1

Power from the Margins

Political science has recently seen a resurgence of interest in international diplomacy. Much of the attention has gone to the "great men" of international politics. For example, studies related to the Vietnam War, the Cuban Missile Crisis, the Korean War, and the Cold War often emphasize presidents or high-level cabinet appointees when analyzing the origins of conflict.[1] Students of international cooperation usually focus on the same figures. Recent studies of arms control and security cooperation, for example, often emphasize the roles of presidents and cabinet-level appointees.[2] These political elites, many argue, are the "primary decision-makers" with respect to national security politics; therefore, focusing on their beliefs, preferences, personal characteristics, personalities, and so on does much to explain international politics.[3] Political scientists, of course,

[1] A few, of many, examples include Graham Allison and Philip Zelikow, *Essence of Decision: Explaining the Cuban Missile Crisis* (New York: Longman, 1999); Y. F. Khong, *Analogies at War: Korea, Munich, Dien Bien Phu, and the Vietnam Decisions of 1965* (Princeton University Press, 1992); Elizabeth Saunders, "Transformative Choices: Leaders and the Origins of Intervention Strategy," *International Security* 34, no. 2 (2009): 119–61.

[2] Eric Grynaviski, *Constructive Illusions: Misperceiving the Origins of International Cooperation* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2014); Brian C. Rathbun, *Diplomacy's Value: Creating Security in 1920s Europe and the Contemporary Middle East* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2014).

[3] "Primary decision maker" is in Keren Yarhi-Milo, *Knowing the Adversary: Leaders, Intelligence, and Assessment of Intentions in International Relations* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014), 13. See, for example, Daniel Byman and Kenneth Pollack, "Let Us Now Praise Great Men: Bringing the Statesman Back In," *International Security* 25, no. 4 (2001): 107–46; Martha Finnemore, *The Purpose of Intervention: Changing Beliefs About the Use of Force* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2003), chap. 2; Emilie M. Hafner-Burton et al., "Decision Maker Preferences for International Legal Cooperation," *International*

realize that these political elites operate under constraints. More ordinary agents, such as citizens and voters, can exert influence on political elites; however, these ordinary agents matter only when acting collectively. Public opinion and electoral results matter, but a single voter does not. A norm entrepreneur with access to organizational resources – such as wealth, prestige, and institutional influence – matters, but an individual without institutional connections does not.[4] Social movements matter, but any specific individual within a movement likely does not (unless the person has a special institutionalized role).[5]

The conventional wisdom in political science, in short, is that actors with institutional influence matter the most. These figures are central to our political and international institutions. The rest of humanity only matters, if at all, if they collectively mobilize. The argument of this book seeks to turn the conventional wisdom on its head. I show that power also lies in being *between* centers of power. This power of betweenness can sometimes matter more in shaping world history than the power that emerges from traditional centers of power. Specifically, decisions by individuals whom I call intermediaries – that is, actors with political power owing to their position between societies, such as missionaries, traders, and low-level government employees – often dramatically affect international politics.

Alliances, trade deals, and war turn on their decisions. Intermediaries' position between societies means that information often traffics through them. They can manipulate that information to create war or ensure peace. This book emphasizes how their power of betweenness shapes

Organization 68, no. 4 (2014): 845–76; Jack Snyder, *Myths of Empire: Domestic Politics and International Ambition* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991).

[4] See, for example, Matthew Evangelista, *Unarmed Forces: The Transnational Movement to End the Cold War* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2002); Martha Finnemore, *National Interests in International Society* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1996); Martha Finnemore and Kathryn Sikkink, "International Norm Dynamics and Political Change," *International Organization* 52, no. 4 (1998): 887–917.

[5] Evangelista, *Unarmed Forces*; Margaret Keck and Kathryn Sikkink, *Activists Beyond Borders* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998); Thomas Risse-Kappen and Kathryn Sikkink, "The Socialization of International Human Rights Norms into Domestic Practices," in *The Power of Human Rights: International Norms and Domestic Change*, ed. Thomas Risse, Stephen Ropp, and Kathryn Sikkink (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 1–38; Maria Stephan and Erica Chenoweth, "Why Civil Resistance Works," *International Security* 33, no. 1 (2008): 7–44. Collective mobilization, in some work in sociology, is the key to agents on the margins having power. See, for example, Jennifer Jihye Chun, *Organizing at the Margins: The Symbolic Politics of Labor in South Korea and the United States* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2009).

cooperation, not war. This chapter outlines a theory that explains the conditions under which intermediaries become crucial for any explanation of cooperation between a state and non-state allies. The specific cases of international cooperation studied in this book are instances in which the United States formed alliances with non-state groups, from 1776 until 1945. In the chapters that follow, I trace how political elites are constrained by, and intermediaries are empowered by, the social structure of international politics. By this I mean that the way personal relationships flow across borders places a specific group of agents, who lack institutional authority, into positions where they are the primary decision-makers shaping international politics in some of the most important and most interesting instances of US security cooperation. By helping the United States find the collaborators upon which American power traditionally depends, they also help explain the rise of American power.

A NETWORK-BASED ACCOUNT OF INTERMEDIARIES' INFLUENCE

In the 1960s, Stanley Milgram conducted a small world experiment. A small world is a social system in which "even when two people do *not* have a friend in common, they are separated by only a short chain of intermediaries."[6] Milgram tested this proposition by sending letters to people in cities in the Midwest, such as Omaha and Wichita, asking them to forward the letters to someone who might know a target individual in Boston. Milgram found that most individuals were connected by no more than "six degrees" of separation, meaning that it took six iterations for a letter to be sent before finding the target person. This finding is consistent with the idea that the United States is a small world, where millions of people are closely linked to one another, whether they realize it or not.[7]

How small is the world of international politics? Most images of the international system depict it as a small system, likely much smaller than the way sociologists like Milgram describe the population of the United States. Some IR scholars think about the international social structure as

[6] Duncan Watts, *Small Worlds: The Dynamics of Networks between Order and Randomness* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999), 4.

[7] On small worlds, see Zeev Maoz, *Networks of Nations: The Evolution, Structure, and Impact of International Networks, 1816–2001* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 10–11. More generally, see Stanley Milgram, "The Small-World Problem," *Psychology Today* 2, no. 1 (1967): 61–7; Duncan Watts, *Six Degrees: The Science of a Connected Age* (New York: Norton, 2003).

the interconnections between states. If we treat states as the units of analysis, then the social structure of the international system is likely a small world, because all states in the modern era know one another directly.[8] If this is the case, there are no degrees of separation between them. They are a family rather than a society, the smallest of worlds. A second image of international diplomacy, featured in traditional diplomatic studies, treats political elites or diplomats as a small set of interconnected agents. One of the interesting features of this approach to the study of diplomacy – the limiting of diplomacy to a small group of political and institutional elites – is that it emphasizes the club-like nature of international diplomacy, characterized by the comparatively small group of individuals working on negotiations.[9] Similar to how research focusing on states as the units of socialization depict a small world, diplomatic studies traditionally represent the international system as connected through powerful political elites who meet in bilateral meetings, discuss matters in international fora, or exchange communications directly to manage international problems. The diplomatic world may be bigger than the world of states, but every high-ranking diplomat is likely connected to every other diplomat through only a few degrees of separation.

This book takes a different approach to the structure of the international system. It posits that the social system relevant to international cooperation is much more varied than the world of states or political elites. To secure one's borders, develop investment or trade partnerships, or advance political change abroad, states often work with groups with

[8] Many contemporary network-based descriptions of international politics point to this view, although only implicitly. See Emilie M. Hafner-Burton, Miles Kahler, and Alexander H. Montgomery, "Network Analysis for International Relations," *International Organization* 63, no. 3 (2009): 559–92; Emilie M. Hafner-Burton and Alexander H. Montgomery, "Power Positions International Organizations, Social Networks, and Conflict," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 50, no. 1 (2006): 3–27; Maoz, *Networks of Nations*.

[9] Examples of work that emphasize the "club-like" nature of diplomacy produced by organizations include Emanuel Adler and Michael Barnett, "A Framework for the Study of Security Communities," in *Security Communities*, ed. Emmanuel Adler and Michael Barnett (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998); Jeffrey Checkel, "International Institutions and Socialization in Europe: Introduction and Framework," *International Organization* 59, no. 4 (2005): 801–26; David H. Bearce and Stacy Bondanella, "Intergovernmental Organizations, Socialization, and Member-State Interest Convergence," *International Organization* 61, no. 4 (2007): 703–33; Jeffrey Lewis, "The Janus Face of Brussels: Socialization and Everyday Decision Making in the European Union," *International Organization* 59, no. 4 (2005): 937–71; Jennifer Mitzen, *Power in Concert: The Nineteenth-Century Origins of Global Governance* (Chicago: University Of Chicago Press, 2013).

whom they have little experience. Whereas diplomats may know other diplomats, they are less likely to know of overseas firms that could be potential economic partners, they may know little about political groups in strategically insignificant parts of the world, and they may have next to no relationship with religious radicals operating in shadowy caves. Therefore, this book treats social structure as the configuration of personal ties between individuals across and within borders.

If one treats personal ties between individuals as the structure of international politics, then the system is likely a "larger world" than that depicted by most IR scholars. Agents are not so closely interconnected. The primary reason is that government agents are not likely to have close, personal ties with the diverse kinds of non-state agents with whom they need to interact. In the language of network theory, we might describe the international system as composed of clusters of individuals. By clusters, I mean there are routinized ties between individuals within an organization, such as a government, a rebel army, or a corporation, that allow those individuals to engage in common enterprises. Sometimes, these clusters will feel a sense of common purpose, such as in an organization with a name and a mission, but other times individuals are simply drawn together because of routinized interactions, such as in a market.[10]

Much of the time, there is significant interaction within clusters but very little interaction between clusters. Sociological theorists posit the idea of "structural holes" between clusters of individuals or organizations, which form when few or no individuals have ties across clusters.[11] For example, two individuals on opposite sides of a continent may never know one another. When there is a hole in the social structure – when there is a failure of agents to connect – the integration of the social structure depends on chains of intermediaries. Theories related to structural holes suggest that in order for individuals, companies, or political communities to cooperate, there must be some "bridge" between them. By bridge, I mean one or more people must have ties with both communities and can thus connect the clusters, enabling cooperation. Two companies may not realize the value of cooperating, for example, if there is no

[10] The former is described as "yoking" in Patrick Thaddeus Jackson and Daniel H. Nexon, "Relations Before States: Substance, Process and the Study of World Politics," *European Journal of International Relations* 5, no. 3 (1999): 291–332.

[11] Burt defines a structural hole in these terms: "A structural hole exists between two people or groups when either party is unaware of the value available if they were to coordinate on some point." Ronald Burt, *Brokerage and Closure: An Introduction to Social Capital* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 25.

individual able to "see" the structural hole and realize the gains that may accrue from working together.[12] Individuals in these bridging positions are often described as brokers.

One central empirical claim this book makes is that the social structure of international politics is often characterized by structural holes. This may seem odd to IR scholars. Usually, our structural images of international politics emphasize the integration of international society in the modern era. Scholarship on diffusion of norms, practices, and technology emphasizes how the globe is becoming a single, integrated world society. Work on international cultures describes a growing, singular, international social system. Theories emphasizing trade and interaction depict the globe growing closer together in increasing levels of integration and interdependence.

These facts about the modern globe do not undermine the intuition that the whole of global social structure depends on a few links that connect societies together. If social structure is the configuration of personal ties between agents, then we will quickly discover variation in how well clusters are linked together. Sociologists have found this to be the case in much more dense social environments, such as schools and companies. Some students do not directly know one another; and opportunities for cooperation between companies are missed when few personal relationships tie those companies together. These general findings are discussed in depth in Chapter 8. I want to concentrate here on the general intuition in international politics.

The most obvious examples of structural holes are instances of "first contact," where previously isolated peoples are connected to the global community for the first time. In these cases, there is no bridge between isolated communities. To find opportunities for cooperation between these distant societies requires an agent to make contact, brokering relations between them. More often, the nature of contemporary politics does not lend itself to developing close, personal relationships between individuals working in different communities, at different levels of governance, and with different political aims.[13] Chapter 8 reviews several ways that structural holes may form: new hubs of political activity may develop with little connection to other centers (e.g., a new rebel group with no

[12] Ronald S. Burt and Don Ronchi, "Teaching Executives to See Social Capital: Results from a Field Experiment," *Social Science Research* 36, no. 3 (2007): 1156–83. More generally, see Ronald Burt, *Structural Holes: The Social Structure of Competition* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992).

[13] Burt, *Structural Holes*; Burt, *Brokerage and Closure*.

relationship to future allies), ties between groups may be disrupted (e.g., a war severs existing ties by killing well-connected leaders), or a state enters a new region of the world where it has few connections.

The closing of structural holes requires brokers to establish bridges between communities; brokers are trustworthy people who have personal connections they can use to connect clusters and secure cooperation. These figures, I argue, take advantage of structural holes to exercise power and influence in international politics. This means the world remains "small," in the language of the small worlds problem. Agents remain connected to one another when structural holes are bridged. But, the bridges are more important than IR scholars usually recognize.

If structural holes are common in international politics, their presence may constrain powerful agents within clusters but empower agents who operate between clusters. Agents with significant institutional influence, who are powerful within clusters, may be unable to generate cooperation due to their inability to identify or build trust with political elites in other clusters. Conversely, the central argument of this book is that strategically placed individuals who close structural holes likely possess power in excess of our expectations over outcomes in international politics, by virtue of having a near-monopoly on information trafficking across structural holes. In short, by focusing on the structural position of agents working between societies, we can begin to understand how seemingly ordinary agents exercise outsized influence in international politics.

The Example of Samoa

Many IR scholars are not accustomed to thinking about social structure as based on ties between individuals. This idea is crucial to the argument of this book. It is this definition of social structure that gives rise to the importance of betweenness. To illustrate, think about the relationship between two countries, the United States and Samoa. Anna Collars, in a book on religious networks in the Roman world, flippantly asks about the connections between the King of Samoa and a peasant in China. She hypothesizes that there are only a few degrees of separation between them.[14] The Chinese peasant is beyond the scope of this book, but the connections between the King of Samoa and an ordinary American citizen are at the heart of it (see Chapter 5).

[14] Anna Collar, *Religious Networks in the Roman Empire: The Spread of New Ideas* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 14.

How was the King of Samoa connected to a resident of Maine in 1887? The King of Samoa, of course, had close relationships with a large number of political actors in Samoa (one cluster); the resident of Maine, likewise, had a large number of connections to actors in Maine (another cluster). Between them, however, there was little contact because of a structural hole. There were few American and no Samoan ships traveling between the societies. In situations such as this, only a few individuals – consular officers and a few sailors – can bridge the communities. In this specific instance, the shortest path between the King of Samoa and a resident of Maine would likely be as follows: the King of Samoa knew the American Consul, Harald Marsh Sewall, and Sewall's father was a Maine shipbuilder and significant employer in the state. Assuming that Maine was a small world separated by only a few degrees of separation, the King of Samoa was likely related to every Maine resident quite closely.[15] Yet, this small world was only made possible by Harald Marsh Sewall, the primary link between the United States and Samoa; without Sewall, the paths linking Maine's residents to Samoa would be quite long and indirect (probably trafficking through Germany).

Samoa illustrates how a planet becomes a small world because of a single individual who provides a bridge across borders. The sum of global social structure might be described in this way, highlighting patterns of relationships between individuals across which information, money, and power flows.

Three Kinds of Influential Agents

The power of betweenness described in this book comes from the importance of brokerage across structural holes. Agents without institutional authority can shape decisions by taking advantage of bridging positions between societies. To lay out how, I focus on the causal powers of intermediaries. These are agents who bridge structural holes through the use of their weak ties. This section describes intermediaries, emphasizing their betweenness.

I use the concept of centrality in social network theory to provide a convenient way to distinguish between two accounts of network structures that constrain and enable agents. The logic of centrality is that an actor central to one or more networks has access to more information,

[15] This assumption is safe because Maine's population was small, and Arthur Sewall was a large employer who knew political figures such as Senator Vandenberg, creating a situation in which Sewall was likely closely linked to much of Maine's population. The details of this case are explored in depth in Chapter 5.

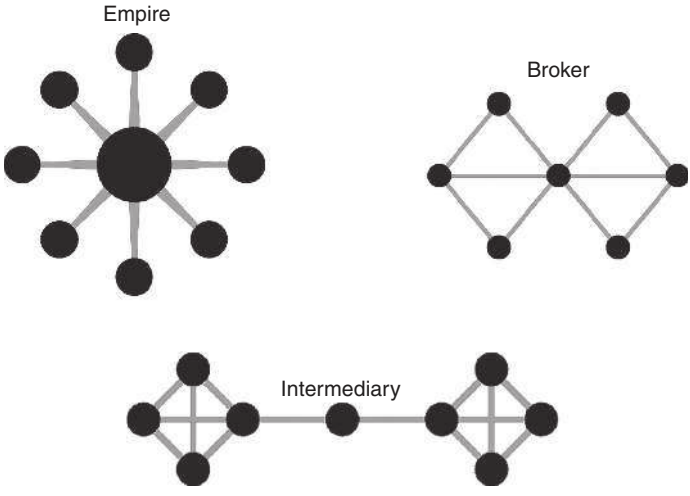

FIGURE 1.1 Centrality and social networks

resources, and influence than do actors who lack social connections. Yet, different agents may be central in different ways. Specifically, political elites and traditional diplomats likely have influence due to their centrality within a cluster; and intermediaries likely have influence due to their centrality between clusters.

The first type of centrality, usually captured by measures of degree centrality, suggests that people are more central to a network when they are well connected within a cluster: people gain influence, prestige, or social capital as the number and strength of their social connections increase in comparison to other agents.[16] Nexon and Wright, for example, describe one important source of power for empires and hegemons: "actors with more connections have more information about the preferences and orientations of others, than those with fewer connections," and Hafner-Burton and Montgomery describe how increasing agents' social connections increases their prestige.[17] The diagram of the empire in Figure 1.1 shows a state with a high degree of centrality because it is connected to many states on the periphery that do not have connections to each other.

[16] David Knoke, *Political Networks: The Structural Perspective* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), chap. 1.

[17] Daniel H. Nexon and Thomas Wright, "What's at Stake in the American Empire Debate," *The American Political Science Review* 101, no. 2 (2007): 260; Hafner-Burton and Montgomery, "Power Positions International Organizations, Social Networks, and Conflict."

Another type of centrality – usually captured by measures of betweenness – highlights an agent's strategic placement. The broker in Figure 1.1 represents ideal-typical betweenness centrality. If an agent is placed between parts of a network such that the overall coherence of the network depends on that agent's existence, then the agent has substantial influence, even if the quantity of connections is low. Building on well-established sociological claims, Stacie Goddard argues that when networks are fragmented by structural holes, agents who can bridge different parts can reshape international politics, because their position between influential players provides strategic flexibility, a higher potential to develop innovative ideas, and a greater likelihood of seeing their ideas diffuse.[18] Goddard concentrates on traditional diplomats, showing that agents who have strong ties to political elites in other states can broker cooperation. Henry Kissinger, for example, controlled communications between the White House and the Kremlin through his backchannel talks with the Soviet ambassador. He had elements of power that arose from his position "between" societies.[19]

These two logics of centrality point to the study of traditional political elites. Presidents, for example, are influential because they occupy a place within organizations that provides them with access to many others within a network: they are literally the center of power within the state. For instance, presidents have access to information coming from the national security bureaucracy, information from legislative and media contacts, and access to party resources that ordinary citizens do not have, making them "central" and worthy of study.[20] Other kinds of political elites who exert influence on international politics – from chief diplomats like Otto von Bismarck to chief terrorists like Osama Bin Laden – may be described as influential because they are hubs of network activity.[21]

Similarly, studies that highlight betweenness also focus on political elites. Goddard, for example, draws on some of the most powerful individuals in world politics to demonstrate betweenness: Napoleon III and

[18] Burt, *Structural Holes*; Burt, *Brokerage and Closure*; Stacy Goddard, "Brokering Change: Networks and Entrepreneurs in International Politics," *International Theory* 1, no. 2 (2009): 249–81. See also Charli Carpenter, *"Lost" Causes: Agenda Vetting in Global Issue Networks and the Shaping of Human Security* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2014).

[19] Grynaviski, *Constructive Illusions*.

[20] See, for example, Jon Western, *Selling Intervention and War: The Presidency, the Media, and the American Public* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2005).

[21] See, for example, Marc Sageman, *Understanding Terror Networks* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004), 141.