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Institutionalized Disagreement

Randall L. Schweller

To the Editors (Robert Jervis writes):

Randall Schweller's discussion of John Ikenberry's book *After Victory: Institutions, Strategic Restraint, and the Rebuilding of Order after Major Wars* is acute, but his criticisms of the role of institutions miss the dynamics that can be involved.¹ Schweller is convincing when he argues that international institutions are too weak to restrain major powers when their leaders decide that their interests call for breaking the rules or disregarding the views of the institution's other members. He does not discuss, however, the more important if more elusive role of institutions: their ability to shape even a powerful state's preferences. Thus while at the point of decision a major power will not be bound by the institution, its capabilities, outlook, and even values may have already been affected by how the institution operated previously. What Schweller downplays is how things can change over time—how institutions can strengthen themselves by altering the environment and the views of policymakers.

Part of the difficulty may be that political scientists usually look at discrete events or compare instances over time, through either case studies or large-*N* analysis, trying to hold constant as much as possible. Unlike historians, political scientists are less accustomed to thinking about how one event influences succeeding ones, and the feedbacks are missed by the standard comparative method—and indeed can subvert it.² These effects are not captured by the common phrase “institutions are sticky,” which implies that they keep their shape for a while before yielding to external pressures. Rather, institutions can influence the actors and the incentives they face.

What mechanisms might be involved? One is simply habit.³ Although not a strong force when vital interests are concerned, its influence should not be dismissed. Bureau-

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1. Randall L. Schweller, “The Problem of International Order Revisited: A Review Essay,” *International Security*, Vol. 26, No. 1 (Summer 2001), pp. 161–186; and G. John Ikenberry, *After Victory: Institutions, Strategic Restraint, and the Rebuilding of Order after Major Wars* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2001).

2. See Robert Jervis, *System Effects: Complexity in Political and Social Life* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1997).

3. James N. Rosenau, “Before Cooperation: Hegemons, Regimes, and Habit-Driven Actors in World Politics,” *International Organization*, Vol. 40, No. 4 (Autumn 1986), pp. 849–894; and Robert Abelson, “The Secret Existence of Expressive Behavior,” *Critical Review*, Vol. 9, Nos. 1–2 (Winter–Spring 1995), pp. 25–36.

cracies and decisionmakers can become accustomed to cooperating in certain ways and working through established institutions that handle many issues. These patterns can become routine and be applied more broadly.

Second, institutions can develop constituencies in state bureaucracies, interest groups, and public opinion.⁴ By providing information and analysis, participating groups can influence the outlooks and preferences of decisionmakers. In some cases, they may also grow into political forces potent enough to convince those at the top to deepen their support for a particular institution, although this is not likely when the issue is seen as crucial and the top decisionmakers have strong convictions.

Third, the operation of institutions can influence states' capabilities. When an issue arises, decisionmakers can deal with it only with the tools at their disposal. Institutions may have played a large role much earlier, however, in developing or suppressing instruments that will or will not be available at the later point of decision. A good example from internal politics (granted that we expect institutions to be more powerful here) is Jeffrey Legro's analysis of the role of the military's aversion to chemical warfare in Great Britain, Germany, and the United States in seeing that these weapons were not used in World War II.⁵ It was not that the military overrode the civilian leaders' strong desire to use them, but rather that the neglect of chemical weapons during the interwar years meant that this arm was not nearly as attractive to the leaders during the war as it would have been had the organizations invested in these capabilities in the 1930s. An important part of the contemporary international landscape is that Germany does not have nuclear weapons. Much of the reason for this is that the North Atlantic Treaty Organization and the Nuclear Planning Group were able to meet many of West Germany's needs for security and status earlier.⁶ (To be sure, the policy was essentially an American one, but it probably would not have been possible without NATO.) Similarly, the existence of NATO made it possible for the United States to expand security guarantees to new members in Eastern and Central Europe. Without this instrument, I doubt that the United States would have made unilateral guarantees or could have developed collective ones.

Perhaps most important are the subtle and slow processes of learning and socialization described by John Ikenberry, Alexander Wendt, Bruce Cronin, and, in most detail, Paul Schroeder that shape what people and states come to desire and see as feasible.⁷ The power and insularity of the United States permit it to resist much institutional so-

4. The processes are similar to those of spillover that can operate in regional integration. See Ernst B. Haas, *The Uniting of Europe: Political, Social, and Economic Forces* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1958).

5. Jeffrey W. Legro, *Cooperation under Fire: Anglo-German Restraint during World War II* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1995).

6. On the Nuclear Planning Group, see Paul Buteux, *The Politics of Nuclear Consultation in NATO, 1965–1980* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1983); and David Schwartz, *NATO's Nuclear Dilemmas* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings, 1983).

7. Ikenberry, *After Victory*; Alexander Wendt, *Social Theory of International Politics* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999); Bruce Cronin, *Community under Anarchy: Transnational Identity and the Evolution of Cooperation* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999); and Paul W. Schroeder, *The Transformation of European Politics, 1763–1848* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1994). See also Alastair Iain Johnston, "Treating International Institutions As Social Environments," *International Studies Quar-*

cialization, which helps to explain why Schweller is more convincing than Ikenberry. But the United States is not entirely immune. The way it sees Europe, its willingness to keep troops on the continent, and its expectations for continued cooperation in the future, all are affected by previous events.⁸ The effect of institutional socialization is larger among Europeans and partly explains the decreased fear that they have of one another, although the opposition of François Mitterrand and Margaret Thatcher to German unification reminds us that experience is not always determinative because people know that the future can break with the past.⁹ Even the Soviets found themselves influenced by their earlier stances. The ideologue Mikhail Suslov, of all people, argued against armed intervention in Poland in 1981 in these terms: "We've done a great deal of work for peace, and it is now impossible for us to change our position. . . . What a great effect we have had from the visit of L.I. Brezhnev to the FRG [Federal Republic of Germany] and from many other peaceful actions we have undertaken. That is why it is now impossible for us to change the position we have adopted vis-à-vis Poland."¹⁰

The fact that habits, expectations, capabilities, and socialization operate throughout the international system means that institutions can change the environment in which states act. Because the incentives facing each actor are influenced by what others are expected to do, feedbacks can be central to the patterns that develop. Thomas Schelling showed the importance of such dynamics in his tipping models and *k*-groups.¹¹ In the former, the racial composition of a neighborhood or the frequency of a form of behavior can change rapidly as one person's movement leads at least one other to follow suit, which in turn sets off a cascade of changes. The analysis of *k*-groups shows that the rationality of one actor's cooperating depends on the mix of cooperation and defection expected from the others, and the patterns can be intricate with many potential equilibria whose realization depends in part on "custom, precedent, and imitation."¹² Previous behavior on the part of the actor and others molds the environment because what each does affects what others are likely to do, and expectations create and destroy possible

terly, Vol. 45, No. 4 (December 2001), pp. 487–515; Robert O. Keohane, *International Institutions and State Behavior* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview, 1989), especially chap. 1; and Jervis, *System Effects*, pp. 48–58. The danger is that the operation of socialization will simply be asserted rather than demonstrated. See Mark Peceny and William Stanley, "Liberal Social Reconstruction and the Resolution of Civil Wars in Central America," *International Organization*, Vol. 55, No. 1 (Winter 2001), pp. 149–182.

8. Some of the processes involve the way that actors infer their own attitudes from their behavior. See Daryl Bem, "Self-Perception Theory," in Leonard Berkowitz, ed., *Advances in Experimental Social Psychology* (New York: Academic Press, 1972), pp. 1–61. For an application to foreign policy, see Deborah Welch Larson, *Origins of Containment: A Psychological Explanation* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1985).

9. See Dale C. Copeland, "The Constructivist Challenge to Structural Realism: A Review Essay," *International Security*, Vol. 25, No. 2 (Fall 2000), pp. 187–212.

10. "CPSU CC Politburo Transcript, 10 December 1981," trans. Mark Kramer, *Cold War International History Project Bulletin*, Issue 5, Spring 1995 (Washington, D.C.: Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars), p. 137.

11. Thomas C. Schelling, *Micromotives and Macrobehavior* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1978), chaps. 4, 7.

12. *Ibid.*, p. 243.

courses of action. Thus an institution that is incapable of preventing a war from occurring in the event of a crisis might be able to avoid war by keeping relations from deteriorating to the point that a crisis will occur. I wonder what relations between the United States and the major countries of Western Europe would be like today had NATO not been created. Although there are many strains and the relationship is not one among equals, the degree to which the United States has been willing to listen to its partners is partly a function of how the West Europeans have behaved toward one another and the United States,¹³ something that is hard to divorce from NATO.

The long-run effects of institutions are also manifest in the economic arena. By lowering tariffs and establishing even weak processes for the resolution of disputes, the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) not only raised the level of international trade but thereby increased domestic support for greater trade. It also accustomed actors to at least a mild form of international adjudication. Furthermore, the lowering of some barriers made it clear that greater economic benefits could only be obtained by still more international cooperation.¹⁴ Through these processes, GATT and the dynamics that it set in motion paved the way for the creation of the stronger World Trade Organization.

Sometimes decisionmakers establish institutions because they want to induce the effects I have discussed, in which case we can see them as instruments of statecraft.¹⁵ But sometimes the effects are unanticipated, and whether they are undesired may depend on whether the benchmark is the values of the actors at the time the institution was established or those that develop later, in part because of the effects of the institutions. Of course, it is often difficult to separate the impact of the institution from that of the policy of its leading members. For example, it would be foolish to attribute all of the pacification of Europe to NATO and ignore the driving role of the United States. Relatedly, one can argue that my formulation is so loose that it runs the danger of conflating the influence of institutions with that of history. Indeed the processes of socialization are hard to trace, and establishing causation is particularly difficult here. Nevertheless, I think that by sharply focusing on whether institutions can guide or constrain powerful states at the moment of decision, Schweller's treatment distracts attention from their multiple roles in shaping what world politics is like at that moment.

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13. For U.S. responsiveness to European allies during the Cold War, see Thomas Risse-Kappen, *Cooperation among Democracies: The European Influence on U.S. Foreign Policy* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1995).

14. Here too there is a parallel to Haas's spillover.

15. Robert Jervis, "Realism, Neoliberalism, and Cooperation: Understanding the Debate," *International Security*, Vol. 24, No. 1 (Summer 1999), pp. 42–63. For a general discussion of how people can act to change what they value, see Gary Stanley Becker, *Accounting for Tastes*, Pt. 1 (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1996); George Ainslie, *Picoeconomics: The Strategic Interaction of Motivational States within the Person* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1962); and Henry Aaron, "Public Policy, Values, and Consciousness," *Journal of Economic Perspectives*, Vol. 8, No. 2 (Spring 1994), pp. 4–8.

To the Editors (Henry R. Nau writes):

John Ikenberry and Randall Schweller have moved the debate between neoliberal and realist perspectives to a higher and more illuminating level.¹ Ikenberry, in his new book, *After Victory: Institutions, Strategic Restraint, and the Rebuilding of Order after Major Wars*, is the first neoliberal scholar to show how binding or “sticky” international institutions alter state interests and identities, not just outcomes. Schweller is a leading realist scholar who addresses the role of state interests as well as state power in explaining international outcomes. Together these two scholars are nudging international relations theory toward a broader synthesis in which power, interests, and institutions interact to determine outcomes and drive state behavior. But neither carries his reasoning to its logical conclusion. Both fail to conceptualize the central role of state identities in international affairs, even though in the creation of international order they assign a large role to “the political character of states” (Ikenberry, pp. 5, 10, 75–79) and “the benign nature of American intentions” (Schweller, p. 184). State identities generate state interests (e.g., democratic states, whatever their relative power, have different interests toward one another than toward nondemocratic states), no less than state power does (e.g., great powers, whatever their identities, have different interests than small powers). Identity and power together determine the level and type of institutionalization in international relations.

Ikenberry argues that after achieving victory, the leading state chooses to restrain its power by establishing international institutions, rather than to seek hegemony or participate in a balance-of-power order. It does so because “the leading state enters the postwar period sitting on a declining power base,” and institutionalization “allows that state to conserve its base by creating rules and institutions that will extend the stream of benefits and advantages into the future, beyond what would otherwise be the case” (Ikenberry, p. 55). But Ikenberry finds that this decision to restrain power through institutions is itself determined by two more potent systemic variables—power disparities and the types of states that are party to the postwar settlement. He finds that institutional orders that restrain (bind) power—what he calls constitutional orders—are more likely to emerge when power disparities are extreme and when the types of states involved are democratic rather than nondemocratic. So, by Ikenberry’s own analysis, power distributions and the types of states—not binding institutions—are the primary causal variables for establishing postwar constitutional orders.

By not being explicit about the role of state identities, Ikenberry overstates the importance and consequences of institutions. Schweller rightly criticizes Ikenberry on this account. “Institutions,” Schweller writes, “cannot be both autonomous and capable of binding strong states.” They are “either instruments of strong states and capable of binding subordinate ones, or they are independent of strong states and thus unable to

1. G. John Ikenberry, *After Victory: Institutions, Strategic Restraint, and the Rebuilding of Order after Major Wars* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2001); and Randall L. Schweller, “The Problem of International Order Revisited: A Review Essay,” *International Security*, Vol. 26, No. 1 (Summer 2001), pp. 161–186. Further references to both appear parenthetically in the text.

perform a binding function" (p. 182). But on the next page, Schweller asks why, if post-Cold War institutions are the instruments of strong states (in this case, the United States), do these institutions continue to bind Western states even after the demise of the Soviet Union. His answer is that "the industrial democracies have had no reason to fear that the United States, with little history of imperialism or greedy expansion, would use its power for malign purposes." Hence "the benign nature of American intentions, not the illusion of protection from American power provided by binding institutions, explains why members of the Western alliance have not defected to aggregate their power against the United States after the Cold War" (p. 184).

Schweller's contribution is to recognize the role of state interests as well as state power in explaining international outcomes. But, in this case, he is appealing to state intentions and interests other than those that realists usually emphasize. Realists, including Schweller, argue that "great powers have tended to expand when they can" (p. 174). After the Cold War, the United States faces no significant challengers and can expand; yet it continues to restrain its power through binding institutions. Why? Schweller's answer points to something different from state interests, as realists understand them. He appeals to the common goals and values or converging internal characteristics among industrial democracies: "The durability of the West's institutional arrangements," he writes, "is a consequence, not a cause, of peace among industrial democracies, which share common goals and values and trust that the United States will not act aggressively" (p. 184). In short, the convergence of state goals and values acts to restrain the hegemon's power, even though realist state interests predict the expansion of that power.

If internal state characteristics play such a powerful role in institutional and realist explanations of international order, why not conceptualize this role explicitly in a larger theory that integrates identities, power, interests, and institutions? I make a first attempt at such a synthesis in my recently completed book, *At Home Abroad: Identity and Power in American Foreign Policy*.² In this study, I treat state identity and state power as two separate and independent variables. International order is the product (dependent variable) of these two variables. Realists get the power half of this equation right: States seek security by striving for hegemony to coerce (deter) other states. But neoliberals get the other half right: States seek security by establishing "a legitimate order that will reduce [the] requirement to coerce" other states (Ikenberry, p. 258). What does "legitimate order" mean? The concept exists in realism no less than neoliberalism. Kenneth Waltz defines anarchy not as "the absence of government" or of "a monopoly on the use of force," but as the absence of "a monopoly on the *legitimate* use of force" (emphasis in original). In national politics, he writes, "a government, ruling by some standard of legitimacy, arrogates to itself the right to use force. . . . Public agents are organized to prevent and to counter the private use of force."³ In international politics, no such legitimate government or public agent exists. Instead many legitimate public agents ex-

2. Henry R. Nau, *At Home Abroad: Identity and Power in American Foreign Policy* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2002).

3. Kenneth N. Waltz, *Theory of International Politics* (New York: Random House, 1979). Quotations are taken from pp. 102–104.

ist, each performing the same function of preventing and countering the private use of force (and therefore being undifferentiated by function, as Waltz argued), but each also “ruling by some standard of legitimacy” that governs the use of force. These standards of legitimacy differ. That is why states are sovereign. Thus states are not undifferentiated by substance. In early modern Europe, some states legitimated state force on the basis of Catholicism; others did so on the basis of Protestantism. Over the centuries, legitimacy standards proliferated and varied from religious and cultural (aristocratic) standards to national and ideological (fascist, liberal, or communist) ones. Waltz does not track this dimension of anarchy because he conflates legitimacy with power. He defines anarchy as the decentralization of both power and legitimacy but then measures it only as the distribution of power capabilities. I define state identity to capture this missing dimension of legitimacy standards.

The distribution (similarity or dissimilarity) of legitimacy standards among states exercises an influence on the level of threat independent of that of power disparities. When legitimacy standards converge, all other things being equal, the level of threat among states is reduced. States, despite power disparities, may be able to establish a legitimate international order comparable, though not identical, to legitimate domestic order. Similar standards discipline the use of force within each state, and each state is therefore less suspicious of and threatened by other states when any one of them uses force at home or arms to defend itself abroad. Power disparities and the different interests they spawn remain, but the security dilemma is attenuated—in the extreme, as in the case of domestic order, effectively eliminated. Something like this state of affairs exists today among the mature liberal democracies of Western Europe and North America (and possibly Japan). Because these countries share liberal democratic standards governing the use of force, they do not feel threatened by mere disparities in the levels of such force (which persist as reflected in U.S. military preeminence). Converging legitimacy standards produce an effective constitutional order. Such orders among democracies, as Ikenberry notes, establish institutional rules and expectations that maximize transparency, offer multiple points of access for influence, and decentralize power to ensure competition and checks and balances.

Seen in this light, constitutional orders are just as predictable and stable as balance-of-power orders, contrary to what Schweller argues. Balance-of-power orders are predictable, Schweller says, because states act independently, and balances result regardless of what states intend. But states act independently only because they have diverging identities and hence little trust in one another. Otherwise they would act collectively, and balances would not result. Taking identity into account, constitutional orders are equally predictable. States can be expected to act jointly because they have converging identities and trust more in one another. Naturally, if identities shift in either order, all bets are off. Constitutional orders are also equally stable. After all, domestic orders are more stable than international orders, and many domestic orders are constitutional. Whereas balance-of-power orders counterbalance challengers, sometimes at the risk of war, constitutional orders preempt them, often without war, by restraining and redistributing power through institutional access and market expansion.

Constitutional order, however, is only one type of institutional order. As Schweller notes, Ikenberry loads the dice in favor of institutions by conflating the two. Hegemonic

and even balance-of-power orders may be highly institutionalized, and some constitutional orders may not be significantly institutionalized. In hegemonic orders, power is centralized, but secondary states do not accept the order as legitimate. The level of institutionalization depends on the identity of the hegemon. As a nondemocracy, the Soviet Union used institutions extensively to solidify and construct common identities among Warsaw Pact states. The Soviet empire was no constitutional order, but its institutions were nevertheless significant and sticky. The empire did not unravel because the Warsaw Pact fell apart; it unraveled because the Soviet Union collapsed. In balance-of-power orders, both power (multipolar) and legitimacy are decentralized. Institutions are generally weak in this situation (e.g., between the United States and the Soviet Union during the Cold War). But if major states observe similar legitimacy standards, significant institutions may emerge even in a balance-of-power order. The extent of institutionalization depends on the particular content of converging identities. In the nineteenth century, for example, the Holy Alliance represented a significant institution, especially for that era. It was made possible by the converging legitimacy standards of conservative great powers (the traditional monarchies of Austria, Prussia, and Russia). Today the democratic peace, especially among the Group of Seven countries, constitutes a significant constitutional order. But this order is not highly institutionalized (less so than the United Nations) because it reflects the more decentralized and competitive (checks and balances) legitimacy standards of democratic great powers.

A theory that looks at both the distribution (structure) of power and identity, as well as the content of identities when they converge, may be a better predictor of the role of international institutions than the constraints or dynamics of international institutions themselves. Over time, to be sure, institutional processes influence the distribution of identities and power. Constitutional orders, such as the U.S.-led post-World War II order within the Western world, seem to be particularly good at assimilating identities through institutional access and at redistributing wealth and power through competitive markets. Hegemonic orders, such as the one overseen by the Soviet Union, are less effective in these respects. Thus, even as institutions act to shift structural relationships, they reflect the broader influence of the political identities of key member states.

—Henry R. Nau
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The Author Replies

Let me begin by responding to Robert Jervis's final remark "that by sharply focusing on whether institutions can guide or constrain powerful states at the moment of decision, Schweller's treatment distracts attention from their multiple roles in shaping what world politics is like at that moment" (p. 177). It seems to me that this criticism should be directed at John Ikenberry. After all, Ikenberry developed the concept of binding institutions that restrain concentrated power, and it is he who claims in his book that, as a result of such institutions, international politics is coming to resemble a constitutional

order.¹ I could not have accurately reviewed the book without addressing these central themes. Moreover, my focus on the constraining effects of international institutions—whether they make powerful states do things they otherwise would not do—is consistent with Jervis’s own litmus test on whether they matter. In his seminal essay on security regimes, Jervis wrote: “This concept [of international regimes] implies not only norms and expectations that facilitate cooperation, but a form of cooperation that is more than the following of short-run self-interest. To comply with a robber’s demand to surrender money is not to participate in a regime even if the interaction occurs repeatedly and all participants share the same expectations. Similarly, the fact that neither superpower attacks the other is a form of cooperation, but not a regime. The links between the states’ restraint and their immediate self-interest are too direct and unproblematic to invoke the concept.”² Of course, Jervis wrote this passage twenty years ago, so it is not surprising that he may have changed his mind about this complex and controversial subject, which has received so much scholarly attention over the last two decades.

Jervis now argues that international institutions shape the external environment and the preferences of states through the mechanisms of habit, socialization, learning, and the development of pro-institutional bureaucratic and nongovernmental constituencies within member states. Through these processes, international institutions limit the menu of policy choices available to decisionmakers by shaping their incentive (ruling out certain options and making others more attractive) and perceptions about what is appropriate and legitimate behavior in a given situation. By slowly carving out the strategic landscape over which the actors operate and interact with each other, not only do international institutions affect the information and actions available to actors when they have to act (i.e., the structure of their environment), but more important, they gradually change the actors’ preferences and beliefs about the preferences of others.³ These institutionally driven processes keep the preferences of states, even the strongest among them, more stable than they would otherwise be at any given historical moment.

Jervis suggests that I and others (mostly realists, I suppose) do not fully appreciate these subtle but significant effects of institutions because we mistakenly view history in terms of discrete events rather than as path dependent, such that one event influences succeeding ones. To put it another way, many of the important effects of international institutions are easy to overlook because they are nonevents or, as Sherlock Holmes observed, “dogs that don’t bark in the night”; they are the paths not taken or even considered by policymakers because they violate institutional norms and values. Here, Jervis

1. G. John Ikenberry, *After Victory: Institutions, Strategic Restraint, and the Rebuilding of Order after Major Wars* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2001).

2. Robert Jervis, “Security Regimes,” in Stephen D. Krasner, ed., *International Regimes* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1983), p. 173.

3. I should point out that these are not the exact terms that Jervis himself uses. Instead I am interpreting Jervis’s argument, which loosely draws on the strategic choice approach, within the theoretical framework outlined in David A. Lake and Robert Powell, eds., *Strategic Choice and International Relations* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1999).

is making the “strong case” for the effects of international institutions: They do not merely facilitate the achievement of state objectives that are exogenously determined by forces outside the institutions themselves, which is the functionalist logic at the core of neoliberal institutionalism; they also fundamentally change the actors’ goals, beliefs, and preferences, that is, what the actors want and how they go about getting it.⁴

It is a subtle and complex argument about the importance of international institutions, and one that is very difficult to disprove. This is not only because it rests entirely on counterfactual scenarios (what causal argument does not employ counterfactuals?) but because it cannot be falsified by merely pointing out empirical examples of member states deviating in their behavior and/or preferences from the institutional rules, norms, and practices of the day. Jervis could simply respond that there would have been many more such deviations had the various international institutions not existed. Nevertheless, Jervis’s argument appears to compete with the standard realist account of the role and influence of international institutions as put forth by Robert Gilpin.⁵ According to Gilpin, international institutions emerge immediately after hegemonic wars to advance the interests of the most powerful state in the system. This is when realists would expect international institutions to be most effective in constraining the preferences and behavior of secondary and weak states and, in Jervis’s words, in “shaping what world politics is like at that moment.” Given the law of uneven growth, Gilpin predicts that international institutions and the order they reinforce will eventually weaken over time as rising powers emerge to challenge the hegemon’s rule. For realists, the interests and relative power of the hegemon to enforce its unique order determine how and whether institutions matter in world politics.

One way to test Jervis’s argument against the standard realist account is to see if the views and actions of member states deviate more or less frequently over time from institutionally driven incentives. If Jervis is correct about the slow, long-run, and often unanticipated institutional processes of learning, socialization, custom, precedent, and habit, then scholars would expect the preferences and behavior of states to deviate less frequently over time from institutional norms and practices, even when the hegemon’s power is declining relative to that of other states. Conversely, if the preferences and actions of states conform with international institutions less frequently over time and— and this is an important part of the equation—the hegemon is clearly in decline (a time interval that may vary considerably among hegemonic reigns), then we may conclude that the long-run effects that Jervis ascribes to institutions are largely epiphenomenal or, at the very least, not as significant as he claims.

Henry Nau argues that I fail to appreciate the central role of identities in international relations, though my reasoning about why other states do not currently fear U.S. hegemony rests on its identity, not interests or intentions. He further points out that re-

4. For a discussion along these lines, see Robert Jervis, “Realism, Neoliberalism, and Cooperation,” *International Security*, Vol. 24, No. 1 (Summer 1999), pp. 42–63. For the functionalist logic of neoliberalism and constructivism, see Jennifer Sterling-Folker, “Competing Paradigms or Birds of a Feather? Constructivism and Neoliberal Institutionalism Compared,” *International Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 44, No. 1 (March 2000), pp. 97–119.

5. Robert Gilpin, *War and Change in World Politics* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1981).

alists, like myself, predict that great powers expand when they can, “yet [the United States] continues to restrain its power through binding institutions” (p. 179). I have several responses to this line of argument. First, Nau agrees with me that institutions cannot be autonomous and capable of binding strong states. Hence, why does he conclude that the United States “continues to restrain its power through binding institutions”? Second, the United States has indeed expanded its influence in the post-Cold War world. It rushed to enlarge the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, and it sent troops to fight in Haiti, Somalia, the Persian Gulf, and two wars in the Balkans. It currently has forces in Afghanistan and may send others to fight again in Iraq. Is this a record of the United States contracting its interests and influence in the world or of a bound hegemon? Third, what is America’s identity? How are its interests and actions attributable to its identity, whatever that may be? Identities are conferred by others; they are not concrete properties. Analysts such as Nau, who simply assign identities to states rather than employing an interpretivist methodology to uncover the many identities that any given state may possess depending on whose eyes the analyst is viewing it through, are the ones guilty of not carrying their reasoning to its logical conclusion. I have no idea how to determine a country’s identity, how many identities a country may have at any given time, or how its identity shapes its foreign policy. Notwithstanding all the ink that has been spilled recently on the subject of identity and international affairs, I still do not have answers to these central questions.

Nau suggests (though he does not seem to declare) that America’s identity is that of a mature liberal democracy, and that state identities along with power generate state interests. Assuming that he is correct, what does being a liberal democracy mean in terms of behavior and interests? A liberal democracy can have an isolationist foreign policy, as the United States had before World War II; or it can adopt an activist foreign policy, as it has done since 1945. The United States can pursue a protectionist trade policy, as it did before 1934; or it can promote free trade, as it has done since 1945. Liberal democracies can ally with nondemocratic states and even support them over democratic alternatives, as the United States did during World War II and throughout the Cold War and still does in Saudi Arabia and many other places.

In practice, the United States has not supported democracy per se, but rather democracies and nondemocracies that it believes share its interests as it perceives them at the moment. Indeed there is no logical reason to assert—or overwhelming empirical evidence to support the claim—that democracies must share core values. After all, Adolf Hitler was elected, and as Ian Kershaw observes: “Hitler was not a tyrant imposed upon Germany. He was in many respects, until well into the war, a highly popular national leader.”⁶ Consider the counterfactual scenario that Hitler had maintained a democratic Germany and had continued to be reelected by wide majorities, as I suppose he would have been. Would history have been any different? Would U.S. and German interests have been more congruent?

To be sure, Nau raises many interesting and provocative theoretical ideas. Yet the thrust of his reply—what is implicit in its tone though not necessarily explicit in its con-

6. Ian Kershaw, *Hitler: Profile in Power* (London: Longman, 1991), p. 194.

tent—raises the following question: Why do democratic peace proponents believe that democratically elected leaders will continue to support U.S. interests in the world or those of other democratic states? What leads him to believe that all conflicts of interest between democratic states can be resolved short of war and through the mechanisms of a constitutional order? What precisely does being a liberal democracy have to do with the content of a state's national interests?

Perhaps I am just old-fashioned, but I still believe that the national interest, while susceptible to rational analysis, is ultimately determined by a political process, not by the murky concept of identity. This is more or less true for all countries, whether democratic or nondemocratic. Indeed the task of defining the national interest is what the political process is all about; it is a matter of political resolution. As Warner Schilling wrote forty years ago about the size and content of the U.S. defense budget: "Choices of this order can be made in only one place: the political arena. There the relative importance of values can be decided by the relative power brought to bear on their behalf. There the distribution of power can decide matters that the distribution of fact and insight cannot."⁷ It seems to me that the recent fascination with the concept of state identity is shifting the focus of the field of international relations farther away from the substance and process of politics, and that is not a good thing.

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7. Warner R. Schilling, "The Politics of National Defense: Fiscal 1950," in Schilling, Paul Y. Hammond, and Glenn H. Snyder, *Strategy, Politics, and Defense Budgets* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1962), p. 15. See also Arnold Wolfers, "National Security as an Ambiguous Symbol," in Wolfers, *Discord and Collaboration: Essays on International Politics* (Baltimore, Md.: Johns Hopkins Press, 1962), chap. 10.