1 *Introduction*

In Thucydides' *History of the Peloponnesian War,* the author recounts an incident in which the Athenians sailed to the island of Melos, a Spartan colony, and two Athenian Generals, Cleomedes and Tisias, sent their representatives to negotiate with the Council of the Melians. What makes their dialogue especially noteworthy is the Athenians' bald statement at the onset that, in their negotiations, the Melians should not appeal to the Athenians' sense of justice, because, quite simply, "the strong do what they can and the weak suffer what they must." The sphere of power is independent of the sphere of justice, rendering the state an autonomous actor, able to pursue its own interests, limited only by its own capabilities. Millennia later, in an era in which Great Powers have given way to superpowers and nuclear weapons have magnified the disparity between strong and weak to a degree unimaginable to the Athenians, the aphorism remains familiar and seems more applicable than ever.

It is surprising, therefore, to find some of the most adroit statesmen at the helm of some of the most powerful states of the past two centuries expressing near helplessness in the face of the impersonal forces that shape world politics. No less effective a diplomat than Charles de Talleyrand-Périgord famously said that "[t]he art of statesmanship is to foresee the inevitable and to expedite its occurrence." Otto von Bismarck, architect of German unification, wrote that "[e]ven victorious wars can only be justified when they are forced upon a nation."[1] Such quotes, indicating as they do that even Great Powers often have very little freedom of action amid the overwhelming pull of international events, seem puzzling coming from statesmen famous for their ability to produce the outcomes they desired.

The tension between these two perspectives – that Great Powers are free to act, unhindered by external constraints; and that even the actions of Great Powers are dictated largely by circumstance – though rarely made explicit, divides our understanding of international relations. The overwhelming majority of explanations of Great Power behavior in history and political science are premised on one or the other. As long ago as 1841, Thomas Carlyle wrote that "the history of the world is but the biography of great men"; Karl Marx claimed a decade later that people make history, but not under circumstances of their own choosing.[2] More recently, Kenneth

[1] Quoted in Bernhardi (1914, 38).

[2] Carlyle's quote is verbatim, from his *Heroes and Hero-Worship;* Marx's aphorism has been distilled by time, which has done it a considerable kindness. The actual quote, from *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Napoleon,* is far less succinct: "Men make their own history, but they do not make it as they

Waltz (1959), describing what was to become a foundational distinction in the field of international relations, wrote of "first and second image and leaders" explanations of state behavior, which look to the characteristics of states and leaders as the sources of state action, and "third image" explanations, in which "[t]he requirements of state action are . . . imposed by the circumstances in which all states exist" (160).

Although well established, this division is ill advised, because it detracts from and fragments our understanding of international politics. When astronomers have sought to understand the behavior of a planet, at least since Copernicus, they have built a model of the larger solar system that governs its motion – one in which the parts of the system both depend on and constitute the larger whole. Similarly, students of fields as diverse as medicine, agriculture, and psychology favor systemic explanations of their subject matter that provide a comprehensive understanding that a more atomistic point of view cannot. By contrast, the division in international relations between explanations that focus on context and those that emphasize state agency perpetuates an artificial distinction – artificial because the circumstances that constrain and compel state action are also produced by state action.[3] Explanations that lack an account of this reciprocal relationship cannot hope to offer a comprehensive explanation of international politics.

Conceptualizing states, not as individuals or one of a pair, but rather as one state embedded in a larger system of states, can improve our ability to understand that state's behavior. For example, as I demonstrate in Chapter 4, a focus on America's reaction to changes in the international system, rather than to characteristics or actions of the Soviet Union, makes it easier to understand what Anatoly Chernyaev called the "Lost Year"[4] – the puzzling gap between the sweeping Soviet military and ideological *démarche* of December 1988 and the accommodationist American response in November 1989. A focus on American attention to the international system helps us understand the American turn away from isolationism around the time of the fall of France; and in the 1830s, the Great Powers' focus on the ideological division of the system (between legitimist and constitutional states) explains the parallel rift that developed in their alliance structure.

Moreover, these insights also help to clarify the connections between events such as the ones just described and prior events – thereby lengthening the causal chain and expanding the scope of our understanding. In the case of the Cold War we can understand not just how the United States reacted to changes in the international system but also how, and why, the Soviets produced that change. Similarly, we can understand the forces that led the Germans prior to World War II and the Europeans prior to 1830 to produce changes in their respective systems. In each instance we can see how prior state action produced a change in the systemic context that prompts

please; they do not make it under self-selected circumstances, but under circumstances existing already, given and transmitted from the past."

[3] The circumstances that forced war on Bismarck, for example, would hardly have existed without him, a fact of which he was surely well aware. Indeed, as he proved with maneuvers such as his creative retransmission of the Ems Dispatch, he was not at all above provoking others to force him to fight.

[4] Chernyaev (2000, 201).

state action, which in turn produces subsequent state action: a systemic dynamic come full circle. This deeper lesson – that states, especially strong ones, produce the circumstances that subsequently compel them to act – was brought home most recently when investigations following the September 11 attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon led to the suggestion that the radical Islamic group responsible and the regime that sheltered them had both benefitted from American support of the anticommunist insurgency in Afghanistan in the 1980s.[5]

The goal of this book is to elaborate and test a systemic theory of international politics that is designed to provide the same holistic understanding of interstate relations that systemic perspectives provide in other fields. It is not the first such portrayal, by any means, although systemic theories remain quite rare,[6] and it is noteworthy that those few systemic theories that do exist in the international relations literature have been unusually persistent[7] – a fact that may reflect scholars' intuitive sense that thinking systemically about international politics is an important objective. The book provides an empirically and theoretically rigorous explanation of how the Great Powers simultaneously shape and are influenced by the structure of the international system. Using both statistical methods and historical case studies, it demonstrates that structural balances and Great Power actions over the past two centuries strongly support the argument.

Understanding why integrating the behavior of the states and the structure of the international system is a difficult problem, and how we can go about resolving it, requires a bit of preliminary background in the form of a foray into the agent–structure debate and its application to international relations.

The agent–structure debate

The tension between explanations based on the behavior of unconstrained agents and explanations based on the exigencies of their circumstances has manifested itself in international relations in what has come to be known as the "agent–structure debate." The question at the heart of the debate – whether to focus on people or on their circumstances when explaining political events – is among the most fundamental issues in the study of politics. I will argue that the agent–structure debate should have no victor: in the realm of international politics, each has an impact on the other, and

[5] The argument that the American CIA funded or trained bin Laden directly is not generally credited; the connections were most likely indirect (Coll 2004), a fact that makes their magnitude difficult to estimate. Nevertheless, even those who most categorically deny American involvement with al Qaeda (e.g., Bergen 2002) conclude that the United States channeled a substantial amount of funding to the Pakistani ISI, which preferred to fund more radical groups.

[6] There may be many reasons for the rarity of these works. Many are controversial, few as much as Waltz's – a fact that may cast a pall on systemic theorizing in general. At the same time, however, the complexity of systemic theorizing can be daunting, a fact that may in part explain the paucity of systemic theories of international relations.

[7] Waltz's seminal *Theory of International Politics,* for example, remains a staple on graduate school field seminar syllabi, despite being more than three decades old; Organski and Kugler's *War Ledger* and Gilpin's *War and Change in World Politics* are one and two years younger, respectively.

neither should be granted theoretical primacy. Before doing so, however, I discuss the meanings of the terms.

The nature of structure

First, we must understand the meaning of the word "structure." Philip Cerny, who examines structure and agency in considerable depth, defines structure as "the pattern of constraints and opportunities for action and choice."[8] Though succinct, this definition is one step removed from the one that we seek, because it conflates an explanation of what structures *do* (constrain, provide opportunities) with an explanation of what they *are* (patterns). If they are to have a causal role in the theory, this role must not already be assumed in the definition. Unfortunately, separating the two leaves us with "patterns," which is not very enlightening. Anthony Giddens conceives of structure as the "rules and resources, recursively implicated in the reproduction of social systems." Again, focusing on what structure is rather than what it does leaves us with "rules and resources," where rules are understood as things that "generate – or are the medium of the production and reproduction of – practices."[9]

An examination of existing structural theories helps to flesh out the definition a bit. Theda Skocpol's examination of social revolutions was highly critical of previous studies for their lack of appreciation of the role of structural factors. In particular, according to Skocpol, international structure (the state's position in the world economy and its level of development, as well as international military balances) and internal structure (the organizational and coercive capacity of the state) are critical factors in the revolutions that she studies.[10] Douglass C. North's seminal discussion of the role of economic structure and historical change is admirably succinct on the question of what constitutes structure: property rights, which give rise to the rules and regulations that govern society and the enforcement structures and norms that underpin them.[11] Peter Hall's discussion of institutions suggests yet another understanding: they are "the formal rules, compliance procedures, and standard operating practices that structure the relationship between individuals in various units of the polity and economy."[12] In the introduction to a volume of essays on historical institutionalism, Kathleen Thelen and Sven Steinmo survey a remarkable array of structural factors, from property rights to economic interest groups to party systems.[13]

[8] Cerny (1990, 4).

[9] Giddens (1979, 64, 67). Elsewhere, Giddens offers a different definition of rules as "techniques or generalizable procedures applied in the enactment/reproduction of social practices" (Giddens 1984, 21). He likens rules to mathematical formulae – though he hastens to add that "I do not mean to say that social life can be reduced to a set of mathematical principles" (20). By this reading, Giddens' conception of rules may come closer to the structures of the differential equations used later in the book to model the international system; conceived of in this sense, that aspect of structure is not only exogenous but also constant in the theory presented here. This is in keeping with established practice in international relations theory; few actors in game-theoretic models, for example, are allowed to alter the structure of the game tree that defines their available options.

[10] Skocpol (1979). On critiques of previous studies see pp. 14–24; discussions of international and internal structures can be found *passim* and are summarized especially on pp. 22–24 and 284–287.

[11] North (1981, 17–18). [12] Hall (1986, 19). [13] Steinmo and Thelen (1992).

What do these structural elements have in common, other than their purported effects (which, for the reasons just mentioned, are impermissible as part of the definition)? Remarkably little, save that they tend to be *distributions* of something: distributions of rules or resources, in the form of property rights or political rights or organizational capacity or coercive power or norms within society, for example. Granted, there are some structural concepts that are difficult to understand in purely distributional terms. However, many of these are either intentionally general formulations that, when applied in concrete terms, are often distributional in nature ("patterns of relationships") or are one step removed from a structural element that is distributional ("standard operating practices").[14]

If we move to the more rarified air of the international realm, the distributional nature of structure becomes more readily apparent. Historically, pride of place must go to a particular distribution: the balance of power or, more precisely, the distribution of realized military capabilities across the most powerful states in the system.[15] This distribution has been the focus of students of international politics for centuries.[16] They assert that, in some very important ways, although they often disagree on which ones, politics in a system of many Great Powers is fundamentally different from politics in a system of few. Although systematic differences in, say, the likelihood of war across different systems have been difficult to tease out,[17] the general assertion that politics is dramatically different in multipolar than in bipolar systems is hard to deny. Surely German Chancellor Otto von Bismarck's legendary political maneuvers would have

[14] Waltz (1979, 79–82) makes the case for the distributional nature of structure in IR theory, and Buzan, Jones, and Little (1993, 51–52) defend it and elaborate.

[15] "Realized" capabilities are those that are actual rather than potential: soldiers rather than citizens, tanks and planes rather than iron and steel, and so on. Capabilities that have yet to be realized will be referred to as "latent." See p. 42 for a more in-depth discussion. "Balance" is a notoriously ambiguous word, meaning both "distribution" and "rough equality." Ernst Haas's 1953 paper on the subject of the balance of power is quite illuminating.

[16] The most prominent works written from this systemic perspective include Waltz (1979) and Kaplan (1957); explaining polarity as outcome is Rosecrance (1963). For a general discussion see Butterfield (1966); for a remarkably lucid exposition and critique see Claude (1962). Wagner (1986) and Niou, Ordeshook, and Rose (1989) provide a foundation for the balance of power grounded in game theory. Deutsch and Singer (1964) provide a theoretical discussion of the advantages of a system of many powers rather than a system of few. Gulick (1955) is the classic historical discussion of the balance of power – although Schroeder (1994b) provides a convincing and thorough argument that balance-of-power politics did not survive the Napoleonic Wars; and Healy and Stein (1973) attempts to provide formal empirical structure with which to evaluate the proposition. Gilpin (1981) and Organski and Kugler (1980), though they depict serial unipolarity rather than a constant tendency toward multipolar balance, nevertheless emphasize the distribution of capabilities in the system – that is, they focus on *the* balance of power without claiming that *a* balance of power exists.

[17] Contrast, for example, the findings of Organski and Kugler (1980) and Mansfield (1988) with those of Thompson (1986) and Spiezio (1990) regarding the relationship between unipolarity and war: the former studies find unipolar systems to be more warlike than other sorts, whereas the latter two find them to be less so. There has historically been difficulty in assessing the relative merits of bipolar vs. multipolar systems because the correlation between bipolarity and the existence of nuclear weapons has been nearly perfect, making their effects difficult to untangle. Hopf (1991) is a remarkably creative attempt to circumvent this problem.

been far more difficult in the bipolar 1970s than they were in the multipolar 1870s: one Great Power in a world of two can hardly play its potential enemies off of one another.

As to the issue of which distribution(s) will constitute the most important element of the structure of the system, the only safe generalization seems to be that security politics has typically been greatly influenced by the distribution of *any* characteristic deemed important by the main actors. As Alexander Wendt (1999) has argued, the distribution of ideas can define an international system. One need look back no further than the Cold War to find a distribution of ideologies that provided the context for Great Power politics for nearly half a century. Raymond Aron emphasizes the causal importance of the distribution of values and principles across the international system, a quantity that he sums up succinctly with his concept of "heterogeneous" and "homogeneous" systems.[18] Karl Deutsch's international system consists primarily of communications and interaction flows; their distribution is thought to be indicative of the presence or absence of political community.[19] Immanuel Wallerstein's understanding of history is based on the distribution (in particular, the degree of centralization) of both economic and political capacity in the international system; only a discontinuity between the two, he argued, permitted the growth of capitalism.[20] Kalevi Holsti surveyed more than 300 years of Great Power conflicts and found their sources to have been quite diverse: the list includes the distribution of territory, strategic territory, state boundaries, national or religious or ethnic groups (within or across borders), commercial resources, ideology, and so on.[21] More recently, distributions of a wide range of phenomena, from temperate climate to natural resources to culture and religion, have been implicated as primary motivating causes of group or state behavior.[22] It seems that few distributions can be ruled out *a priori* as relevant elements of the structure of the international system: when, for example, the Great Powers decided in the early 17th century that possession of nutmeg was critically important, its distribution became a vital issue that touched off the Spice Wars and resulted, ultimately, in the Dutch cession of Manhattan to the British.[23]

This, then, constitutes the understanding of structure that will be used throughout the book: systemic distributions of quantities deemed most important by the states in the system in the realm of international security.

[18] "I call homogeneous systems those in which the states belong to the same type, obey the same conception of policy. I call heterogeneous, on the other hand, those systems in which the states are organized according to different principles and appeal to contradictory values" (Aron 1966, 100, emphasis removed).

[19] Deutsch (1966). Similarly, David Easton's research on the international system emphasized the distribution of political interactions, i.e., those relevant to a society's "authoritative allocation of values" (Easton 1965, 25). For an intriguing application of Deutsch's work on interaction flows see Nierop (1994).

[20] And, somewhat confusingly, was permitted by it; Wallerstein (1979).

[21] Holsti (1991).

[22] See Diamond (1997), Homer-Dixon (1994) and Klare (2001), and Huntington (1996), respectively.

[23] See Milton (2000). Granted, many of these distributions were at least tangentially related to wealth and power, but often much more so after they became structural distributions: nutmeg, for example, was an extremely valuable commodity, but only because it was thought to cure the plague.

Ameliorating the dilemma: reciprocity

The agent–structure debate could be resolved quite easily if the structure were outside of the agents' control. In this regard, it is important to note that all structures are not alike: some are less easily changed than others. At the extreme, agents may have very little control over the structure of the system of which they are a part. The theory of natural selection is a good example. Structures are highly immutable contexts, and the agents that are poorly adapted to them perish. The agents themselves, while they may have a substantial collective impact on some parts of their ecological niche over time, may have little if any ability to manipulate the harsh climates, mountain terrain, parched soil, access to food, etc., that govern their probability of reproduction. Under these circumstances, we really only need to understand the effects of structures on agents, because agents *can't* have any effect on structures.

In the international system, by contrast, structure is the result of purposive action by the agents: they exert control over it, though it may not conform to their wishes. Because the international system is a system of this kind, we cannot ignore either the effects of the agents or those of the structure. We must attempt to describe, in Giddens' words, "the ways in which that system, via the application of generative rules and resources, and in the context of unintended outcomes, is produced and reproduced in interaction."[24] The easy way out is unavailable to us.

Given that people have an effect on the contexts within which they interact and those contexts in turn have an effect on people, the problem is that focusing on one of these two effects typically forces the theorist to de-emphasize the other.[25] Without explaining how both of these processes occur and unfold over time, no systemic theory can be complete. Unfortunately, doing so has proven to be extremely difficult. Faced with this dilemma, political scientists have done what it is perhaps in the nature of academics to do: they have taken sides.

On one side, researchers focus on the actions of states and statesmen (the agents) and downplay or ignore the circumstances in which they find themselves.[26] A surfeit of studies that fit this description can be found in the political science literature; they focus on characteristics of decision makers, the behavioral implications of the internal characteristics of states, and so on. At the same time, the proliferation of

[24] Giddens (1979, 66).

[25] For "focusing on" one might reasonably read "implicitly or explicitly asserting the ontological priority of." See Wendt (1987) and Dessler (1989) for review and discussion of the debate. Waltz views his theory as being entirely structural, in that the distribution of capabilities within the system influences outcomes and an individual state's activity is irrelevant. Dessler's 1989 critique of Waltz's theory, simply put, is precisely the reverse: all of the action is the result of purposive state activity, and that activity presupposes the existence of the system – the context within which action takes place.

[26] For an argument in favor of focusing on the role of statesmen in history, see Byman and Pollack (2001). The emphasis on dispositional rather than situational factors as causes of behavior is not entirely surprising; research (e.g., Rosenberg and Wolfsfeld 1977) suggests that, although actors tend to explain their actions in situational terms, observers tend to explain them in dispositional ones, and academics tend overwhelmingly to be observers of rather than participants in the political process.

data-gathering endeavors like the Correlates of War project, the Polity project, and so on, which focus on national and sub-national attributes, has ensured an emphasis on actors rather than contexts in the quantitative international relations literature.[27]

Another group of scholars, however, has chosen to seek the source of history not within those entities but rather in the environment within which they interact (structure). Neorealism, an extension of the classical political realism of such authors as Hans Morgenthau and George Kennan, is the most prominent example: its proponents argue that the most important determinant of the behavior of states is not their internal nature but their external environment, in particular, the distribution of power in the international system.

Neoliberals have also chosen to focus on the environment within which states interact but have emphasized different aspects of it – the distribution of authority in the form of international political institutions,[28] the role of economic processes and information flows, and so forth. Still other scholars, whose collective theoretical breadth defies any common label save "ideationalists," have focused on the social structure of the international system, that is, the distribution of ideas that comprise the identities of the states within it.[29]

Few approaches attempt to combine structure and agency in a manner that reflects both the contribution of each to political outcomes and the ability of each to influence the other. Rational choice theory[30] does not inherently contain any role for structure beyond the rather minimal sense implied by the interaction of the agents (what Wendt calls "micro-structure," or interaction structure).[31] In fact, rational choice theory's ability to explain similar behavior in such diverse structural settings as the

[27] For example, Geller and Singer (1998), a volume devoted to a review of statistical studies of the sources of war, devotes two pages to studies that examine the effects of changes in distributions of capabilities across the system (121–122).

[28] "Institution" is a broad term meant to encompass any of a number of multi-state deliberative entities that both result from and facilitate cooperation. The North Atlantic Treaty Organization and the United Nations are prominent examples; the International Telecommunications Union is a less prominent but more venerable one.

[29] Here see esp. Wendt (1999, ch. 6).

[30] Rational choice theory, which (confusingly enough) is almost entirely a methodology rather than a theory (for treatment as a method, see Rasmusen 1989; for treatment as a theory, see Morrow 1994; and for a seminal example of waffling see Von Neumann and Morgenstern 1944, ch. 1), has its roots in the economics literature but has become quite popular in political science due, I think, to its impressive analytical rigor and ability to produce intriguing and often counterintuitive conclusions. In general, the method involves describing the actors in a given situation, their possible actions and the associated outcomes, the actors' utility functions (which imply some utility or disutility for each possible outcome), and what each of the actors knows and does not know about the situation. Rational choice theory is of no inherent use in specifying what each of these elements will consist of, just as statistical methods like linear regression are of no help in specifying which variables should be included in a test. In both cases, this is the role of theory. (For an example of explicitly realist foundations to a game-theoretic argument see Powell (1999, 53–58).)

[31] Wendt (1999, 147–150). It should be apparent from this discussion that these "micro-structures," the contexts that arise from the mere fact that states interact, are conceptually unrelated to the structure of the international system described earlier (which more or less corresponds to Wendt's idea of "macro-structure"). Two states that are aware of one another's incentives may be unable

U.S. Senate and the trenches of World War I is often seen as a major strength.[32] Modeling the influence of agents on structures, or vice versa, though possible in principle, is underexplored: in fact, both the agents and the structural setting of their interaction are typically assumed to remain constant for the duration of the game. Moreover, rational choice theory predicts behavior "in equilibrium," that is, when no actor has an incentive to act differently; but changes in agents and structures imply that equilibration, not equilibrium, may be the phenomenon of interest in systemic theories, and therefore quite a bit of out-of-equilibrium behavior may be observed.[33]

As a result, as Richard Little has put it,

> explanations in the social sciences . . . frequently operate at one of two extremes. At one extreme, human beings are seen to be free agents with the power to maintain or transform the social systems in which they operate. At the other extreme, it is assumed that human beings are caught in the grip of social structures which they did not create and over which they have no control.[34]

The unavoidable truth is that each perspective, structural and agentic, tells part of the story. The proper response to Carlyle and Marx, in other words, is that history constrains those who make it.[35] Today's decisions take place in an environment shaped by yesterday's actions, and the results of today's decisions provide the environment for tomorrow's.

A few examples will help to illustrate the reciprocal relationship between agents and structures.

- The French Revolution, although it devolved into tyranny, nevertheless popularized the ideals of liberty, equality, and fraternity in a monarchical era. As a result European international politics after the fall of Napoleon played out in the context of the ongoing struggle between nationalism and political liberty, on the one hand, and traditional royal authority on the other. The most prominent international events and institutions from this period – the Treaty of Vienna, the Holy Alliance, the Quadruple Alliance, the various Congresses – were the results of actors attempting to resolve this struggle.
- In the early 20th century, arms races and international tensions divided Europe into two rival camps, the Triple Entente and the Triple Alliance. The diplomatic

to trust one another even though each could benefit from cooperation; that is the effect of micro-structure. The distribution of capabilities in the system may prompt weak states to work harder than strong ones to improve their relative positions; that is the effect of structure.

[32] Axelrod (1984). Some recent research has modeled the impact of changes in domestic institutional structure, typically either as changes in payoffs or as changes in the options available to players, though research in this vein remains "in its infancy" (Rogowski 1999, 135).

[33] The main exception to this generalization is evolutionary game theory; see Weibull (2002) for an introduction. It should be noted that these are all examples of a relatively "thin" conceptualization of structure, meaning that structure is seen as producing or constraining behavior in agents, rather than fundamentally constituting them.

[34] Buzan, Jones, and Little (1993, 103).

[35] For "history," one might just as reasonably substitute "politics," for the history discussed herein is the history *of* politics.

environment was so polarized and relations were so tense that the assassination of an obscure Austrian archduke plunged the continent into war.

- Closer to our own time, the leaders of the two superpowers often cited (and, the evidence suggests, felt genuinely compelled by) the necessities dictated by an overarching ideological struggle when making security policy during the Cold War. Their behavior in turn perpetuated the structural division that caused it. Only a radical deviation in behavior on the part of the Soviet Union in the late 1980s broke this vicious cycle.

In short, the interaction of states produces an international systemic context, or structure, and that structure subsequently defines the limits within which leaders must work as well as the opportunities that are open to them.

There are, historically, two major strands of literature on international relations that bear on the issue of the interrelation of agents and structures: general systems theory and systemic international relations theory. I turn now to an examination of each and a discussion of their potential.

Systemic traditions

A systemic approach to international politics may be somewhat alien to many readers, especially those in more empirically oriented subfields. Most present-day explanations of outcomes in the international realm proceed by examining either the characteristics of states themselves (as when, for example, a state's behavior is attributed to its ideology or its domestic structure) or the logic of interactions between pairs of states (or "dyads"). Even large-scale, aggregated statistical studies of every state in the system across many decades conceive of the relations between those states as being fundamentally dyadic in nature.[36]

The main reason to think systemically about international relations is that the international system actually *is* a system, and it acts like one.[37] In international affairs, interactions between two powers are very often colored by the possibility of third-party involvement, three-party interactions must take into account the possibility of fourth-party involvement, and so on. States and dyads cannot be neatly excised from the context that prompts their actions and analyzed in isolation from one another; moreover, the sum of a series of such analyses will fail to capture the essence of the whole system. Actions appropriate in a dyadic or triadic context may not be appropriate in a systemic one, and in a system actions may produce outcomes that can only be understood in the context of the larger picture. In short, no amount

[36] On this point see Croco and Teo (2005).

[37] As the concept of a system will be very important to the book, it merits explicit definition. Hedley Bull and Adam Watson define a system as a situation in which "the behaviour of each [actor] is a necessary factor in the calculations of the others" (1984, 1). Anthony Giddens, quoting Amitai Etzioni, defines a social system as "a relationship in which changes in one or more component parts initiate changes in other component parts, and these changes, in turn, produce changes in the parts in which the original changes occurred" (1979, 73). The system of states, or at least that of Great Powers, surely counts as a system by these criteria.