo alliance can only contain states with a shared legitimating principle, neither Russia nor China will defend world order.

The Versailles system collapsed when the balance of power failed. But defenders of the Liberal order should not therefore grow complacent in their overwhelming capabilities, nor should they cease to tend the ideational ties binding the West together. Most importantly of all, the Liberal powers must never allow the rules of international politics to obscure their core interests. If the Liberal Order is to endure, its defenders must maintain a balance of power, cultivate democratic solidarity, and clarify the core of
interstate politics. Only these will preserve international society and the peace of nations. To do less is to lose all.

And in the past, men have lost all. The failure to understand the requirements of peace, to accurately appraise reality, has cost millions of lives and untold treasure. Politicians may deny necessity, but they may not deny its consequences: when we despise reality, we risk everything. The true statesman is not the idealist who tries to remake the world, but the realist who makes the best of the world he has been given.

States differ from men, and from this difference arises the possibility of their ungoverned society. But that society cannot sustain itself: for it to endure, men must construct an order to preserve it, to bind states to its defense. We cannot predict this outcome from the structure of international politics: states as often clash in titanic struggle as unite in well-ordered concord. The emergence of the state of nations from the state of nature, of harmony on Olympus, depends on human beings and all their unfathomable peculiarities. Whatever are the gods, their ways are made by men.
Appendix: Definitions

Actor – the basic ontological unit of this model, typically identified with the state. It has three attributes:

1) capabilities – an actor *can* effect an outcome. Capabilities are a function of resources and technology. An actor has finite capabilities.

2) interests – an actor *desires* to effect an outcome. Interests are a function of values and identity. An actor has infinite interests.

3) perceptions – an actor recognizes the capabilities and interests of itself and others. Perceptions are a function of actual capabilities and interests and processing power. To some degree an actor always misperceives the world.

Anarchy – the absence of hierarchy. (Anarchy implies neither disorder nor chaos.)

Balance of Power – neutralization of capabilities, i.e., the removal of the capability or the interest (deterrence) to effect an outcome.
   - Balance of Power, Fortuitous – usually accidental neutralization of capabilities that would alter the number of states
   - Balance of Power, Contrived – conscious neutralization of capabilities that would alter the core.

Core – set of interests the change in any one of which will jeopardize the elementary goals of at least one major power.

Elementary Goals (of states) – “goals stand out as elementary or primary, inasmuch as their fulfillment in some measure is a condition not merely of this or that sort of social life, but of social life as such…any other goals a society may set for itself presuppose the realization of these goals in some degree.”

They include survival, property, and promise-keeping. This analysis focuses on survival.

International Society – set of states which mutually respect elementary goals. (Major war is impossible in an international society.)

Legitimating Principle – principle by which the use of force is justified.

Major Power – any actor that can be existentially threatened only by a coalition containing at least one other major power.

Major War – a war which threatens the existence of a major power. (The existence of a major power includes its existence as a major power.)

Norm – expectation of behaviour; in the terms here employed, a norm is the perception of future action. (Since norms are reducible to perceptions, they do not have an ontological status independent of actors.)

---

84 Bull, 4. I have not included in this definition all which Bull lists, since his catalog exceeds mere comprehension to include goals by no means essential to all others.
Periphery – set of interests which are negotiable, that is, change in any one does not jeopardize the elementary goals of a major power.

State of Peace – the state of nations, that is, international society, wherein major war is impossible. A state of peace implies not harmony of relations but treatment of elementary goals as inviolate.

State of War – the state of nature; major war is possible. A state of war implies that all interstate politics are conducted under the shadow of existential threats.

(International) Structure – the relationship of actors to each other, that is, the distribution of capabilities, interests, and perceptions across units. (Since actors are the sole ontological unit in this model, structure can contain nothing else.)

(International) System – pattern of interstate relations. (The English School traditionally distinguishes an international system from an international society.)

Utopian (vision of international order) – denial of the importance of an essential element of order.
  Utopian idealism – denial of the importance of the balance of power
  Utopian rationalism – denial of the importance of a legitimating principle
  Utopian constructivism – denial of the importance of a set of rules
Annotated Bibliography


A contemporary piece sympathetic to Wilson, which looks hopefully toward the future. The author attempts to locate Wilson as a wise and pragmatic statesman who successfully maneuvered between idealistic pressures at home and cynically realist pressures abroad, all while upholding his ideals. The author is also delusional.


A brief account, the text offers a clear outline of the overarching dynamics of the period and its major events. It has been republished in a second edition.


While I draw on the work more because it typifies constructivist approaches to the issues I discuss than for its own argument, the text’s merits extend beyond those mentioned here. Most significantly, it addresses how and why domestic legitimacy changes and how this change affects international politics, an issue still desperate for theoretical resolution.


A classic of International Relations theory. Bull’s emphasis on the balance of power separates him from many in the English School. The book’s merits lie primarily in the first, second, and fifth chapters, the others tending to description and vague ramblings without strong theoretical development.


One of the most rigorous pieces of English School scholarship and a fascinating blend of its ideas with neorealist thought. Still, for all its strengths, it does not transcend the difficulties typical to its paradigm.


One of the foundational texts of international relations. While Carr claims to urge a middle course between realism and utopianism, in fact his book falls firmly within the realist tradition. Curiously, Carr also discusses the interdependence of theory and reality, an important point the realist paradigm should never have abandoned. Finally, his understanding of the philosophy of science does not.


   The article presents a typology of rules and a general discussion of these variations within a Cold War context.


   Argues that, absent coercive force, states will obey international law inasmuch as they see it as legitimate, which argument underpins the conception of order I present. The article proceeds to discuss the various ways by which laws acquire legitimacy.


   Gentz’ perception and prescience are striking. To my knowledge there is no better summary of the dynamics in 1818; this brief analysis far exceeds anything a modern tome has to say about the period.


While Heller’s arguments are not particularly original, he delivers his critique soundly. His article lays out in a single piece the various (mis)interpretations of Hobbes in the IR literature. Still, more extensive reference to the literature would have been useful.

Mr. Hobbes’ recent discourse on antediluvian marine biology and its significant appearances in the sacred theophanic literature of primitive nomadic Levantine cultures crafts a powerful argument which substantially enhances our understanding of this extraordinarily unusual and understudied species. Its groundbreaking work lays the foundation for all future inquiry into this topic and will remain the standard of the subject for at least another three hundred and fifty years.

An able work, albeit a flawed one. Ikenberry’s argument is intriguing, but ultimately undermined by a vague and poorly articulated conception of order. Furthermore, while he discusses the factors promoting long-term stability, Ikenberry does not address how constitutions (orders) promote stability in the short term, that is, how orders function.

Fairly ordinary in its disdain for empiricism and encouragement of more constructive approaches. Though it offers a brief, concise summary of the English School—for which reason I have drawn upon it here—the article makes no real contribution to our understanding of international relations.

A brief but surprisingly thorough volume on order, discussing both modern and classical approaches, with an emphasis on Bull and Grotius. It does not clearly advance its own theory of the subject.


The precursor of *A World Restored*.

A book whose breadth outmatches its depth. Kissinger’s prose is as engaging as ever, but *Diplomacy* lacks the masterful analysis and coherent vision found elsewhere in Kissinger’s corpus. It serves well as a general history, but it falls far short of *A World Restored*.


A.J.P. Taylor called the book “a rhapsody, not a work of history, and the best thing is to gather the plums of Professor Kissinger’s utterance.” In truth, Taylor is right: the merits of Kissinger’s opus are not the novelty of its historical interpretation but rather its systematic analysis and sheer readability (although, to be fair, Taylor’s own enduring appeal lies not in the power of his insight but the eccentricity of his prose). *A World Restored* assembles generations of diplomatic and theoretic wisdom from the realist tradition into a superlative account of a single period. It has no equal.


An exhaustive publication of everything Wilson could ever have possibly said or written. The work contains roughly one billion volumes. Needless to say, Wilson was an academic.


While Little’s discussion of the great balance of power theorists using a single set of terms is interesting, to some extent he imposes his own typologies on the authors he examines. Moreover, the inclusion of Bull amongst the archetypal realists reflects not Bull’s affinity for these theories but rather Little’s particular approach to IR theory. Little’s own analysis falls prey to the muddled thinking typical of the English School. Ultimately the book deserves praise as a sound introduction to the classic theories and not for its understanding of international politics.


An intriguing piece of political theory which discusses Augustine’s realist vision of politics and its relation to modern IR scholars, including Carr and Morgenthau.

One of the modern classics of international relations scholarship. The work is the clearest and most controversial articulation of offensive realism.

An engaging biography which breaks little new ground. Perhaps this is a virtue, given the depths to which other biographies of Metternich have stooped to gain critical attention, however disparaging.

A readable if erratic account of the events of 1919.

A strong, brief introduction to a topic with an extensive scholarship. Contains a collection of relevant primary materials and a gloss of major figures and terms.


An historian, his essays focus far more on detail than theoretical development. His sallies against the arguments in political science often misunderstand the theories and terms the discipline has developed (for instance, his misinterpretation of the balance of power leads him to deny its prevalence in the Vienna system). This criticism does not reduce his powers of historical analysis, which remain of the highest caliber.

An account strongly favorable to Metternich and his achievements. It tends to view his decisions, even when morally culpable, as excusable and necessary to international peace.

The work recognizes Metternich’s achievements without blinding itself to his flaws. It presents a solid account of its subject, the decline of the Habsburg Empire.

A thorough canvass of diplomatic history in multiple volumes.


A large collection of primary documents, organized and introduced so as to be unreadable.

Written with lively wit and prose, Taylor’s short essays are insightful, if often one-sided. Where Kissinger’s portrayal overrates Metternich, Taylor’s treatment of the diplomat underestimates the diplomat’s skill and misunderstands his war aims.
A lot of material in a little book. It has all the foibles that typify Taylor’s histories.


A collection of primary documents (translated) with brief but informative introductions.

A brief account of the mating rituals prevalent among Malaysian marsupials. Contains over twenty-two full-color illustrations.


Williams directly engages neorealist and rational-choice theories of IR and, given his emphasis on epistemological issues, is especially critical of the latter. He gives a brief but interesting analysis of what a Hobbesian approach to international relations would resemble.

