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Author(s): Miriam Fendius Elman

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The Foreign Policies of Small States: Challenging Neorealism in Its Own Backyard

MIRIAM FENDIUS ELMAN*

The received wisdom in international relations suggests that we can best account for the foreign policies of small states by examining structural/systemic rather than domestic level factors. This article challenges this scholarly consensus. The distribution of power and the balance of threat do influence domestic institutional formation and change in emerging states. However, the subsequent military strategies of these weak states are likely to reflect such domestic institutional choices in a number of important and predictable ways. The article tests this argument against pre-1900 US domestic regime change and foreign security policy. The historical evidence suggests that while international preconditions were critically linked to constitutional reform, the institutional structures and rules of democratic presidentialism affected both the timing and substance of US military strategies in later periods. The US case study provides a springboard for speculating on the international context of democratization in Eastern Europe and the long-term foreign-policy consequences of this domestic regime choice.

With the collapse of the Soviet Union and the end of the cold war, a number of small states have entered upon the world scene.¹ How has the international

*Department of Political Science, Columbia University. Previous versions of this article were presented at the 1993 Annual Meetings of the American Political Science Association, the New York State Political Science Association, and the International Studies Association. Funding for this research was generously provided by the William T. R. Fox Fellowship in Political Science and the Morris Abrams Award in International Relations. The author thanks Emmanuel Adler, Vincent Augur, Lawrence Dodd, Colin Elman, Annette Baker Fox, Beau Grosscup, Virginia Hauffler, Jerel Rosati, Jack Snyder, Hendrik Spruyt, Yaacov Vertzberger, the *Journal's* editors and anonymous referees for their helpful comments on earlier drafts.

¹ In this article, the terms 'weak', 'small', and 'insecure' are used interchangeably. When 'small state' appears in the text, it should be understood to mean 'small' in terms of power rather than size. For a similar conceptualization, see Michael Handel, *Weak States in the International System* (London: Frank Cass, 1981), pp. 10–11; and Peter R. Baehr, 'Small States: A Tool for Analysis?', *World Politics*, 3 (1975), 456–66, at p. 461. For an alternative definition based on population size, see Colin Clarke and Tony Payne, eds, *Politics, Security and Development in Small States* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1987). The most convincing definitions are those which view smallness in terms of capabilities as well as how those capabilities are applied against whom, when, and for what sets of goals. Resource capabilities necessarily constrain the scope and domain of foreign policy. Thus a small state can be defined by its limited capacity to: (1) influence the security interests of, or directly threaten, a great power; and (2) defend itself against an attack by an equally motivated great power. See Robert O. Keohane, 'Lilliputians' Dilemmas: Small States in International Politics', *International Organization*, 23 (1969), 291–310, at pp. 295–6; Jack S. Levy, *War in the Modern Great Power System, 1495–1975* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 1983), pp. 9–10, 13; Robert L. Rothstein, *Alliances and Small Powers* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1968), p. 29; Handel, *Weak States in the International System*, pp. 36, 68–9, 171; Annette Baker Fox, 'The Small States in the International System, 1919–1969', *International Journal*, 24 (1969), 751–64, at p. 752; Eric J. Labs, 'Do Weak States Bandwagon?' *Security Studies*, 1 (1992), 383–416, at p. 409.

environment affected the democratization process in these emerging states? Now that democratic institutions have been selected, how will this domestic regime choice affect their foreign policies?

International relations (IR) theory offers little help in answering these questions. While IR theorists have addressed the foreign policies of great powers, they have largely ignored the study of small states. Moreover, even when scholars *do* refer to weak states, systemic rather than domestic factors are accorded causal primacy. The received wisdom in the field is that domestic determinants will be less salient when studying small state behaviour because external constraints are more severe and the international situation is more compelling. Including domestic affairs in our analysis would only detract from an already satisfactory explanation based on the small state's position in the international system and its interaction with the great powers.

Given this scholarly consensus, small state foreign policy provides a unique opportunity for those scholars who insist that domestic politics matters in explaining international and foreign-policy outcomes. Put more formally, weak state foreign policy presents a crucial test for domestic level theory. It is precisely in such cases where the conventional wisdom suggests that international factors can adequately account for state policy. If we can show that domestic politics matters *even in these instances where we would expect that it should not*, then we will have provided the strongest possible support for domestic level theorizing.

This article is divided into three sections. In Section 1, I review the received wisdom in the field which assumes that neorealism has the home-court advantage in explaining small state behaviour.² Assertions that international

² Neorealism assumes that international constraints influence state behaviour. In general, international pressures will override domestic interests, internal political struggles, and the characteristics of particular states in foreign-policy decision making. Given that the international system is anarchic and that states must consequently ensure their own security, the exigencies of the international environment will be paramount in decision makers' calculations. Accordingly, a state's behaviour is viewed as a response to the constraints and incentives of its aggregate power relative to others (i.e., the distribution of capabilities) or the degree of aggressive intent on the part of external actors (i.e., the balance of threat). Neorealists assume that statesmen will respond rationally to these preconditions and will choose that foreign-policy course which is most likely to maximize security benefits and minimize security risks. While neorealists recognize that systemic/structural factors may prevent statesmen from pursuing optimal strategies, it is presumed that elites are domestically unconstrained. In contrast to this structural/systemic argument, unit or domestic level theories expect that state attributes and societal conflicts will affect foreign-policy choices. It is assumed that foreign policy will not always reflect national security interests or systemic/structural imperatives. Rather, the characteristics of particular states and the ideologies and local interests of societal and state actors will often render statesmen incapable of responding to the exigencies of the international environment. For seminal works that distinguish between external and internal levels of analysis as determinants of state behaviour, see Kenneth N. Waltz, *Man, the State and War: A Theoretical Analysis* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1959) and J. David Singer, 'The Level of Analysis Problem in International Relations', *World Politics*, 14 (1961), 77–92. For recent

factors have causal priority in such cases are not uncommon. In fact, most students view small state behaviour as a function of either the international distribution of power or the balance of threat. Changes in small state foreign policies are considered isomorphic to fluctuations in the structure of the international system and/or the degree of threat posed by the great powers. In light of this scholarly consensus, small state foreign policy poses a hard case for domestic level theory while it is easy on alternative systemic/structural explanations. Thus a successful refutation of the received wisdom would pose an even more significant challenge to neorealism in other contexts – it would do much to legitimize domestic level approaches while seriously diminishing neorealism's claim for explanatory primacy in the study of international relations.³

In Section II, various domestic level theories of foreign policy are rejected in favour of an 'institutional' approach. Historical institutionalism suggests that we study the development of domestic rules and structures separately from their effects over time. This two-stage research strategy is necessary because the variables that are important for explaining institutional formation and change may be less important in accounting for subsequent state behaviour. For example, while international factors play a dominant role in predisposing statesmen towards particular democratic institutional alternatives, subsequent state practices may reflect these recent domestic institutional choices rather than the constraints of the international environment. *Paradoxically, neorealism has greater explanatory power in accounting for domestic regime choice in emerging states than it does for explaining their subsequent military strategies.*

In Section III, I review pre-1900 US domestic regime change and subsequent military strategy. American state building in the 1780s provides an opportunity for testing how the international environment influences the choice between alternative democratic institutional arrangements, if at all. The historical evidence suggests that systemic/structural conditions play a dominant role in democratic institutional formation and change. When emerging states are faced with severe external threats to their survival, regime reformers are more likely to choose presidential institutional features. When such exogenous pressures are

(Footnote continued)

overviews of the debate, see Richard Rosecrance and Arthur A. Stein, 'Beyond Realism: The Study of Grand Strategy', in Richard Rosecrance and Arthur A. Stein, eds, *The Domestic Bases of Grand Strategy* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1993); Jack Snyder, *Myths of Empire: Domestic Politics and International Ambitions* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1991), pp. 21–3; and Bruce Bueno de Mesquita and David Lalman, *War and Reason: Domestic and International Imperatives* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1992), pp. 12–17, 247.

³ By exploring small state foreign policy and showing that domestic politics counts, this article aims to question the assumed causal primacy of neorealism. However, I remain firmly rooted in the classical realist tradition, which never disregarded the important role of domestic level factors. As Snyder notes, 'Realism must be recaptured from those who look only at politics between societies, ignoring what goes on within societies' (Snyder, *Myths of Empire*, p. 20).

absent, statesmen enjoy a wider range of alternatives. They may choose presidential type systems, but parliamentary institutions may also appear attractive.

US foreign security policy during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries also provides a ready testbed for judging the merits of a domestic politics alternative to the study of small state behaviour. Specifically, I identify the determinants of military strategy during the Quasi War (1798–1800); the War of 1812; and the Mexican–American War (1846–48).⁴ Each case pits neorealism against the proposed domestic level argument. Since the two theories lead us to expect different foreign policies, I examine the actual outcomes to see which theory predicts more reliably. The domestic institutional argument gains credibility by providing the best explanation for US military strategies. The defeat of neorealism in this competition can be considered particularly significant because the theory fails in an area in which it claims to be strong.

The cases demonstrate how the rules and structures of presidentialism, rather than the constraints of the external environment, influenced US military strategies. The historical evidence suggests that US foreign policies during this period failed to reflect prevailing international conditions and can only be understood from a domestic level perspective. Specifically, domestic institutional features affected both the timing and substance of US military strategies. Systemic/structural factors lead us to expect foreign-policy behaviour which is not borne out by the empirical evidence. The proposed domestic level approach provides a closer historical fit.

In conclusion, the article suggests that the kinds of causal arguments appropriate for explaining state choices during periods of crisis when domestic institutions are first created, may be less appropriate in later periods – while the external environment affects domestic institutional development, these institutional designs will condition subsequent foreign policy outcomes. Neorealism assumes that such domestic 'regime type has only a limited affect on a state's foreign policy, if at all.'⁵ According to neorealism, domestic politics can be

⁴ Military strategy is how states decide 'which wars shall be fought, or if war should be fought' (see Barry R. Posen, *The Sources of Military Doctrine: France, Britain, and Germany Between the World Wars* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1984), p. 285). These cases comprise the three foreign wars that the United States fought as a weak state as well as the security issues which dominated domestic debate during the initial years of the American republic.

⁵ It is often argued that while neorealism can account for general recurring patterns of state behaviour, it does not attempt to explain the foreign policies of specific states. For example, Waltz says that a theory of foreign policy is required in order to explain how an individual state will respond to the constraints posed by the international system (see Kenneth N. Waltz, *Theory of International Politics* (Reading, Mass.: Addison-Wesley, 1979), pp. 71–2). Nevertheless, Waltz does derive different foreign policies, such as alignment strategies, from different distributions of power. Balancing, chain-ganging, and buckpassing behaviour, which Waltz depicts as the product of the system and its given polarity, are *not* general systemic or international outcomes but are rather alternative foreign-policy strategies. In short, neorealism *is* a theory of foreign policy. But it differs from other theories of foreign policy by assuming that state behaviour will be responsive to international constraints and incentives rather than domestic level pressures. For additional studies

'black boxed', because, whatever their different internal characteristics, all states must nevertheless act in similar ways to ensure their security in a self-help world. Past research on small states has relied on this view of international relations. The scholarly consensus views small state behaviour from a state-centric perspective in which foreign-policy outputs are a response to external constraints. By contrast, I argue that whether international or domestic factors matter more is an empirical question and should not be assumed *a priori*. In contests between levels of analysis, neither domestic nor international arguments automatically win.

I. HOW SHOULD WE STUDY SMALL STATE FOREIGN POLICY?

The Scholarly Consensus

While mainstream IR has largely ignored the study of weak states, scholars have suggested that we can account for their behaviour by focusing on the effects of the international system. The reasoning is as follows: since small states are more preoccupied with survival than are the great powers, the international system will be the most relevant level of analysis for explaining their foreign-policy choices. Because weak states are typically faced with external threats to national survival, foreign policy will reflect an attentiveness to the constraints of the international environment and foreign-policy goals will be less constrained by the domestic political process. By contrast, domestic politics will necessarily play a greater role in an explanation of great power foreign policy. Generally speaking, great powers are faced with a lower level of external threat in comparison to small states and thus have more options for action. This increased range of choice will tend to make foreign policy formation more susceptible to domestic political influences. Consequently, unit level variables cannot be ignored when explaining great power foreign policy.⁶

(F-note continued)

which employ the structural/systemic level of analysis in explaining particular foreign policies, see Posen, *The Sources of Military Doctrine*; Benjamin Miller, 'Explaining Great Power Cooperation in Conflict Management', *World Politics*, 45 (1992), 1–46; and Joseph M. Grieco, *Cooperation Among Nations: Europe, America and Non-Tariff Barriers to Trade* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1987).

⁶ See Waltz, *Theory of International Politics*, pp. 194–5. With regard to the determinants of small state foreign policy, Waltz is ambiguous. On the one hand, he argues that small state security and foreign policy will be dependent on structural constraints, such as the degree of great power competition. Small states will need to be more attentive to these external constraints due to their 'narrower margin for error' (Waltz, *Theory of International Politics*, pp. 184–5, 195). On the other hand, Waltz claims that the smaller the state, the more it is likely to take international constraints for granted, since nothing it does can significantly effect the international system. Moreover, because great powers focus their attention on those states most likely to present a security threat, they will be less interested in weak states. As a result, small states will face fewer external constraints and their behaviour will be more likely to reflect domestic political influences (Waltz, *Theory of International Politics*, pp. 72–3).

Arguments that presume the salience of different levels of analysis in the study of great versus small state behaviour have been raised in several seminal texts. Well-known early examples include Wolfers and Rosenau. The former, in his famous analogy of the 'burning house', emphasizes that states' fear for survival is a variable rather than a constant and that 'the closer nations are drawn to the pole of complete compulsion', the more they can be expected to conform in their behaviour and act in a way that corresponds to structural models.⁷ For Wolfers, the need to analyse decision making and domestic politics is most essential in the study of great power foreign policy, where environmental constraints are less severe and hence differences in state behaviour are more pronounced. Similarly, in assessing the relative explanatory power of structural and domestic factors in foreign policy, Rosenau suggests that the international environment will be more important in an analysis of small state rather than great power foreign policy.⁸

In recent years, this scholarly consensus has been reinforced. It is generally assumed that because of the different international contexts in which small and large states operate, their foreign policies will reflect different sets of constraints. Domestic level pressures will have more relevance for explaining the foreign-policy choices of states which are less exposed to the international environment. For example, Jervis argues that the security dilemma is particularly acute for small states that cannot afford to be cheated and are less likely to be buffered from the consequences of foreign-policy mistakes. Unlike great powers, small states lack a 'margin of time and error' when responding to external exigencies. Since the costs of being exploited are much higher for small states than they are for great powers, the former will feel the effects of anarchy to a greater extent. Consequently, statesmen in small states will need to be 'more closely attuned' to external constraints than will great power leadership.⁹

Similarly, Snyder assumes that the study of small state and great power behaviour require different analytical foci. He points out that 'among the great powers, domestic pressures often outweigh international ones in the calculations of national leaders'.¹⁰ Since great powers 'enjoy a substantial buffer from the pressures of international competition', domestic political explanations are good predictors of their foreign policy strategies. When studying the foreign policies of small states, Snyder does not expect domestic political theories to fit as well. Whereas 'great powers adapt their foreign strategies to their domestic

⁷ Arnold Wolfers, *Discord and Collaboration: Essays on International Politics* (Baltimore, Md: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1962), pp. 13–16.

⁸ James Rosenau, 'Pre-theories and Theories of International Politics', in R. Barry Farrell, ed., *Approaches to Comparative and International Politics* (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 1966), pp. 47–8.

⁹ Robert Jervis, 'Cooperation Under the Security Dilemma', *World Politics*, 30 (1978), 167–214, at pp. 172–3.

¹⁰ Snyder, *Myths of Empire*, p. 20. See also Miroslav Nincic, *Democracy and Foreign Policy: The Fallacy of Political Realism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1992), p. 16.

circumstances', small states are more 'exposed to the vagaries of international security and economic competition'. Since small state foreign policy strategies will reflect an attentiveness to external exigencies, international/structural explanations should suffice.¹¹

Like Snyder, Schweller argues that domestic level explanations will be less useful when it comes to small states. According to Schweller, domestic institutional constraints explain why great power democracies have consistently pursued foreign policies short of war when confronted with rising challengers. By contrast, small democratic states 'have not had their foreign policy options constrained by those [domestic political] elements that have ruled out preventive war for other democracies'.¹² Rather than being susceptible to domestic level influences, Schweller concludes that 'extreme systemic constraints' can account for weak state foreign policy and military behaviour.¹³

Walt concurs with this received wisdom. In explaining the alliance patterns of small states, he suggests that weak states are more likely to bandwagon with an aggressive great power than balance against it. He attributes this foreign policy strategy to the position of small states in the international system. Since weak states are vulnerable to the aggressive demands of great powers, they will ally with a dominant power in order to avoid immediate attack. Bandwagoning is likely to be a preferred alliance strategy when the threatening great power is geographically proximate and has a strong offensive capacity as well as when alternative great power allies are unavailable.¹⁴ Labs' recent study of small state alignment similarly concludes that systemic-level conditions determine the foreign policies of weak states. Like Walt, Labs argues that whether weak states are more likely to balance or bandwagon against a great power threat is a function of systemic factors, such as geographic proximity and the availability of alternative alliance options.¹⁵ He concludes that neorealism is 'powerful in predicting weak state behavior'.¹⁶

Lastly, in their study of state behaviour in the post-cold war era, Goldgeier and McFaul argue that while domestic politics will have an increasing influence

¹¹ Snyder, *Myths of Empire*, pp. 62, 317–18.

¹² Randall L. Schweller, 'Domestic Structure and Preventive War: Are Democracies More Pacific?', *World Politics*, 14 (1992), 235–69, at p. 267.

¹³ Schweller, 'Domestic Structure and Preventive War', pp. 253, 264–8.

¹⁴ Stephen M. Walt, *The Origins of Alliances* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1987), pp. 21–31. Walt's point is not that small states *prefer* to bandwagon, but rather that they will often be forced to select this course of action due to their vulnerable international position. Yet, Walt's insistence that weak states choose bandwagoning strategies 'reluctantly' makes it difficult to falsify his argument. If a small state bandwagons, Walt can point to its geographic proximity to a threatening great power or to the unavailability of allies – 'balance of threat' theory scores a success. If a small state balances, Walt can always argue that this strategy should be its first choice *even if* it is a good candidate for bandwagoning – once again, 'balance of threat' theory scores a success. That Walt's theory is non-falsifiable highlights the ambiguity of neorealist policy prescriptions where virtually any foreign-policy action would appear to confirm the theory.

¹⁵ Labs, 'Do Weak States Bandwagon?', pp. 385–6.

¹⁶ Labs, 'Do Weak States Bandwagon?', p. 406.

on great power foreign policy, the behaviour of small states on the periphery of the international system will continue to reflect structural/systemic constraints: 'structural realism is inadequate to explain the behavior of states in the core but is relevant for understanding regional security systems in the periphery'.¹⁷

To what extent has the small state literature reflected the scholarly consensus found in mainstream IR theory? We would expect that those works specifically devoted to the study of small states would question the received wisdom's empirical validity. Yet, 'to a large extent, small states research concentrates its efforts on the level of structurally determined behavior patterns. All authors, to some degree, start from the assumption that the structural attributes of smallness are by far the most important, if not the only, criteria that determined small states' policy'.¹⁸

Analysts typically assume that because small states lack the necessary self-sufficiency to defend themselves against great powers, they will be 'continually preoccupied with the question of survival'.¹⁹ Since small states have both more to fear as well as more to lose, structural constraints and incentives will exert a powerful influence on the decision-making calculus. For example, in a recent study of small state security and foreign policy, Handel argues that

domestic determinants of foreign policy are less salient in weak states. The international system leaves them less room for choice in the decision making process. Their smaller margin of error ... makes the essential interests of weak states less ambiguous. Kenneth Waltz's 'third image' is therefore the most relevant level of analysis.²⁰

Much of the small state literature tends to concur with Handel that the international level of analysis is a good predictor of small state foreign policy.

¹⁷ James M. Goldgeier and Michael McFaul, 'A Tale of Two Worlds: Core and Periphery in the Post-Cold War Era', *International Organization*, 46 (1992), 467–91, at p. 470, see also pp. 475–6, 479. Contrary to Goldgeier and McFaul's assertions, much of the literature on developing countries does not insist that structural explanations are clearly dominant. For example, Rothstein frequently refers to domestic considerations in explaining the foreign-policy choices of underdeveloped countries. He argues that a variety of domestic level variables are salient for this category of weak state, primarily because 'questions of legitimacy, authority, and national identification remain unsettled' (see Robert L. Rothstein, *The Weak in the World of the Strong: The Developing Countries in the International System* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1977), p. 35). Recent analyses of Third World security and foreign policy which also focus on domestic political influences include Steven R. David, 'Explaining Third World Alignment', *World Politics*, 43 (1991), 233–56; and Mohammed Ayoob, 'The Security Problematic of the Third World', *World Politics*, 43 (1991), 257–83.

¹⁸ Hans Vogel, 'Small States' Efforts in International Relations: Enlarging the Scope', in Otmarr Holl, ed., *Small States in Europe and Dependence* (Vienna: Braumuller, 1983), p. 57.

¹⁹ Handel, *Weak States in the International System*, p. 36.

²⁰ Handel, *Weak States in the International System*, pp. 3, 261–2; see also R. P. Barston, 'Introduction', in R. P. Barston, ed., *The Other Powers: Studies in the Foreign Policies of Small States* (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1973), p. 19; Rothstein, *Alliances and Small Powers*, p. 182.

For example, in Fox's seminal study of small state behaviour during the Second World War, foreign policy is largely considered a response to external conditions, such as the degree of great power competition and the demands made upon the small state by great power belligerents.²¹ Similarly, Paul's recent account of small state military strategy suggests that their strategic choices are primarily a reflection of external constraints and opportunities rather than internal pushes and pulls. Consistent with the received wisdom in the field, he argues that a small state's decision to wage war depends on systemic factors such as alliance support from other great powers and the anticipated reactions of the stronger state: 'the timing of war is greatly affected by a weaker state's ... assessment of the loopholes in the opponent's strategy and tactics.'²²

In sum, mainstream IR theorists in general, and most small state researchers in particular, explain small state foreign policy by focusing on the prevailing features of the international system and on small state–great power interaction. Bjøl puts it well: 'For the small state, as Rosenau has pointed out, the environment is a much more important variable than for the great power, and hence any reasoning about its role should probably start by an identification of the type of international system in which it has to operate'.²³

Challenging Neorealism in Its Own Backyard

The received wisdom in the field suggests that structural/systemic variables have the home-court advantage in accounting for weak state foreign policies. Given this scholarly consensus, the study of small state behaviour provides a unique opportunity for dealing neorealism a major blow as well as for demonstrating the merits of domestic level approaches to foreign policy analysis. Small state behaviour offers a particularly good test of neorealism because it is a crucial case. According to Stinchcombe, theories gain credibility by being pitted against each other in crucial experiments: 'by eliminating the most likely alternative theory, we increase the credibility of our theory much more than we do by eliminating alternatives at random'.²⁴ Posen claims that 'our goal of theory testing should be the construction of particularly difficult tests – tests that one intuitively expects the theory to pass only with difficulty'.²⁵ Similarly, Grieco notes that 'the most powerful way to test a theory is to

²¹ Annette Baker Fox, *The Power of Small States: Diplomacy in World War II* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1959).

²² T. V. Paul, *Asymmetric Conflicts: War Initiation By Weaker Powers* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994), p. 176.

²³ Erling Bjøl, 'The Small State in International Politics', in August Schou and Arne Olau Brundland, eds, *Small States in International Relations* (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiskell, 1971), pp. 32–4.

²⁴ Arthur L. Stinchcombe, *Constructing Social Theories* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, and World, 1968), p. 25.

²⁵ Posen, *The Sources of Military Doctrine*, p. 38.

determine if the propositions derived from it hold in circumstances in which they are unlikely to do so, and in which comparable but divergent propositions from competing theories very much ought to be validated'.²⁶

Based on this criterion, small state behaviour is essentially a hard case for domestic level theory while it is easy on the alternative neorealist explanation. Since small state behaviour is likely to reflect the constraints of the international environment, it should offer the best confirmation of neorealist assertions. Indeed, neorealism should have little difficulty in explaining small state foreign policy because these cases are precisely where we would expect unit level influences to play a less significant role. Finding that domestic politics does indeed matter in these unlikely instances will challenge the explanatory power of neorealism while justifying the need for domestic level analysis.

II. DOMESTIC LEVEL THEORIES OF FOREIGN POLICY: TRADITIONAL APPROACHES AND HISTORICAL INSTITUTIONALISM

'Society' Versus 'State'

Challenging the scholarly consensus regarding the determinants of small state foreign policy requires that we test neorealism against a domestic politics explanation. The logical step would be to adopt a theory of domestic politics already advanced in the field. However, most prove insufficient in accounting for the foreign policies of internationally weak, *democratic* states.²⁷

Liberal politics are constructed to allow for the participation of both state and societal actors in policy formation. Consequently, monocausal 'society' or 'state' centred theories will fail to capture domestic political processes adequately. Societal arguments, which view state behaviour as a function of pressures from domestic groups, often neglect the possibility that state actors and institutions can hinder or facilitate the capacity of these groups to influence policy outcomes. Moreover, such approaches often neglect that state actors can have interests and goals of their own, which may or may not coincide with societal preferences.²⁸

On the other hand, state-centred approaches, which view foreign policy as the output of the administrative and decision-making apparatus of the state's

²⁶ Joseph M. Grieco, 'Understanding the Problem of International Cooperation: The Limits of Neoliberal Institutionalism and the Future of Realist Theory', in David A. Baldwin, ed., *Neorealism and Neoliberalism: The Contemporary Debate* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), p. 306.

²⁷ In this article, I define democracy in its minimalist sense. A state can be categorized as democratic if government leaders are determined by elections contested by independent political groups; the transfer of power between these political groups is peaceful and is based on election results; government officials are not systematically controlled by non-elected individuals or institutions; and citizens have the right to express political views, organize for political action and seek alternative sources of information without fear of punishment.

²⁸ A seminal example of the societal approach is Helen Milner, *Resisting Protectionism: Global Industries and the Politics of International Trade* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1988).

executive branch, often neglect the fact that the successful implementation of state policy requires the co-operation of powerful societal groups.²⁹ Moreover, statist approaches commonly fail to take sufficient account of the more subtle forms of public pressure. For example, in democracies, the executive typically has institutional incentives to anticipate the reactions of domestic groups and to revise policies to accord with citizens' expected attitude towards future policies. Thus, while the executive may encounter little domestic opposition, statist are incorrect to infer that this consensus implies executive autonomy from societal forces.

Lastly, state-centred approaches which view policy outcomes as a function of organizational structure (i.e., the relative strength of the state in relation to society), obscure the role of political bargaining which inevitably occurs in all democratic states, whether 'weak' or 'strong'.³⁰ This 'domestic structure' approach identifies the boundaries within which political choices are made but fails to explain specific foreign-policy formation. Additionally, the domestic structure approach derives outcomes from fairly fixed contextual features. It assumes that political outcomes can simply be 'read off' an institutional configuration.³¹ Consequently, the domestic political process which necessarily intervenes between state-societal preconditions and foreign-policy outcomes is underspecified.

The Institutional Approach

Institutionalism, often termed the 'new institutionalism' or 'historical institutionalism', addresses the shortcomings of both societal and statist approaches.³² Indeed, an institutional approach is especially well suited for the study of foreign-policy formation in democratic states, because it attempts to account for the open interplay between state and society and the ways in which institutional designs impinge upon both state and societal actors.³³

Central to institutionalism is the belief that factors internal to political

²⁹ Exemplars of this type of statist argument include Robert Gilpin, *US Power and the Multinational Corporation* (New York: Basic Books, 1975); and Stephen D. Krasner, *Defending the National Interest: Raw Materials Investments and US Foreign Policy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1978).

³⁰ See, for example, Peter Katzenstein, ed., *Between Power and Plenty: Foreign Economic Policies of the Advanced Industrial States* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1978).

³¹ Kathleen Thelen and Sven Steinmo, 'Historical Institutionalism in Comparative Politics', in Sven Steinmo, Kathleen Thelen and Frank Longstreth, eds, *Structuring Politics: Historical Institutionalism in Comparative Politics* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992), p. 14.

³² See Thelen and Steinmo, 'Historical Institutionalism'. See also James G. March and Johan P. Olsen, 'The New Institutionalism: Organizational Factors in Political Life', *American Political Science Review*, 78 (1984), 734-9.

³³ Thelen and Steinmo, 'Historical Institutionalism', p. 10. I define institutions here as sets of rules that prescribe permissible behaviour. Institutions define acceptable patterns of conduct which channel social behaviour in a certain direction rather than in the many directions that would otherwise be possible.

institutions affect the flow of history. Without denying the importance of societal conflict and the calculations of self-interested actors, institutionalists posit a more autonomous role for institutions.³⁴ Two propositions are central to the institutional approach. First, institutional arrangements are said to influence the struggles between societal and government actors. They do so by providing the arenas within which social forces contend as well as by setting terms and available resources. Institutions constrain and empower policy makers by delineating specific repertoires of policy instruments, thereby influencing the strategies ultimately adopted: 'Once developed, ... actors tend to view solutions to particular problems through the lens of the instruments that are available to them; their options are limited or expanded by the tools they have at hand'.³⁵

Secondly, institutions will mediate the interests and capacities of state and societal actors even after the ideas and conditions responsible for their formation are no longer present. Institutions are likely to have long-term policy implications beyond the control and intentions of their designers. As Krasner notes, 'the basic characteristic of an institutional argument is that prior institutional choices limit available future options'.³⁶ Thus, institutionalism requires that we study how governance structures initially develop as well as how they constrain and enable subsequent policy choices: 'just as the rules make a difference, so does the way in which they are adopted'.³⁷

*International Effects on Domestic Institutional Formation and Change*³⁸

Recent studies of democratic regime transition have increased our understanding of how domestic institutions are formed and subsequently revised. These studies emphasize that institutional formation and change tend to occur during periods of crisis in which existing political rules and structures are discredited and new sets of rules are adopted: 'the transitional phase can be seen ... as a formative period, akin to a critical juncture, during which choices set countries

³⁴ James G. March and Johan P. Olsen, *Rediscovering Institutions: The Organizational Basis of Politics* (New York: The Free Press, 1989); Thelen and Steinmo, 'Historical Institutionalism', p. 2.

³⁵ Stephen Haggard, *Pathways from the Periphery: The Politics of Growth in the Newly Industrializing Countries* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1991), p. 46.

³⁶ Stephen D. Krasner, 'Sovereignty: An Institutional Perspective' in James A. Caporaso, ed., *The Elusive State: International and Comparative Perspectives* (Newbury Park, Calif.: Sage Publications, 1989), p. 74.

³⁷ Guiseppa DePalma, *To Craft Democracies: An Essay in Democratic Transitions* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), p. 214.

³⁸ Studies linking the international environment to national political developments have a long tradition in the Comparativist literature. See, for example, Charles Tilly, ed., *The Formation of Nation States in Western Europe* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1975); and Theda Skocpol, *States and Social Revolutions* (Cambridge: University of Cambridge Press, 1979). For concise overviews of this 'second image reversed' research agenda, see Gabriel A. Almond, 'The International-National Connection', *British Journal of Political Science*, 19 (1989), 237-59; and Peter Gourevitch, 'The Second Image Reversed: The International Sources of Domestic Politics', *International Organization*, 32 (1978), 881-911.

on a particular trajectory'.³⁹ During this period, potential regime opponents and/or elites realize that the old system no longer 'works' and needs amendment.⁴⁰ This institutional reform is affected by crisis which generates changes in the relative bargaining power of various domestic groups: 'political actors discover that sources of political strength or power have changed. The critical juncture may [produce] new sources of political strength'.⁴¹ These domestic political realignments determine when the conditions are ripe for certain domestic institutional reforms to take hold.

In analysing these transition periods, factors internal to the state have usually received the most attention. When international factors *are* considered, scholars have pointed out that democratization is facilitated by 'settlement, colonial rule, defeat in war, or fairly direct imposition' and that the successful experience of Western countries with democracy has provided an important 'demonstration effect' for other states.⁴² Additionally, they have suggested that democratization has been fostered by the deliberate attempts of Western governments to 'proclaim the "promotion of democracy" as an important goal in foreign policy'.⁴³ However, there has been little attempt to link exogenous conditions to the political process by which democratic regime transitions occur. Indeed, current studies come close to arguing that democratic institutional outcomes can be neatly 'read off' the type and credibility of incentive structures which external actors present to potential democratizers.

Students of regime transition have been careful to identify contextual conditions for democratization without minimizing the role of strategic choice in shaping the particular institutions that emerge.⁴⁴ Context and structure may compel the modification or abandonment of existing political institutions, but they do not determine whether a new regime will result in their place or what type it would be. Leadership, political coalition-making and bargaining are considered essential elements of the causal sequence. Yet, despite the frequent

³⁹ Gerardo L. Munck and Carol Skalnik Leff, 'Structure, Process, and Choice in Regime Change: The Institutional Forms of Emerging Democracies in South America and Eastern Europe' (paper presented at the annual convention of the International Studies Association, Acapulco, Mexico, 1993), p. 4.

⁴⁰ DePalma, *To Craft Democracies*, p. 29.

⁴¹ Gretchen Casper and Michelle Taylor, 'When Competitors Cooperate' (paper presented at the annual convention of the Midwest Political Science Association, Chicago, Ill., 1993), pp. 13–14.

⁴² Samuel P. Huntington, 'Will Countries Become More Democratic?' *Political Science Quarterly*, 99 (1984), 193–218, at pp. 205–7.

⁴³ Lawrence Whitehead, 'International Aspects of Democratization', in Guillermo O'Donnell, Philippe C. Schmitter and Lawrence Whitehead, eds, *Transitions from Authoritarian Rule: Comparative Perspectives* (Baltimore, Md: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986), p. 3; see also Philippe C. Schmitter, 'The International Context of Contemporary Democratization', *Stanford Journal of International Affairs*, 2 (1993), 1–34.

⁴⁴ See, for example, DePalma, *To Craft Democracies*; Samuel P. Huntington, *The Third Wave: Democratization in the Late Twentieth Century* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1991), p. 39; and Juan J. Linz, 'Transitions to Democracy', *Washington Quarterly*, 13 (1990), 143–64.

claim that 'a democratic regime is installed not by trends but by people',⁴⁵ there has been little study of how international preconditions affect the interaction between domestic groups. For instance, little attention has been devoted to how international factors, such as the threat of invasion or war, may influence the bargaining game between government and opposition. Moreover, since external preconditions tend to be included in a long list of additional domestic level variables, the *independent* effect of these international factors on the domestic political process is obscured.⁴⁶ Lastly, recent studies of democratization fail to recognize that the international context can have a crucial bearing on the type of democratic regime likely to emerge.⁴⁷

I suggest that international factors are more likely to be linked to domestic regime formation and change when states are faced with severe threats. Specifically, international threats may trigger foreign-policy crises which, in turn, strengthen the bargaining position of regime reformers *vis-à-vis* status quo proponents. Exogenous pressures can provide a 'window of opportunity' for advocates of regime reform. Reformers can draw attention to external threats and poor foreign-policy performance in order to justify the necessity for regime change and delegitimize the position of those who support the status quo.

Moreover, given serious external threats, statesmen will tend to choose domestic institutions on the basis of their likely impact on foreign-policy performance. Since minimizing these international threats and ensuring survival of the polity will be of prime importance, specific domestic rules, structures and decision-making procedures will be fashioned with this goal in mind. Once statesmen have opted for democracy, the choice between various institutional alternatives will be influenced by the perceived effects that these differing systems will have on immediate foreign-policy options. *Ceteris paribus, we can expect that when faced with serious exogenous threats and foreign-policy failures, advocates of democratization will be predisposed towards presidential institutional arrangements.* Unsuccessful foreign policies will discredit claims for a decentralized democratic system, such as parliamentarism, and will legitimize arguments for increased centralization and stronger democratic options. In presidential systems, the executive is separately elected and therefore relatively autonomous from societal forces represented in the legislative branch. Statesmen are likely to assume that such an institutional arrangement will contribute to more efficient foreign policies by enabling the executive branch to base strategy on the national interest rather than on the demands of particularistic groups. In sum, the external environment influences domestic

⁴⁵ Huntington, *The Third Wave*, p. 107.

⁴⁶ See, for example, Huntington, *The Third Wave*; and Casper and Taylor, 'When Competitors Cooperate'.

⁴⁷ Students of regime transition rarely differentiate between alternative democratic arrangements, focusing instead on transitions to democracy in general. For example, Huntington claims that an analysis of the differences between democracies may facilitate explanations of the effects of democratic systems once created, but will provide little information on how democratic governments are initially forged. See Huntington, *The Third Wave*, p. 109.

political development by altering the relative credibility of competing institutional alternatives.

Exogenous threats do not automatically result in domestic regime transition. In most instances domestic institutions will be able to cope with external pressures. At other times, revisions of existing rules and structures can be instituted without a wholesale transformation of the traditional regime. Indeed, international pressures are more likely to generate domestic institutional change in emerging states. Unlike great powers, new states have much more to lose from poor foreign-policy performance and are less likely to survive in the face of severe exogenous threats. Consequently, they will be more likely to adjust domestic institutions to the demands of the international environment and they will have more incentives to tailor internal rules and structures towards achieving greater efficiency in foreign policy. Additionally, systemic/structural factors are more likely to affect the decision-making calculus, because domestic institutions have yet to be consolidated. Since domestic institutions are not yet considered established rules-of-the-game, they will be expendable for more efficient structures. Yet, even when elites in newly independent states realize that existing institutions are inadequate, regime change is not guaranteed. The consolidation of a new set of institutional rules will be dependent on whether bargains, pacts and deals can be successfully concluded. Often this will require the amendment of new institutions such that no group will be likely to attain disproportional benefits.⁴⁸ Thus, while the specification of international preconditions cannot foretell whether statesmen will produce new institutions, it can nevertheless provide information about what kind of behaviour we can expect from the actors involved.

Domestic Institutional Effects on Foreign Policy

Essential to an institutional approach is the assumption that policy is the product of institutions whose previous historical development can significantly effect the political process in later periods. During transition periods, politics is an 'evolving game of experimentation and adaptation to new historical conditions'. Once institutions are selected, we can begin to see politics in terms of a 'well-ordered game with more or less fixed rules'.⁴⁹ In Katzenstein's words: 'periods of great crisis can profoundly affect the way domestic politics is organized; periods of relative normality can...reinforce that pattern of organization'.⁵⁰

⁴⁸ On the role of distributional conflicts in the emergence of institutions see Jack Knight, *Institutions and Social Conflict* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992), especially pp. 26–8, 40–1, 126–8.

⁴⁹ Lawrence C. Dodd, 'Political Learning and Political Change: Understanding Development Across Time' (paper presented at the annual convention of the Midwest Political Science Association, Chicago, Ill., 1993), p. 48.

⁵⁰ Katzenstein, *Small States in World Markets: Industrial Policy in Europe* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1985), p. 37.

Both rational choice and sociological perspectives address the mechanisms of such institutional influence. Rational choice approaches suggest that since institutions will tend to be fairly stable over time, we can focus on the individual responses to incentive structures provided by various institutional designs.⁵¹ The approach directs foreign policy analysis towards the strategic use skilful entrepreneurs make of institutional logics. State and societal actors can rely on institutional features in order to advance their preferred national security agendas. But since institutions delineate specific repertoires of policy instruments, they will inevitably preclude some foreign policy options while allowing for others. Additionally, the approach directs foreign-policy analysis towards the way in which given institutional structures and rules provide greater bargaining power to some actors over others. Insofar as various political groups disagree about the appropriate direction of national security and foreign policy, institutions are likely to affect which foreign security agendas rule the day by privileging some groups at the expense of others. In sum, institutions can be considered strategic resources in distributional conflicts precisely because they help some actors prevail over others; institutions matter because they influence the nature of political competition.⁵² The key is to identify those institutional components which are likely to provide certain groups with increased foreign-policy leverage.

The rational choice approach is criticized by scholars who argue that it neglects the sociological aspects of political interaction. For example, Wendt points out that institutions influence 'not just by creating external constraints on the behavior of exogenously constituted actors', but through the acquiring of 'new understandings of self and other'.⁵³ Institutions persist because they are tied to actors' commitments to their identities. Over time institutional frameworks will cease to be challenged not only because they allow actors to maximize their interests but also because individuals cannot even conceive of appropriate alternatives. As Grafstein comments, 'members work within their institutions and not on them because to step outside the institutional structure is to step into a social void'.⁵⁴ In short, sociological institutionalism rejects the notion that actors are already equipped with identities and preferences before

⁵¹ Larry L. Kiser and Elinor Ostrom, 'The Three Worlds of Action: A Metatheoretical Synthesis of Institutional Approaches', in Elinor Ostrom, ed., *Strategies of Political Inquiry* (Beverly Hills, Calif.: Sage Publications, 1982), p. 181. According to rational choice theories, institutions will tend to be 'sticky' because: (1) relying on pre-existing institutions is less costly than creating and enforcing new ones; and (2) institutions create interest groups with a stake in maintaining existing rules and structures.

⁵² Thelen and Steinmo, 'Historical Institutionalism', pp. 2–3; Peter Gourevitch, *Politics in Hard Times: Comparative Responses to International Economic Crises* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1986), pp. 28, 61–2, 229.

⁵³ Alexander Wendt, 'Anarchy Is What States Make of It: The Social Construction of Power Politics', *International Organization*, 46 (1992), 391–425, at p. 417.

⁵⁴ Robert Grafstein, *Institutional Realism: Social and Political Constraints on Rational Actors* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1992), p. 100.

they encounter institutional constraints. Rather, institutions matter precisely because they help to define actors' goals and interests in the first place.

Institutional arguments based on sociological perspectives suggest a competing approach to the study of institutional influence. This approach directs foreign policy analysis towards the ways in which actors invoke institutional rules in order to justify their own foreign-policy choices and delegitimize alternative foreign-policy options. Invoking institutional features is a useful strategy since it involves equating policies with the approval of a desired social order. By proving that certain foreign-policy measures are sanctioned by domestic institutions, these policy options will be accorded a greater degree of legitimacy than would otherwise be the case. *Ceteris paribus*, actors who succeed in linking foreign-policy options to the legitimacy of the domestic institutional framework will increase their bargaining leverage *vis-à-vis* competing political groups. The sociological perspective also suggests that foreign-policy strategies may be redefined in order to coincide with pre-established institutional rules and norms. Rather than pursue foreign policies which contradict embedded institutional frameworks, actors will tailor their policy choices to accord with them. Such reconciliation will often require an adjustment or abandonment of certain foreign-policy options.

Domestic Politics and Foreign Policy: A Two-Step Institutional Model

The preceding discussion suggests that political behaviour can only be explained in the context of institutionally created incentives and available options. Current foreign-policy preferences and capabilities cannot be understood without looking at prior institutional choices: 'the possible options available at any given point in time are constrained by available institutional capabilities and these capabilities are themselves a product of choices made during some earlier period'.⁵⁵ I have also suggested that understanding institutional formation and subsequent stability requires that we differentiate between 'politics in crisis' and 'politics in normal times'. Institutions tend to be formed and reformed in periods of acute crisis; they will tend to persist in the absence of such exogenous influences.⁵⁶ This notion that rapid political change occurs during short-term upheavals followed by longer periods of stability and stasis forms the basis of an institutional approach to foreign policy (see Figure 1).⁵⁷

⁵⁵ Krasner, 'Sovereignty', p. 75.

⁵⁶ See Gabriel Almond, Scott C. Flanagan and Robert Mundt, *Crisis, Choice, and Change: Historical Studies of Political Development* (Boston, Mass.: Little, Brown, 1973).

⁵⁷ The argument that fundamental institutional change occurs in an episodic and discontinuous manner bears a close resemblance to punctuated equilibrium theory. This evolutionary theory assumes that genetic change occurs rarely and rapidly. Once a sharp break in the ancestral lineage takes place, species do not change substantially over long periods of time. Recently, political scientists have noted the implications of punctuated equilibrium theory for institutional analysis. See Miriam Fendius, 'Punctuated Equilibrium and International Relations Theory: An Example of Cross

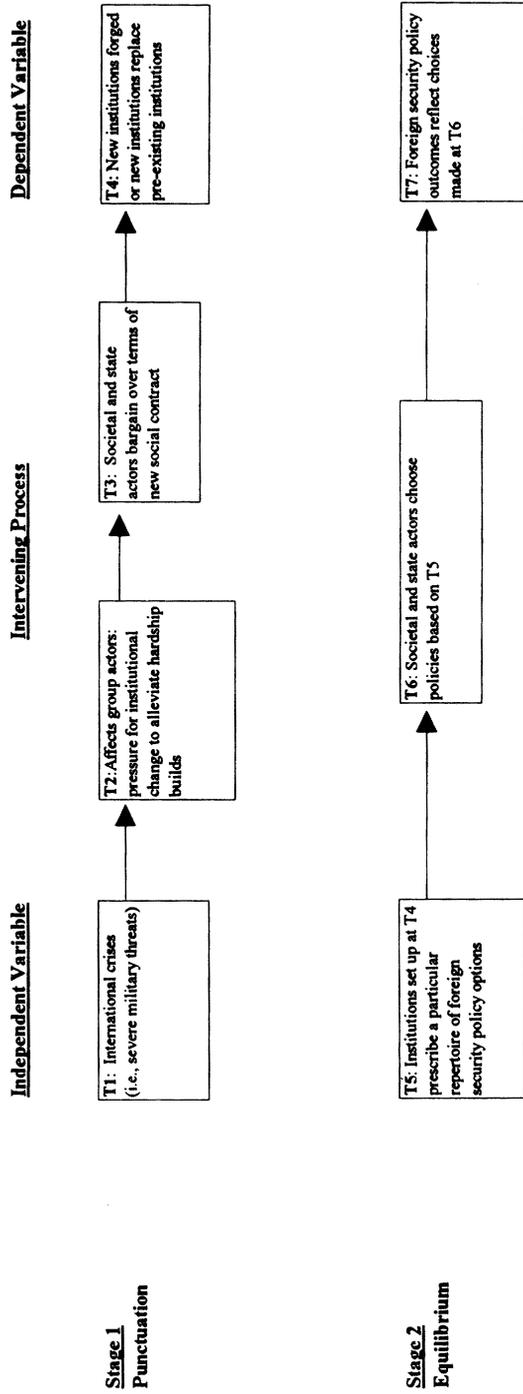


Fig. 1. Domestic politics and foreign policy: a two-step institutionalist model

There are several advantages to the proposed institutional perspective. First, it allows for a reciprocal interplay between agency and structure.⁵⁸ On the one hand, at critical junctures, the activity of political actors *can* bring about a change in social structure. For instance, while severe international threats are constraints that domestic actors are compelled to deal with, any resulting institutional change depends on how actors perceive they can best cope with these external threats *as well as* maintain domestic political power. Even when domestic institutions are restructured to changes in the international environment, elites will attempt to retain their positions within the new institutional framework. Consequently, political engineering matters. On the other hand, once formed, social structures constrain agents – even as the latter retain the freedom to manoeuvre within institutional boundaries. The study of political choice remains essential precisely because institutions delimit a range of possible policy options rather than determine any particular path. Indeed, agency matters after institutions are developed and not just in moments of institutional breakdown. Thus, by bracketing time into crisis and non-crisis periods, the approach accounts for both the influence of institutions as well as the purposeful behaviour of political actors. Institutions become both products and constraints.⁵⁹

Secondly, institutionalism can incorporate both rational choice and sociological perspectives. Both approaches illuminate domestic institutional influences on foreign policy. Institutionalism merely states that actors' choices will be based on a repertoire of pre-existing policy options. It makes no *a priori* claim as to whether actors will manipulate institutional features in order to achieve their preferred foreign-policy goals *or* whether they will legitimize these goals by invoking institutional norms – both strategies are potentially feasible.

Lastly, the proposed institutional argument assumes that new institutions may be beneficial or dysfunctional for society as a whole. The irony of institutional choice is that the rules and structures designed to cope with immediate problems may be ineffective for dealing with future challenges. Institutions, and the policies they generate, may end up being suboptimal because new rules and structures tend to express the politics and requirements of the moment. For example, new sets of institutions may initially prove adaptive insofar as they enable actors to deal with immediate foreign policy problems in innovative

(*F* note continued)

Fertilization Between the Natural and Social Sciences' (paper presented at the annual convention of the Midwest Political Science Association, Chicago, Ill., 1993).

⁵⁸ For useful overviews of the 'agent-structure' problem in IR, see Alexander Wendt, 'The Agent-Structure Problem in International Relations Theory', *International Organization*, 41 (1987), 335-68; and David Dessler, 'What's at Stake in the Agent-Structure Debate', *International Organization*, 43 (1989), 441-73.

⁵⁹ Thelen and Steinmo, 'Historical Institutionalism', pp. 10-17; Walter Carlsnaes, 'The Agency-Structure Problem in Foreign Policy Analysis', *International Studies Quarterly*, 36 (1992), 245-70, at pp. 256, 263.

ways. Later, the very same institutional features can provide actors with the means for advancing their own particularistic goals at the expense of national security.

III. THE CASE STUDY: THE UNITED STATES, 1781–1848

In this section of the article, the institutional perspective depicted above is tested via a diachronic study of US foreign security policy during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.⁶⁰ The American case was selected for two reasons. First, small state researchers have failed to include US foreign policy prior to the Civil War in their historical examples. This omission is odd, particularly because of the general consensus among diplomatic historians regarding the weakness and insecurity of the young American republic.⁶¹ Secondly, the case study suggests that US foreign policies during this period reflected domestic political considerations in ways that diplomatic historians have largely overlooked. While partisan and sectional conflict is often cited in explanations of early US involvement in international wars, these ‘society-centred’ analyses often fail to refer to the pre-existing institutional frameworks within which domestic groups acted. An analysis of early American foreign policy from an institutional perspective should therefore improve our understanding of the American case in particular and domestic political influences on small state foreign policy in general.

The case study is organized as follows. First, I present various reasons for categorizing the United States prior to the mid-1800s as a small state. Next, I look at how international threats contributed to a strengthening of the American state as pre-existing institutions delineated in the Articles of Confederation were replaced with a new set of rules and resources.⁶² International threats became a bargaining advantage for advocates of regime reform. Federalists maintained that political engineering was required in order to forge a new political structure which could better cope with external threats. Presidentialism emerged as an attractive model for building national power without sacrificing centralization

⁶⁰ For concise overviews of US foreign relations during this period see Julius W. Pratt, *A History of United States Foreign Policy*, 3rd edn (New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1972), pp. 1–135, and Alexander DeConde, *A History of American Foreign Policy, Volume I: Growth to World Power (1700–1914)*, 3rd edn (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1978), pp. 37–189.

⁶¹ See, for example, Bradford Perkins, ‘Introduction’, in Bradford Perkins, ed., *The Causes of the War of 1812: National Honor or National Interest?* (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1962), p. 1; DeConde, *A History of American Foreign Policy*, p. 36; Pratt, *A History of United States Foreign Policy*, p. 3; Frederick W. Marks, ‘Power, Pride and Purse: Diplomatic Origins of the Constitution’, *Diplomatic History*, 11 (1987), 303–19, at p. 313.

⁶² The emergence of American democracy is typically depicted as a slow process of incremental change. See Linz, ‘Transitions to Democracy’, p. 143. Moreover, it is often assumed that, in contrast to continental Europe, US institutional development was insulated from military threat. See Felix Gilbert, ed., *The Historical Essays of Otto Hintze* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1975). This article suggests otherwise. The forging of the US presidential system coincided with severe external threats and was ‘telescoped’ into a few critical years.

and state autonomy to the demands of fractious citizens. But the Constitution and presidential democracy became politically viable only after a series of bargains and compromises ensured that the interests of key domestic groups would not be jeopardized under the new institutional framework.⁶³ Lastly, I discuss the impact of these institutional structures on US foreign security policy. Focusing on US decision making prior to the Quasi War, the War of 1812 and the Mexican–American War, I conclude that domestic politics provides a better explanation of US military strategy than do neorealist accounts. In each case, foreign policy is linked to the constraints and incentives of presidentialism. The previous historical development of this particular type of democratic system significantly affected foreign-policy outcomes in later periods. Consequently, the scholarly consensus that the international level of analysis can best account for small state foreign policy is seriously challenged. In so far as the American case is concerned, the historical evidence does not support the causal primacy of neorealism over a domestic level approach.

The United States as a Weak State

Prior to the mid-1800s, the United States can be defined as a small state for several reasons. First, US survival was at risk from great power threats. US expansion and economic growth during the pre-Civil War period should not mislead us into assuming that US survival was assured. On the contrary, it was only secure insofar as the European powers were too absorbed with their own rivalries on the European continent to notice developments in the new world. But the United States could not defend itself when faced with a concerted effort on the part of a great power. Secondly, US statesmen could not disregard European power struggles. Policies had to be considered in light of anticipated European reactions. US policy makers *could* exploit and manipulate European conflicts to their own advantage. They did so mainly by purchasing territory from over-extended European powers who needed to focus their attention on the aspirations of would-be European hegemonies. But the US had little influence over the course of European events and could not significantly affect the security of the European great powers. This lack of influence was a function of resource scarcity relative to the European great powers.⁶⁴ Lastly, America's geographic

⁶³ In arguing that the period 1781–87 constituted a 'critical period' in early American history, I concur with American historians who view the US Constitution as a fundamental departure from earlier institutions rather than the 'crowning success of the movement for a more popular government that had started with the revolution'. See Gerald N. Grob and George A. Billias, *Interpretations of American History, Volume I: To 1877 – Patterns and Perspectives*, 6th edn (New York: The Free Press, 1992), p. 161. Instead of the Revolutionary and Constitutional periods representing a continuous line of progressive political evolution, the period from 1781 to 1787 is a 'dramatic story of change'. For a concise discussion of this tradition in US constitutional historiography, see Grob and Billias, *Interpretations of American History*, pp. 159–81.

⁶⁴ In their coding of the great powers, Singer and Small include the United States only after the Spanish–American War. See J. David Singer and Melvin Small, *The Wages of War, 1816–1965: A*

location should not fool us into thinking that US survival was guaranteed. That the US was geographically distant from Europe did not mean that it was on the *political* periphery of the European state system. Even as late as the 1840s, half of the North American continent remained unsettled and without firm allegiance. The vast regions of Oregon, New Mexico and California remained under foreign control and subject to the rival claims of the European powers.

International Effects on Domestic Institutional Change, 1781–87

American state building in the 1780s is one of the most controversial periods of US history. There are numerous conflicting interpretations concerning the demise of the Articles of Confederation and the subsequent adoption of a stronger central government. Some historians have viewed this period in terms of class conflict. According to this socio-economic interpretation, 'the Constitution [is] a document of dissent that emerged from a clash of economic interests among various elements of American society'.⁶⁵ Others have stressed the role of ideas, particularly the 'elite conception of republicanism' fostered by the Federalists and the more egalitarian conception of politics advanced by the Anti-Federalists.⁶⁶ Such interpretations, however compelling, tend to downplay the exigencies of defence and international commerce and the problems of diplomacy.⁶⁷ While the characteristics of the social and political groups that struggled for and against institutional innovation are important, it is also necessary to focus on the international context and how it shaped the political process.

During the 1780s five issues threatened US national security. First, the new union faced hostile Indian tribes to both the north and south. Secondly, despite the recent peace treaty with Britain, the latter retained its military garrisons along the northern frontier. These posts not only jeopardized a lucrative fur trade but also facilitated British collusion with various Indian tribes. As Marks notes, 'nearly every Indian raid in the Northwest was blamed on the British'.⁶⁸ Thirdly, Spain retained control of both banks of the lower Mississippi River and could therefore deny American settlers access to the key port of New Orleans. Fourthly, American shipping, no longer automatically protected by the British

(*F* note continued)

Statistical Handbook (New York: Wiley, 1983), pp. 41–2. Similarly, Levy does not rank the United States as a major power until after the late 1800s (see Levy, *War in the Modern Great Power System, 1495–1975*).

⁶⁵ Grob and Billias, *Interpretations of American History*, p. 168.

⁶⁶ On this view, see Isaac Kramnick, 'The "Great National Discussion": The Discourse of Politics in 1787', *William and Mary Quarterly*, 45 (1988), 3–22.

⁶⁷ Peter Onuf, 'Reflections on the Founding: Constitutional Historiography in Bicentennial Perspective', *William and Mary Quarterly*, 46 (1989), 341–75, at p. 358.

⁶⁸ Frederick W. Marks, *Independence on Trial: Foreign Affairs and the Making of the Constitution*, 2nd edn (Delaware: Scholarly Resources Inc., 1986), p. 19.

flag, was increasingly plagued with a series of raids by the North African Barbary pirates. Lastly, most American industries were seriously affected by heavy British trade restrictions imposed in the aftermath of American independence. By closing the British West Indies, Newfoundland and Nova Scotia to American ships, Britain curtailed American trade substantially.⁶⁹

The Articles of Confederation undermined the government's ability to diffuse these international crises effectively. For example, faced with Britain's discriminatory trade practices, Congress was unable to retaliate. Under the given rules of the game, the power to regulate commerce remained in the hands of individual states. Since the Confederation sought to retain newly won state sovereignty from federal encroachment, Article IX stipulated that: 'no treaty of commerce shall be made whereby the legislative power of the respective states shall be restrained from imposing such imposts and duties on foreigners as their own people are subject to, or from prohibiting the exportation or importation of any species of goods or commodities'.⁷⁰ According to this rule, the decisions of Congress were little more than recommendations. Since Congress could not obligate the states to comply with a common trade policy, successful retaliation required the adoption of identical restrictions by every state. However, the individual states were unable to adopt similar measures.⁷¹ Gorlin describes this well:

Connecticut refused to pass any legislation, and the port of New Haven received the British ships that could not land in Massachusetts, New Hampshire, or Rhode Island. Virginia refused to pass discriminatory legislation on the basis that such legislation would be self-defeating if the barred goods could reach Virginia via Maryland and North Carolina. The inconsistency in the application of laws led Massachusetts to suspend its navigation act in July 1786, and Pennsylvania repealed most of its high duties when its neighboring states refused to match the tariff rates.⁷²

⁶⁹ Marks, *Independence on Trial*, pp. 59–65.

⁷⁰ Excerpted from George Anastaplo, *The Constitution of 1787: A Commentary* (Baltimore, Md: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989), p. 249. That the Articles sought to limit federal powers is understandable given the 'deep distrust of executive authority produced by the long colonial struggle with appointed English governors' (see Keith J. Polakoff, *Political Parties in American History* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1981), p. 8). Following the Revolutionary War, it is unlikely that elites would have opted for an institutional arrangement which centralized government power. After all, they had just rebelled violently in order to maximize the liberties of individual states. Limiting, rather than expanding, the powers of the central government was the primary objective.

⁷¹ British statesmen refused to take Congressional attempts to negotiate seriously, noting that Congress would not have the authority to enforce any commercial treaty. See Daniel G. Lang, *Foreign Policy in the Early Republic: The Law of Nations and the Balance of Power* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1985), p. 83. Co-operation at the international level was, therefore, hindered because one contracting party, in this case the British, was aware of the other's domestic-level impediments. On how domestic institutional features can affect an executive's international bargaining abilities, see Robert Putnam, 'Diplomacy and Domestic Politics: The Logic of Two Level Games', *International Organization*, 42 (1988), 427–60, especially pp. 448–9.

⁷² Jacques J. Gorlin, 'Foreign Trade and the Constitution', in Robert A. Goldwin and Robert A. Licht, eds, *Foreign Policy and the Constitution* (Washington, DC: American Enterprise Institute, 1990), p. 57.

Nor was the central government able to force state compliance to national treaty provisions. While the Articles gave Congress the power to negotiate with foreign nations, it failed to make treaties the supreme law of the land. Congress had no institutional mechanism for coercing states which refused to abide by international agreements. Inevitably, this complicated negotiation with the British. The latter insisted that they would vacate Northern posts only if the United States fully complied with the terms of the peace treaty, namely enforce the collection of pre-war debts owed to British creditors. When many of the individual states refused to comply, the British argued that retaining the Northern posts was justified.⁷³

Congress's inability to enforce treaties also complicated relations with Spain. Despite Spanish attempts to negotiate an alliance and treaty of commerce with the United States, these negotiations were hindered by Southern state intransigence.⁷⁴ Five southern states refused to agree to the Spanish demand that the United States relinquish its claim to sole navigation of the Mississippi. Since under Article IX of the Confederation, the concurrence of nine states was required to ratify any international treaty, negotiations with the Spanish amounted to little. Even if a treaty with the Spanish could be negotiated, the five opposing states would deny the necessary majority needed for its final approval. Thus, since the requirement for an extraordinary majority diminished the likelihood that international agreements would be ratified, there was little incentive to negotiate with Spain.

Also absent from the Articles were federal taxation powers. According to the given institutional rules, Congress 'had to rely on the willingness of the individual states to pay assessments levied on them; it had no way to enforce payment'.⁷⁵ Inevitably, this forced Congress to borrow on foreign credit. By 1786 the United States was unable to pay its interest on these foreign loans and credit was seriously endangered. When Congress attempted to avoid bankruptcy by levying a 5 per cent customs duty, New York's rejection of the scheme guaranteed its failure. Since, under the Articles' rule of unanimity, every state had to agree to the terms of an increase in congressional power, New York's rejection ensured stalemate despite the fact that most states agreed to the measure.⁷⁶ This lack of an independent source of revenue also exacerbated problems with the British. Without the power to tax, Congress was unable to raise troops. Thus, even if the United States *had* been able to carry out its treaty obligations, it still would have had little military leverage with which to compel the British to relinquish their Northern garrisons.

⁷³ Norman A. Graebner, *Foundations of American Foreign Policy: A Realist Appraisal from Franklin to McKinley* (Delaware: Scholarly Resources Inc., 1985), p. 14.

⁷⁴ Lang, *Foreign Policy in the Early Republic*, p. 79.

⁷⁵ Walter Berns, 'The Writing of the Constitution of the United States', in Robert A. Goldwin and Art Kaufman, eds, *Constitution Makers on Constitution Making: The Experiences of Eight Nations* (Washington, DC: American Enterprise Institute, 1988), p. 128.

⁷⁶ Marks, 'Power, Pride, and Purse', p. 310.

Lack of funds and military power also hindered negotiations with the Indians. As Marks explains: 'Warfare could never be conclusive unless crowned by a treaty. Yet treaties were enormously expensive; they required generous gifts for the Indians, strong military support, and highly paid agents steeped in native customs and language'.⁷⁷ Without the ability to negotiate with the Indian tribes, a two-front war appeared inevitable. In fact, by 1786 there were large concentrations of Indians on both the southern and northern borders. Both could count on support from British and Spanish outposts. Finally, the inability to effectively raise taxes meant that the United States could not fund a naval squadron capable of patrolling the Mediterranean against the Barbary pirates: plans to form an alliance with the European powers to maintain a permanent naval force that would protect commercial shipping failed to materialize.⁷⁸

Due to these international threats and poor foreign-policy performance, many Congressmen realized that increased centralization and a stronger national government were required. Indeed, the primary reason for inviting representatives to the Annapolis and Philadelphia conventions was to revise the Articles of Confederation in order to ensure more effective government policies. With the existing government unable to cope with the threat of war, bankruptcy and commercial distress, 'the least that could be done was to establish a strong central government which could have control over all foreign relations'.⁷⁹

During the constitutional convention and subsequent ratification debate, Federalists in support of a strong central authority had to contend with Anti-Federalists who feared that increased federal powers would override state autonomy and, by extension, individual liberties.⁸⁰ The Federalists, however, had a bargaining advantage over their opponents. Most agreed that external forces threatened the new republic. Thus, the high stakes and shortness of time increased the bargaining power of the Federalists. Moreover, 'because nearly everyone wanted the government strengthened in the area of foreign affairs, the issue provided the Federalists with the basis for a national consensus and with the primary theme of their campaign'.⁸¹

In particular, the Federalists were able to argue that strengthening the national government *vis-à-vis* the states would preserve democratic principles *as well as*

⁷⁷ Marks, *Independence on Trial*, p. 18.

⁷⁸ Marks, *Independence on Trial*, p. 45; Graebner, *Foundations of American Foreign Policy*, p. 41.

⁷⁹ Max Farrand, *The Framing of the Constitution of the United States* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1913), p. 45.

⁸⁰ While the Anti-Federalists acknowledged the need to revitalize Congress, they tended to emphasize the dangers that consolidation posed for republican government. On the Anti-Federalist viewpoint see Herbert J. Storing, *What the Anti-Federalists Were For* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1981); and Peter Onuf, 'State Sovereignty and the Making of the Constitution' in Terence Ball and J. G. A. Pocock, eds, *Conceptual Change and the Constitution* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1988), especially pp. 86–8.

⁸¹ Frederick W. Marks, 'Foreign Affairs: A Winning Issue in the Campaign for Ratification of the United States Constitution', *Political Science Quarterly*, 86 (1971), 444–69, at p. 469.

state security.⁸² According to the Federalists, tyranny would be avoided due to the separation of powers between the branches of the new government and the increased number of interests that would necessarily have to compete against each other in an expanded polity.⁸³ But a larger republic would also ensure the states' security. By authorizing the central government to pool their resources and by limiting the independence and excessive power of the individual states, each state would have greater safety from the European powers than they would acting on their own. Thus, for instance, Roger Sherman insisted that the 'great end' of the new regime was to 'protect the several states' against 'foreign invasion'. Similarly, Oliver Ellsworth and Edmund Randolph argued that the independence of the separate states made them dependent on the foreign powers of Europe and that, under the Articles of Confederation, Congress was unable to 'protect the states'. In sum, 'the Federalists insisted that only a strong union could guarantee the survival of the states. Outside the union, the states would be vulnerable to internal and external assault'.⁸⁴ Thus, while the Anti-Federalists stressed the adequate provision of one collective good (i.e., democracy), the Federalists were able to show that their institutional alternative would provide for two collective goods (i.e., democracy and security).

Although many of the delegates arriving at Philadelphia were ardent nationalists, the forging of a new institutional framework was not guaranteed. Indeed, replacing the Articles of Confederation with a new institutional framework was preceded by a series of bargains between government elites. Most of the delegates wanted to revise provisions in the Articles of Confederation in order to secure a stronger, more effective, national government. But each had different visions of what this new regime should look like. While the delegates realized that their respective states would be worse off without some agreement, they disagreed about what the terms of this agreement should be. Each representative sought to secure provisions which would benefit his own state and regional interests.

For example, delegates from small states wanted equal representation in the Senate in order to ensure that their interests would not be overridden by larger states in the Union. Conversely, representatives from larger states preferred the Virginia Plan, which called for proportional voting representation in both legislative branches. Such an institutional rule would maximize the bargaining position of the larger states within the new government. The solution to this distributional conflict, often termed the 'great compromise', revolved around the relative intensity of preferences and aversion to the status quo. Small state delegates preferred to retain the Articles of Confederation rather than accept an institutional alternative which threatened their interests. Delegates from large states preferred to compromise on this issue rather than retain the status quo.

⁸² See, for example, Federalist No. 37 in Clinton Rossiter, ed., *The Federalist Papers* (New York: Penguin, 1961).

⁸³ See Federalist Nos. 9, 10, 48 and 51 in Rossiter, *The Federalist Papers*.

⁸⁴ Quoted in Onuf, 'State Sovereignty and the Making of the Constitution', pp. 80–4.

Equal representation in the Senate was considered a small price to pay for a new, more effective national government.⁸⁵

Distributional conflicts also arose between Southern and Northern states. For instance, Southern delegates insisted that the executive's authority to negotiate treaties be subject to approval by two-thirds of the Senate body. Through this institutional rule, Southern delegates hoped to avoid future foreign-policy actions which worked to their disadvantage. In calling for this measure, Southern states pointed to previous executive negotiations with Spain. During these negotiations, the Secretary of Foreign Affairs had offered to relinquish US rights to the Mississippi in favour of commercial concessions which would primarily benefit Northern interests. In order to avoid such executive discretion in the future, Southern delegates insisted on a Senatorial check and balance.

Sectional conflicts were mitigated largely because of international pressures. Significant in this regard is the compromise between Southern states, threatened by Spain's presence in Florida and Louisiana, and Northern states, threatened by British trade restrictions. These external economic and military threats became important stimulants to the political bargaining necessary for institutional reform. It was the Northern merchants, shippers and manufacturers who were most hurt by British trade restrictions. Conversely, Southerners were less interested in commerce. Committed to an agricultural economy based on slavery, they were either opposed or indifferent to Northern demands for a national commercial system. Southern states, however, *were* dependent on the military and naval capacities of the Northern states. The Southern states felt a stronger sense of insecurity and realized that Northern assistance might be needed in the near future. Consequently, the Southern states acquiesced to granting Congress the power to regulate trade in return for Northern protection.⁸⁶

American state building in the 1780s resulted in the adoption of a stronger government which decreased the influence of individual states. The prior institutional framework established by the Articles of Confederation sought to preserve state autonomy and curtail the powers of a central government. The Articles were replaced by a new institutional framework which limited the states' ability to influence foreign policy. Indeed, many of the new institutional features stemmed from the need to deal more effectively with European powers. Delegates realized that in order to ensure more efficient foreign-policy performance, government leadership would need the authority to set priorities, innovate and implement decisions. This in turn would require that the national

⁸⁵ By attaining an equal voting rule in the Senate, small state delegates guaranteed that state sovereignty would be preserved in the new system. Thus, distributional conflict led to the convention's decision to qualify the commitment to centralization and concede a larger role to the states. Ironically, equal representation in the Senate became a useful bargaining chip for the Federalists. Federalists could claim that they were just as concerned with states' rights as were the Anti-Federalists and that representation in the Senate was linked to preserving these rights. See Federalist Nos. 39 and 62 in Rossiter, *The Federalist Papers*.

⁸⁶ On this issue, see Marks, *Independence on Trial*, pp. 147–51, 181–3.

government be empowered to impose losses on influential groups, namely the states. Thus, for example, the new Constitution granted Congress the power to regulate trade, to draw revenue directly from individual citizens and to raise troops directly. In providing for the 'common defense, security of liberty and general welfare', Congress could override the laws of individual states and could sanction aberrant states with military force. Moreover, the Constitution established a new national executive which would command the armed forces and bring 'speed, secrecy, and efficiency' into the foreign-policy making process.⁸⁷

The distinguishing features of the new Constitution and presidential system were accountability and electoral origins. The head of government would be dependent on the electorate and could not be forced to resign by the legislature barring the unusual process of impeachment. The Framers rejected parliamentary features, such as the fusion of executive and legislative powers and the selection of the executive by Congress, because of the perceived effects such measures would have for foreign policy. A parliamentary system would have produced outcomes similar to those under the Articles of Confederation. In a parliamentary system, the legislature, with its local and insular interests, would have continued to dominate foreign policy. It was precisely this kind of parochialism that the Framers wanted to avoid.⁸⁸ Thus, for example, delegates did not want the executive to be dependent on the legislature with considerable debate revolving around executive election.⁸⁹ Similarly, in attempting to minimize the influence of popular pressures from the legislature and avoid the chaos which could result from mass politics, the Framers agreed upon a bicameral Congress. In creating the executive and Senate, the Framers sought to insulate foreign-policy making from factional interests. Unlike the unicameral legislature under the Articles, it was assumed that the executive and Senate would be less subject to narrow self-interests and would be less likely to sacrifice the public good. Conducted by a relatively impartial executive and Senate, foreign policy would be more 'rational' and would tend to reflect the general welfare rather than the interests of a few states or regions.⁹⁰

Due to these new institutional rules, the United States was able to maintain an army and navy which would counteract Indian raids, drive the British out of the Northern frontier, force open the Mississippi and subdue the Barbary pirates. Thus, the new institutional framework empowered US statesmen by facilitating more efficient foreign-policy responses to previously intractable international threats. The fact that the new presidential system enabled statesmen to minimize security threats facilitated its consolidation. Federalists could refer to effective foreign policy under the new Constitution in securing legitimacy for the new regime.

⁸⁷ See Federalist No. 70 in Rossiter, *The Federalist Papers*.

⁸⁸ See Federalist Nos. 48 and 71 in Rossiter, *The Federalist Papers*.

⁸⁹ Farrand, *The Framing of the Constitution of the United States*, pp. 78–9, 115.

⁹⁰ See Federalist Nos. 10 and 64 in Rossiter, *The Federalist Papers*.

Domestic Institutional Effects on Foreign Policy, 1787–1848

The Quasi War. In 1793, the wars of the French Revolution broke out and continued throughout the decade. The principal antagonists were France and a coalition of nations supported by Britain. Britain instituted a naval blockade of France and seized neutral vessels suspected of carrying contraband goods. While the US merchant marine was seriously affected by these restrictions, a crisis with Britain was averted by the negotiation of Jay's Treaty. France interpreted the treaty as an American move to support the British and retaliated by seizing US ships bound for English ports. These depredations continued, culminating in an undeclared naval war between the United States and France.

To what extent do structural/systemic variables account for US foreign policy prior to the Quasi War? On the one hand, based on the distribution of capabilities, the United States 'had the strongest motives to avoid war. It had much to lose and little to gain'. In almost every category, US military defences were 'lamentably weak'.⁹¹ There was no navy; many coastal forts had been stripped of their armaments; there was a shortage of small arms and cannons; and the army numbered only 3,500. Given the balance of military forces between France and the fledgling American state, we would expect the United States to take a defensive position against the French rather than pick a fight. Indeed, based on the 'balance of power', the United States should have avoided war. Risking war with France would not have been a rational response to the constraints of the international system.

On the other hand, based on the 'balance of threat', neorealism suggests the opposite. First, due to French–Spanish affinity at the time, US statesmen feared Spain would cede Louisiana to France. It was perceived that such a security threat could only be mitigated through war.⁹² Secondly, some evidence suggests that President Adams expected British support in the war. This aid would significantly decrease the 'dread of conflict' and might have enabled the United States to acquire French holdings in the new world. Thirdly, many Executive officials believed the status quo to be worse than war. US trade could suffer no greater loss once hostilities began. Consequently, war with France could be considered a sensible response to external threats.

Thus, in this case, neorealism appears indeterminate. Because structural/systemic analysis leads to contradictory predictions, it does not prove very helpful in accounting for the actual policies that the United States *did* undertake.

By contrast, an institutional approach can account for US decision making before the Quasi War in a variety of ways. First, the case demonstrates how domestic institutions can empower statesmen by offering foreign-policy options not previously available. Specifically, the Constitution altered the course of US foreign policy in large measure because it made possible actions and policies

⁹¹ Alexander DeConde, *The Quasi War: The Politics and Diplomacy of the Undeclared Naval War with France, 1797–1801* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1966), pp. 22, 90.

⁹² Lang, *Foreign Policy in the Early Republic*, pp. 121–2.

which otherwise would have been beyond reach. The new Constitution enabled actors to forge international treaties that were binding on individual states as well as raise an effective armed force. The Federalists would have been unable to negotiate Jay's Treaty with the British had the Articles still been in effect.⁹³ Nor would the United States have been able to organize a centrally controlled naval retaliation against the French had the Constitution not been ratified.

Secondly, US foreign policy prior to the Quasi War demonstrates that foreign-policy makers tend to put domestic institutional features to strategic use. As previously discussed, domestic institutions can influence military strategy by providing components which are subsequently used to advance specific foreign-policy goals. In this case, Federalists believed that US security could be enhanced only by close commercial ties with Britain.⁹⁴ Yet, they were able to implement these foreign-policy objectives only by relying on Constitutional features of treaty ratification. Since the new Constitution required only Senate approval for treaty ratification, Federalists found themselves with a unique opportunity. Having secured control of the Executive and a majority in the Senate, the new institutional rules enabled the Federalists to negotiate and ratify a treaty with Britain.⁹⁵ President Washington takes much of the credit for using Constitutional features to Federalist advantage. Once Jay's Treaty was negotiated, Washington referred it to a special session of the Senate. Republicans, a minority in the Senate, who would have been able to block ratification under the old rules of the Articles of Confederation, were now unable to do so. The new rules of treaty ratification delineated by the Constitution thus influenced foreign policy outcomes by providing greater bargaining power to the Federalists over the Republicans. These new rules increased the Federalists' ability to pursue their preferred foreign-policy agenda. Negotiation with the British became possible where before it was not.

Thirdly, consistent with sociological institutionalism, the case also suggests that foreign-policy makers will invoke domestic rules and norms in order to justify their actions as well as tailor foreign-policy options to accord with pre-established institutional frameworks. For example, after the disclosure of Jay's Treaty resulted in a Republican uproar, Washington thwarted opposition by invoking Constitutional features. Since the Constitution rendered foreign treaties as the supreme law of the land, President Washington argued that Jay's Treaty could, therefore, not be amended or revoked.⁹⁶ He thus tried to de-legitimize the opposition's attempts to have the treaty reconsidered. Moreover, because war measures conflicted with the provisions of the

⁹³ Under the terms of the treaty, the United States recognized the British position on neutral rights in return for the evacuation of Northern military posts still held by the British. See DeConde, *A History of American Foreign Policy*, pp. 52–67.

⁹⁴ DeConde, *A History of American Foreign Policy*, p. 50; Albert Bowman, 'Jefferson, Hamilton, and American Foreign Policy', *Political Science Quarterly*, 71 (1956), 18–41, at pp. 20–1.

⁹⁵ Graebner, *Foundations of American Foreign Policy*, p. 92.

⁹⁶ Polakoff, *Political Parties in American History*, p. 44.

US–French alliance of 1778 and the Constitution stipulated that treaties were the supreme law of the land, Federalists sought to reconcile their policies within Constitutional boundaries by voting a law that formally abrogated all treaties with France. This act was initiated on the premise that, without it, the Federalist programme might appear unconstitutional.⁹⁷ Yet despite these domestic considerations, the law had international repercussions. It effectively ended the hope of reconciliation with the French. For their part, Republicans invoked the Constitution in attempting to stop approval of Jay’s Treaty. Republicans in the House claimed that the concept of separation of powers gave them the right to judge the treaty. Republicans also argued that the Federalist programme was unconstitutional by pointing out that only Congress had the right to declare war and it had never done so against France.⁹⁸ These examples suggest that the Constitution was already becoming a part of social identity. Both Federalists and Republicans tailored their foreign-policy choices to pre-existing Constitutional features. Domestic actors worked within the limits of given domestic institutions. Foreign policies were pursued only insofar as they conformed to Constitutional rules.

The timing of the US retaliation against France (why 1798?) and its character (why quasi?) is also illuminated by an institutional approach. In order to understand US military strategy prior to the outbreak of hostilities with France, we must trace the power struggles between the Federalists and the Republicans. Such coalitional analysis, however, will only provide half of the story. The case shows that it is necessary to study coalition-making *within the context of existing institutions*.

First, foreign-policy options were constrained by Constitutional features which required bicameral deliberation on matters of war. Prior to 1798, Federalists held a majority in the Senate but lacked such voting strength in the House. With such a division along party lines, Congress was unable to enact even limited measures for defence – ‘The Republicans were strong enough in the House to delay action on almost any matter’. Thus, due to the composition of the legislative body, Congressional ‘power of the purse’, and the Constitutional requirement that both houses vote on matters pertaining to war, ‘the nation would have to wait in a state of undeclared, or unofficial, war’.⁹⁹ However, once the Federalists gained majorities in both houses, they succeeded in voting bill after bill that put the United States on a war footing. In the course of three months, twenty laws for waging the Quasi War were passed.¹⁰⁰ Therefore, the timing of the war appears to have been contingent on Constitutional features and party politics.

Secondly, foreign-policy options were largely a function of the Federalist/

⁹⁷ DeConde, *The Quasi War*, p. 102.

⁹⁸ Lang, *Foreign Policy in the Early Republic*, p. 152; Graebner, *Foundations of American Foreign Policy*, p. 97.

⁹⁹ DeConde, *The Quasi War*, pp. 62, 68–9.

¹⁰⁰ DeConde, *The Quasi War*, pp. 90, 101.

Republican rift. Many Federalists who feared the rise of Republicanism welcomed the crisis: 'they saw in these [foreign affairs] developments the means by which their party could retain power. Foreign policy, they believed, could be used as a weapon against domestic adversaries'.¹⁰¹ The foreign-policy option of war with France could be used as a means for destroying the Republican cause. War had a particular appeal to High Federalists (i.e., Hamiltonian followers) because it would purge the government of domestic opposition. War would 'expose the disloyalty of the opposition party and allow Federalists, as patriots, the chance to crush internal opposition in the name of national security'.¹⁰² US foreign-policy options with regard to French overtures for negotiation were coloured by this Federalist/Republican conflict and Federalist attempts to manipulate Constitutional features. High Federalists believed that the possibility of peace with France would freeze popular support for the Federalist party. As DeConde notes, 'The growth, even the support, of the party had come to depend on a continuation of the Quasi War'.¹⁰³ Consequently, Hamiltonian Federalists tried to delay the nomination of negotiators, thereby prolonging the conflict. Such stalling tactics were feasible due to institutional constraints. Since the Constitution required Senate confirmation of appointments abroad and Federalists held a Senate majority, domestic institutional rules empowered Federalist foreign-policy options rather than those of their domestic contenders.

The War of 1812. When France and England resumed warfare in 1803, restrictions on American trade became a favoured weapon. The American merchant marine, seeking to trade with both sides, was caught in the middle of the British–French war of attrition. Since Britain had a larger navy than France, it was able to enforce a blockade more tightly and seize more American ships. Added to these restrictions on commerce was the British practice of impressing American seamen for service in the British navy under the claim that these sailors were British citizens or deserters. Thus, although the United States was against both French and British policies, American hostility was largely directed at the latter. The administration attempted to protect American trade and seamen by a series of economic sanctions which were either rejected by American merchants or had little effect on British and French policy makers. Finally, the United States decided to resume trade with both Britain and France until one of these nations agreed to respect American neutral rights. In that event, the United States would initiate an embargo of the other. When France agreed to the US offer, trade with Britain was placed under sharp restrictions. As the reduction in exports from the United States began to have an effect on the British

¹⁰¹ DeConde, *The Quasi War*, p. 77.

¹⁰² DeConde, *The Quasi War*, pp. 85, 328–9. In fact, Federalist war plans included an attempt to attack Louisiana as a way of avoiding French dominance and hence Republican influence in the area. See Lang, *Foreign Policy in the Early Republic*, pp. 123–4.

¹⁰³ DeConde, *The Quasi War*, p. 182.

economy, the Orders in Council were repealed. Britain, however, had acted too late. On 1 June 1812, President Madison recommended war against Britain and a declaration of war was soon approved by both the House and Senate.

To what extent does neorealism account for the US decision to wage war against Britain in 1812? An assessment of the US and British capabilities would lead us to expect that the US should not have favoured war. Indeed, the reason behind Jefferson's economic embargo policy *vis-à-vis* Britain was the 'utter impossibility of deciding to declare war against the foremost land and sea power in the world'.¹⁰⁴ From a balance of military forces, the US decision to wage war against Britain cannot be considered a rational response to external exigencies.¹⁰⁵

Yet, we can argue that US military strategy was a response to the 'balance of threat'. A US declaration of war would have been rational considering the external threat which the United States faced at the time. For instance, several diplomatic historians claim that the United States was reacting to British economic pressures. The continuation of the status quo under such circumstances was considered to be worse than war. As Horsman notes, 'America's position was so hopeless in regard to the European belligerents that it seemed that no war could make it worse ... the failure of economic coercion made war or absolute submission to England the only alternatives, and the latter presented more terrors to the recent colonists'.¹⁰⁶ Moreover, with the purchase of Louisiana from France, the external pressures which had forced the United States into the hands of Britain were removed and war became a viable foreign-policy option.

Thus, as with the Quasi War case, neorealism leads to contradictory predictions. An institutional perspective provides a closer historical fit. Indeed, there are several problems with viewing US military strategy as a reaction to external circumstances such as British maritime restrictions and a relaxation of the French threat. First, some historians have pointed out that US policy makers disregarded the European balance of power. The United States failed to acknowledge that Britain had no choice but to impose restrictions on neutral trade in order to counter Napoleon's hegemonic aspirations.¹⁰⁷ Historians suggest that if US decision makers *had* been reacting to external exigencies they

¹⁰⁴ Reginald Horsman, *The Causes of the War of 1812* (New York: Octagon Books, 1972), pp. 142, 179.

¹⁰⁵ For example, the British army numbered approximately 300,000 in comparison to some 11,000 US troops hastily assembled in 1812. In naval strength, Britain had over 700 ships and approximately 150,000 men; the American navy totalled 16–20 ships and only 4,000 personnel. Moreover, the British, as the leading industrial nation of Europe, could easily produce enough goods to support a military engagement in North America. The United States, however, was primarily an agricultural society and could not support such a wide-scale military machine. See T. Harry Williams, *The History of American Wars from 1745–1918* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1981), p. 97. Thus, we would expect the United States to assume a defensive position against Britain rather than pick a fight.

¹⁰⁶ Horsman, *The Causes of the War of 1812*, pp. 186, 266.

¹⁰⁷ Horsman, *The Causes of the War of 1812*, pp. 24, 80, 112, 120, 136, 264–5.

would have been less hostile to British policy.¹⁰⁸ Secondly, it is not clear why the removal of the threat of war with France meant that the United States would have to go to war with Britain. US–French reconciliation did not make war with any other foreign country inevitable. Lastly, the neorealist argument that US foreign policy was a rational reaction to external threat cannot account for the United States failing to go to war earlier. By 1812, British restrictions on trade were ‘old grievances’ and had been more burdensome in previous years. Moreover, it was not the New England maritime section, representing the interests directly affected by British naval infringements, which supported the decision to go to war. Rather, as the Congressional vote on the declaration of war demonstrates, it was the Southern and Western states which were its most vigorous champions.¹⁰⁹

Most historians view the conquest of British-held Canada as a significant factor in explaining US decision making prior to the war. But diplomatic historians have presented varying motives for this Western expansion: (1) the Western states advocated war with Britain as a means of obtaining the fertile agricultural lands of Canada; (2) the conquest of Canada was considered an effective method of prosecuting the war with Britain since it would require the British to fight on land as well as on sea; (3) the annexation of Canada would eliminate British aid to the Indians on the north-western frontier; (4) the conquest of Canada would increase the sectional bargaining power of the Northern states in Congress; and (5) the retention of Canada would eliminate the general threat for American security which stemmed from the British presence along the northern borders.

An institutional argument unites these seemingly disparate interpretations. Expansion into Canada could only be contemplated in light of procedures delineated by existing institutions. According to the Constitution, Congress was authorized to decide the admittance of new states into the Union. But the Constitution provided few rules for such Congressional action. This lack of guidelines was bound to spark controversy since the conditions for admitting territories into states would critically influence the relative power and bargaining strength of the existing states. Ultimately, it was the Louisiana Purchase of 1803, concluded amidst sectional conflict, which set the rules for Congressional action. As DeConde notes, the Louisiana Purchase ‘set a precedent for acquiring territory and people by threat and treaty’. A decade later, these rules expanded the options of groups favouring expansion into Canada.¹¹⁰ Expansionists, regardless of their underlying motives, could rely on Constitutional authorization and the subsequent precedent of the Louisiana Purchase

¹⁰⁸ See, for example, Graebner, *Foundations of American Foreign Policy*, p. 121.

¹⁰⁹ Perkins, ‘Introduction’, pp. 3–4.

¹¹⁰ DeConde, *A History of American Foreign Policy*, p. 77. That these rules influenced policy options can be seen as early as 1807 when President Jefferson stated that ‘if the British do not give us the satisfaction we demand, we will take Canada, which wants to enter the Union’. Quoted in Horsman, *The Causes of the War of 1812*, p. 169.

in order to justify their actions. Indeed, the case is an example of how pre-existing institutions set the 'menu of available practices', thereby empowering certain groups over others. The case appears to corroborate Snyder's claim that domestic politics matters in explaining instances of over-expansion. Pre-existing institutions can empower, and facilitate the options of, concentrated interests favouring expansion.¹¹¹

An institutional perspective also unites the arguments of diplomatic historians in a different way. Historians claim that the South and West had a number of reasons to vote for war, including a desire to preserve US honour and maritime rights in the face of British trade restrictions and secure foreign markets for exports. Historians would therefore have us explain US military strategy by coalitional analysis. As in the Quasi War case, however, coalition-making cannot be divorced from the specific institutions within which these coalitions acted. Indeed, it is not Western and Southern interests *per se* that are the most interesting fact, but rather this 'remarkable [regional] unity'. This united front facilitated a pro-war majority in Congress. Since the Constitution authorized Congress to declare war, it was only when this pro-war majority was secured that war with Britain became a viable foreign-policy option.

Lastly, an institutional perspective can account for the political process prior to war. The US declaration of war can be considered the product of a sectional bargain between the West and the South, each attempting to strengthen their regional power in Congress by acquiring new territory.¹¹² However, this bargain was facilitated by institutional constraints. With only nine votes in the House of Representatives, the Western states could not get a vote of war without support of Southern congressmen.¹¹³ As Horsman explains, 'it was a voting impossibility for the West to take America into war for grievances peculiarly its own. Clay had sounded the clarion call on behalf of the West, but for voting strength he was to depend on the intimate alliance and joint leadership of the South'.¹¹⁴ The annexation of Canadian territory would result in the addition of several Northern states into the Union, thereby increasing anti-slavery political power in Congress. Therefore, Southerners would only agree to such an expansionist policy if Florida, which would presumably enter the Union as a slave state, would be added to the national domain as well. Since Spain and

¹¹¹ Snyder, *Myths of Empire*. According to Snyder's criteria, the War of 1812 can be considered an instance of over-expansion. The United States was effectively 'self encircled' by Britain and, given its military power relative to that of Britain, US expansion into Canada extended 'beyond the point where material costs [equalled] material benefits'. US foreign policy in this case corroborates Snyder's claim that, while democratic structures may predispose against over-expansion, they by no means rule out such dysfunctional behaviour.

¹¹² Julius W. Pratt, 'The Bargain Between the South and West', in Perkins, ed., *The Causes of the War of 1812*, pp. 66–7.

¹¹³ Of the seventy-nine votes for war in the House, only nine came from Kentucky, Tennessee and Ohio while a total of thirty-seven came from the South Atlantic states.

¹¹⁴ Horsman, *The Causes of the War of 1812*, p. 183.

Britain were allies at the time, war with Britain would facilitate both the conquest of Canada and Florida.¹¹⁵

In sum, US foreign policy *vis-à-vis* Britain can be considered a 'triumph of Constitutional orthodoxy ... it reveals the irreversibility of the American commitment to the form of government decided upon in 1787–1788'.¹¹⁶ Prior to the war, control over national security could be seized by warring sectional factions in Congress precisely because the Constitution granted Congress a significant role in foreign-policy making. Thus, while the executive did not favour aggression, the logrolling of powerful societal groups in Congress nevertheless led the state down that road.

The Mexican–American War. In March 1845, when President Tyler signed a House annexation resolution admitting Texas into the Union, Mexico formally broke off all diplomatic relations with the United States. Newly elected President Polk quickly ordered 1,500 troops into the still disputed area between the Rio Grande and the Nueces Rivers. Mexico, indignant over the annexation of Texas, demanded that these troops be withdrawn behind the Nueces. When US compliance was not forthcoming, Mexican cavalry and American troops soon clashed on what President Polk insisted was 'American soil'. Congress promptly declared a state of war with Mexico.

It would appear that neorealism can easily account for US foreign policy on Mexico. US military forces were far superior to those of Mexico. Given the balance of military forces, territorial expansion through war with Mexico would have afforded large benefits at minimal costs.¹¹⁷ However, this 'distribution of capabilities' argument overlooks US relations with the European powers during this period. Indeed, US foreign-policy making prior to the Mexican conflict was conducted in the shadow of a possible war with Britain.¹¹⁸ Congressmen from both the Democratic party and the Whig opposition feared that aggressive policies towards Mexico, such as the annexation of Texas, 'promised war with England and Mexico and ultimate disaster for the nation'.¹¹⁹ The business community was especially worried. American merchants feared that the British would withhold credit or impose trade sanctions as a response to US hostilities with Mexico: 'And if the British navy should blockade major American ports,

¹¹⁵ DeConde, *A History of American Foreign Policy*, pp. 94–8.

¹¹⁶ James Sterling Young, *The Washington Community, 1800–1828* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1966), p. 251.

¹¹⁷ See Williams, *The History of American Wars from 1745–1918*, p. 161. While the 'balance of power' may have provided incentives for war, it did not *require* such a strategy. Since Mexico posed little threat, US statesmen had several options short of war. Thus, under permissive international conditions, neorealism proves indeterminate. Domestic level arguments are needed to explain the foreign policy ultimately selected.

¹¹⁸ The stabilization of relations with England and the diffusion of the dispute over Oregon occurred shortly *after* war with Mexico was under way.

¹¹⁹ Pratt, *A History of United States Foreign Policy*, p. 106.

what then but disaster?'¹²⁰ Mexican officials also believed that US–British relations were so strained that Mexico would receive substantial aid from Britain once the fighting commenced.¹²¹ Given the possibility of British intervention on behalf of Mexico, it is far from clear that a Mexican–American war would provide more benefits than costs.

Equally difficult for neorealism to explain is US reluctance to conquer *more* Mexican territory once it became possible. As the war progressed and the threat of European intervention was removed by the Oregon settlement and renewed Franco–British rivalry, the assimilation of Mexico seemed both defensible and militarily possible. Given the lack of external constraints, it is odd that the United States failed to act as a 'taker'. Historians have cited ideological factors motivating US actions, referring to moral and racial reasons behind the rejection of the 'all of Mexico' movement.¹²² Such interpretations neglect a different domestic level argument, one that rests on domestic political struggles within institutional boundaries. Partisan politics and institutional constraints saved Mexico from losing a much larger portion of its territory.

US foreign policy on Mexico demonstrates how domestic institutions empower foreign-policy makers by expanding the available repertoire of policy options as well as how self-interested actors can manipulate domestic institutional features in pursuit of their foreign-policy goals. While institutions constrain actors by obliging them to work within given boundaries, there are a number of rules from which they may choose. Consequently, coalitional analysis is an integral part of any institutional argument.

Foreign-policy options regarding the question of Texas centred upon attempts by both pro- and anti-annexation forces to invoke Constitutional features. After a treaty to annex Texas was defeated in the Senate in 1844, pro-annexation Democrats chose a new strategy: annexation via joint resolution.¹²³ To be ratified, a joint resolution required only a simple majority in each house rather than the more stringent two-thirds Senate approval necessary for treaty ratification. Annexationist forces argued that such a joint resolution was constitutional. Congress would simply be exercising its prerogative to decide upon the admittance of new states into the Union.¹²⁴ Anti-annexationist Whigs

¹²⁰ John H. Schroeder, *Mr. Polk's War: American Opposition and Dissent, 1846–1848* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1973), p. 35.

¹²¹ Seymour V. Connor and Oddie B. Faulk, *North America Divided: The Mexican–American War, 1846–1848* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1971), p. 28.

¹²² See Schroeder, *Mr. Polk's War*, pp. 75, 149; Norman A. Graebner, *Empire on the Pacific: A Study in American Continental Expansion*, 2nd edn (Claremont, Calif.: Regina Books, 1983), p. 91.

¹²³ Connor and Faulk, *North America Divided*, p. 20.

¹²⁴ Frederick Merk, *History of the Westward Movement* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1978), p. 297. That pro-annexationist forces used the Constitution to justify parochial interests is clear from President Tyler's support of the joint resolution. Previously a strict constructionist of the Constitution in matters of domestic policy, we would have expected Tyler to oppose annexation by any means other than that expressly listed in the Constitution. Yet, Tyler declared that Congress as well as the Senate was authorized to annex territory: 'the power of Congress is fully competent in some other

feared that Texas would increase slave state territory and the voting power of the slave-holding south. Thus, they also invoked the Constitution in order to thwart ratification of the joint resolution. Whigs relied on the Louisiana and Oregon precedents for guidelines regarding state entry into the Union. They claimed that foreign territory could only be acquired by treaty. In effect, Whig opponents objected to annexation by joint resolution as a usurpation of the Senate's treaty-making powers.¹²⁵

The transfer of the annexation issue to Congress was a clever manipulation of institutional features. It brought the issue to a body where a mere majority would give victory to pro-expansionist interests. The joint resolution passed in the House despite repeated warnings from Mexico that annexation would be regarded as a declaration of war. As Connor and Faulk claim, 'there can be no question but that the annexation of Texas precipitated a reaction among patriotic zealots in Mexico which produced war'.¹²⁶ Hence, rules governing the ratification process and state entry into the Union empowered various state and societal groups. In furthering their interests, these domestic actors chose options which lead them down a particular foreign-policy path. Had domestic institutions been otherwise, it is likely that the unilateral annexation of Texas would have been precluded, thus forestalling war.

Events prior to the outbreak of hostilities with Mexico support the claim that institutional rules of sequence in decision making will have important ramifications for policy outcomes. While the Constitution authorized Congress to declare war, it did not restrict the ability of the Executive to send US troops outside national borders. Indeed, there was nothing in the Constitution to prevent the president from deploying troops in the critical period between the outbreak of hostilities and a formal declaration of war.¹²⁷ The Constitution allowed pro-annexationist President Polk to *move first* (i.e. set the agenda). Even before annexation had been approved by the Texan Congress, Polk sent a small army to the Rio Grande. When US and Mexican troops clashed, Congress was forced to *move second*. Its options were significantly reduced by the fact that the President had already sent troops to the disputed area. Anti-annexation

(*F* note continued)

form of proceeding to accomplish everything that a formal ratification of a treaty could accomplish'. See Merk, *History of the Westward Movement*, pp. 288, 293, 297; Polakoff, *Political Parties in American History*, p. 153.

¹²⁵ Schroeder, *Mr. Polk's War*, p. 7.

¹²⁶ Connor and Faulk, *North America Divided*, p. 27; see also Pratt, *A History of United States Foreign Policy*, pp. 117–18; DeConde, *A History of American Foreign Policy*, pp. 170, 178; Graebner, *Empire on the Pacific*, p. 108.

¹²⁷ Much attention has been devoted to whether Polk was drawn into war against his wishes due to Mexican belligerency or whether he instigated the war in order to acquire territory from Mexico. It is clear that Polk accepted Texas's annexation which commanded majority support of the Democratic party. On the other hand, Polk sought to end hostilities with Mexico and supported an expansion of the campaign only after Mexico proved unwilling to negotiate. My point here is that regardless of Polk's intentions, institutional factors crucially effected the executive's ability to realize its goals.

forces in Congress did not have the option of voting against the war bill since this would deny support for the embattled American army in the field, thereby exposing them to the politically fatal charge of disloyalty. As Schroeder notes, the Mexican–American War

exposed a critical weakness in the system of checks and balances devised by the founding fathers ... the President had dramatically demonstrated his almost unrestrained power, independent of Congress, to involve the nation in war. American troops had been maneuvered into a position along the Rio Grande which virtually guaranteed a Mexican reprisal; once the shots had been fired, Congress had no real choice but to follow the President into war.¹²⁸

Foreign-policy options considered after the conflict with Mexico had begun can also be considered a function of domestic politics rather than external exigencies. As in the cases of the Quasi War and the War of 1812, coalitional analysis is crucial to explaining which of these foreign-policy options was chosen. But such a ‘society-centred’ approach must also take account of the constraints and resources provided by pre-existing institutions.

Conservative Whigs (i.e., Cotton Whigs) sought to preserve party unity by proposing that no Mexican territory should be taken. This strategy was meant to stem the increasing division within the Whig party over the slavery issue. With pro- and anti-slavery coalitions beginning to emerge within the party, the strategy presented an alternative upon which both Northern and Southern Whigs could safely unite. Thus, this ‘No Territory’ policy was primarily a political strategy designed to protect the Whig party rather than a means of ending the war.¹²⁹ Given their numerical disadvantage in Congress, however, this Whig strategy was bound to be rejected – the expansionist Democratic majority would not accept such a self-defeating restriction. Whig radicals (i.e., the Conscience Whigs) offered a competing foreign-policy strategy, one which was also tied to domestic considerations. For these opposition Congressmen, the annexation of Texas along with the Mexican War represented a scheme of the slave states to extend their territory and hence increase their voting power in Congress. Consequently, Conscience Whigs argued that pro-annexation forces should be expressly prohibited from admitting the new territory gained from Mexico as slave states. Since Congressional passage of such an act would automatically ensure that any Mexican territory acquired in the war would be free territory, radical Whigs reasoned that Polk and his pro-slavery supporters would lose their incentive for fighting the Mexicans.¹³⁰ Thus radical Whigs were just as concerned about domestic political power as the conservative wing of the party. Both sought foreign-policy strategies that would enhance the political power of the Whig party and the free states.

Polk’s policy towards Mexico also reflected increasing divisions in the

¹²⁸ Schroeder, *Mr. Polk’s War*, pp. xii–xiii, 24.

¹²⁹ Schroeder, *Mr. Polk’s War*, pp. 87–8.

¹³⁰ Schroeder, *Mr. Polk’s War*, pp. 124–6; Graebner, *Empire on the Pacific*, pp. 186–9.

Democratic party. Northern and Western Democrats, who had advocated forcing the British to relinquish 'all of Oregon', viewed Polk's request for a declaration of war against Mexico as 'selling out to the South and picking on defenseless Mexico instead of standing honorably against the British'. They demanded that the party not involve itself in a war of conquest in the southwest. Together with the Whigs, these Democrats voted against Polk's appropriations and appointments.

By December 1847, US forces had occupied Mexico City and were in control of Mexican seaports as well as all of her northern provinces. The prevention of what appeared to be the impending annexation of all of Mexico, a policy which would have been rational given external opportunities, has its roots in domestic politics. In fact, the 'all Mexico' coalition was blocked due to an unlikely coalition between anti-slavery Whigs and pro-slavery Democrats.¹³¹ As previously mentioned, Northern Whigs feared that the whole of Mexico, if annexed, would become slave territory. But, by 1848, Southern Democrats were convinced that slavery could not be extended beyond Texas or below the Rio Grande. It was thought that slavery would not flourish in the vast portion of Mexican land due to the lack of cultivable soil. Since Mexican territory would thus become free territory, its annexation would weaken Southern bargaining power.¹³² Thus anti- and pro-slavery groups found themselves strange bedfellows with regard to foreign-policy options – a continuation of the war to subjugate all of Mexico would be politically devastating to their respective sectional interests.

IV. CONCLUSION

This article has used US state building and subsequent military strategy from 1781 to 1848 as a benchmark against which to challenge the theoretical primacy granted to neorealism in the study of small state behaviour. I have argued that while neorealism provides a persuasive explanation for domestic institutional choices in the new American republic, it proves less useful in accounting for US foreign security policies in later periods.

This finding should come as some surprise to both Comparativists and IR scholars. Comparativists have assumed that internal political processes determine democratic institutional development in newly independent states. By contrast, in IR there is a long tradition which suggests that external factors are more likely to influence the foreign policies of these weak states. This article has suggested that there is little reason to accept the validity of such traditional claims about the domains within which domestic and international variables will be valid. Paradoxically, international and domestic factors will often influence state practice when we least expect it.

¹³¹ Schroeder, *Mr. Polk's War*, pp. 130, 152, 155.

¹³² Bradford Perkins, *The Cambridge History of American Foreign Relations, Volume I: The Creation of a Republican Empire, 1776–1865* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993), pp. 196–7.

That foreign-policy making is susceptible to domestic political constraints has become almost a truism among IR theorists. Indeed, few would disagree that, among the great powers, domestic politics can generate national security policies which fail to correspond to systemic/structural imperatives. On the one hand, domestic politics may prevent policy responses which are dictated by the 'balance of power' and the 'balance of threat'. Alternatively, domestic politics may produce military strategies which should be precluded by these international exigencies.¹³³ But finding that domestic groups and constitutional arrangements play an important role in great power foreign-policy making should hardly be surprising. Since great powers are less constrained by the international environment, we would expect domestic political processes to matter. Small state foreign policy rather than great power behaviour necessarily constitutes a more demanding test for domestic level theories.

Contrary to received wisdom, this article has shown that small state behaviour is not immune from domestic political influences. It may well be that small state foreign security policy *can* be viewed as a state-centric phenomenon in which military strategy is a response to international pressures. But this is a proposition to be tested empirically rather than one to be assumed *a priori*. Contrary to the state-centric approach, the cases I have examined reveal that even the most vulnerable states may display foreign policies explicable only in terms of domestic politics. This is especially true for weak states which are also domestically liberal. Various institutional designs for representative democracies are likely to condition the foreign policies of all democratic states, whether they are great powers or small states. In sum, the historical evidence presented here suggests that the causal primacy granted to international explanations of small state behaviour is unwarranted. The influence of particular domestic institutional constraints on foreign policy deserves more attention than it currently receives from small state researchers.

Although most IR theorists would concede that a state's foreign policy is to some degree an extension of its internal situation, even the staunchest supporters of domestic level theorizing have argued that domestic politics is less likely to matter when foreign threats appear great. It is assumed that domestic level theory will be less useful in explaining decisions to go to war because the high stakes require a vigilant attention to national security interests and international circumstances. For example, Posen claims that when external threat is low, great power military doctrines will be shaped by domestic organizational biases, while in periods of high external threat these doctrines will conform to international exigencies.¹³⁴ Contrary to Posen, I have argued that domestic political constraints do not drop out of the foreign-policy equation merely because war seems more probable. Since domestic level arguments can explain small state decisions to go to war, then we have reason to support such theories

¹³³ Rosecrance and Stein, 'Beyond Realism', pp. 17–18.

¹³⁴ Posen, *The Sources of Military Doctrine*, especially pp. 80, 239–40.

with greater confidence when considering the more obvious cases of great power military strategy, even when external threats are extreme.

All this is not to say that neorealists should pack their theoretical tents and steal away into the night.¹³⁵ Rather than reject neorealism completely, we should distinguish the conditions under which it has value from those situations where it is likely to be less relevant. The aim of such research would not be a refutation of neorealism, but rather a clearer understanding of the domains within which domestic and international explanations are likely to prove superior and a more precise sense of the relative importance of external and internal constraints.¹³⁶ For example, this article has suggested that neorealism's explanatory power varies indirectly with the persistence of a given political regime. In early periods of a nation's history, international explanations should have causal primacy. Statesmen in newly independent states should be responsive to external stimuli and should react to external threats in order to protect the emerging state's survival. As in the case of early American state building, the nature of the international environment is likely to affect both the bargaining positions of various domestic groups as well as the perceived merits of domestic institutional alternatives. However, in later periods, state behaviour may be better explained from a domestic level perspective. The domestic institutions formed to deal with particular international and foreign-policy problems will tend to survive beyond this acute phase and are likely to constrain the state's responses to subsequent international challenges. US foreign-policy making prior to the Quasi War, the War of 1812 and the Mexican–American War reveals that pre-established domestic institutions affected both the timing and substance of subsequent US military strategy. In short, historical sequence matters – domestic institutions created during earlier critical junctures constrain the state's response to future crises.

The points I have raised in this article suggest a variety of directions for further research on small states. One promising line of inquiry concerns whether democracy decreases the likelihood of effective small state foreign-policy action. It is frequently claimed that democratic institutions create problems for foreign-policy making. These problems are said to originate in the structure of political authority and the manner in which foreign-policy decision making is apportioned within liberal governments.¹³⁷ For example, in a recent study of the connection between US democracy and foreign policy in the post-1945 period, Nincic argues that the Constitution's joint allocation of foreign-policy authority to the executive and legislative branches of government often contributes to

¹³⁵ I adapt this phrase from G. John Ikenberry, 'Conclusion: An Institutional Approach to American Foreign Economic Policy', *International Organization*, 42 (1988), 219–43, at pp. 221–2.

¹³⁶ Andrew Moravcsik, 'Liberalism and International Relations Theory' (Harvard University, Center for International Affairs, Working Paper No. 92–6, April 1993), p. 41.

¹³⁷ Kjell Goldmann, 'Democracy Is Incompatible with International Politics: A Reconsideration of a Hypothesis', in Kjell Goldmann, Sten Berglund and Gunnar Sjostedt, eds, *Democracy and Foreign Policy: The Case of Sweden* (Aldershot, Hants: Gower, 1986), pp. 1–3.

'incoherent' foreign policy. Specifically, a democratic system based on the principle of electorally separated branches with shared powers hinders governmental consensus and, therefore, increases the likelihood that foreign-policy behaviour will be disconnected from international circumstances to which, in principle, it should be responsive.¹³⁸ The review of pre-1900 US foreign policy presented here lends support for this claim. US foreign policy throughout this period failed to correspond to international conditions. Partisan politics and domestic institutional features decreased the likelihood of conducting effective national security policies. Since the United States often failed to respond rationally to international circumstances, this article corroborates the classic notion that there is a trade-off between democratic institutions and the effectiveness of foreign policy. More research is required on foreign-policy making within internationally weak, domestically liberal states in order to fully assess whether democratic ideals are compatible with the realities of international politics.

A second avenue for new research on small states might address the debate about presidential versus parliamentary government.¹³⁹ The central claim of this literature is that the balance of power between the executive and legislature in decision making varies greatly from one democratic country to the next and that these differences matter. For example, presidentialism is said to have the disadvantage of less democracy (i.e., representation) but the advantage of government stability, while parliamentarism is said to have the opposite consequences of greater democracy and instability. However, the direct effects of presidential and parliamentary systems on foreign-policy outcomes have been less studied.

In terms of presidential government, the cases I have examined highlight three disadvantages for foreign policy: (1) executive–legislative deadlock; (2) temporal rigidity; and (3) legislative parochialism. In presidential systems, conflict between the two branches of government tends to increase because each is an independently elected organ and lacks any institutional method for resolving disagreement: 'the inability of the assembly to remove the executive and of the executive to remove the assembly prevents either branch from resolving political crises based on fundamental mutual opposition'.¹⁴⁰ Furthermore, because both branches are popularly elected and the tenure of each is unaffected by relations with the other, the need for co-operation between the president and congress is less urgent. Neither the president nor legislators have

¹³⁸ Nincic, *Democracy and Foreign Policy*.

¹³⁹ See, for example, Arend Lijphart, *Democracies: Patterns of Majoritarian and Consensus Government in Twenty-One Countries* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1984); Arend Lijphart, ed., *Parliamentary versus Presidential Government* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992); Richard Rose and Ezra N. Suleiman, eds, *Presidents and Prime Ministers*, 2nd edn (Washington, DC: American Enterprise Institute, 1981); Matthew Soberg Shugart and John M. Carey, *Presidents and Assemblies: Constitutional Design and Electoral Dynamics* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992).

¹⁴⁰ Shugart and Carey, *Presidents and Assemblies*, p. 29.

institutional incentives to compromise with one another, thus increasing the chance for political deadlock. This increased tendency for executive–legislative division in presidential regimes means that foreign policy will often fail to reflect national security interests and will be dominated by interbranch rivalries. For example, during the Mexican–American War, Polk’s loss of support in Congress lengthened the duration of the war and hindered the US bargaining position.¹⁴¹

As a consequence of executive–legislative deadlock, executives in presidential systems are likely to manipulate constitutional and extra-constitutional features in order to bypass congressional intransigence. Such activism on the part of the executive is likely because presidents hold a popular mandate and are thus convinced that they possess independent authority. Opposition to his or her policies will, therefore, be more ‘irksome’ to presidents than to prime ministers, who realize that political power is part of a temporary coalition.¹⁴² Such presidential activism is just as likely with regard to foreign policy as it is for domestic policy. For example, since the Second World War, US presidents have sought to overstep hostile legislatures by forging executive agreements rather than formal treaties which would require a two-thirds consent of the Senate. Yet, executive attempts to bypass the legislature were just as common in earlier periods. For example, prior to the Mexican–American War, shifting the Texas annexation issue from the Senate to the House ensured that the executive’s pro-expansionist interests would be realized.

In contrast to parliamentary government, where legislators can at any time between elections cause realignments and break governments, presidentialism lends a rigidity to the political process precisely because Congress cannot dismiss the executive except in extraordinary circumstances:

[presidentialism] makes adjustment to changing situations extremely difficult; a leader who has lost the confidence of his own party or the parties that acquiesced to his election cannot be replaced. He cannot be substituted with someone abler to compromise with the opposition...¹⁴³

For example, despite the fact that President Polk had lost support from members of both parties in Congress, legislators had no institutional mechanism for

¹⁴¹ While executive–legislative division can generate inefficient foreign-policy outcomes, unified government does not automatically ensure that foreign policies will be tailored to international circumstances. Moderate foreign policy may coincide with divided party control of the executive and legislative branches while unified government may not. For instance, prior to the Quasi War, the fact that the Federalists held executive and senatorial majorities increased the likelihood of a costly war with Britain. The fact that Republicans dominated the House ensured against the conflict’s escalation. Because the House and the presidency were controlled by different parties, foreign policies were less aggressive than they might otherwise have been.

¹⁴² Juan J. Linz, ‘The Perils of Presidentialism’, in Lijphart, ed., *Parliamentary versus Presidential Government*, p. 123.

¹⁴³ Juan J. Linz, ‘Presidential or Parliamentary Democracy: Does It Make a Difference?’, in Juan J. Linz and Arturo Valenzuela, eds, *The Failure of Presidential Democracy: Comparative Perspectives, Vol. 1* (Baltimore, Md: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994), pp. 9–10.

removing the president. In a parliamentary system, legislators would have been able to call for a vote of confidence. In such a circumstance, it is unlikely that Polk would have received the necessary majority in Congress to remain in office. Had Congress been able to secure a new executive more in tune with shifting congressional majorities, it is likely that the course of the war would have proceeded quite differently. Moreover, the fact that the executive and legislature have separate electoral origins means that the foreign policies of presidential democracies are likely to be inflexible.¹⁴⁴ Early American foreign policy lends support to this hypothesis. New foreign policies tended to coincide with electoral turnovers which altered the distribution of power within Congress. For example, the timing and direction of the Quasi War was affected by 'critical elections' which changed the voting power of the Federalists *vis-à-vis* the Republicans. It was only after the Federalists gained a majority in Congress that they were able to alter the war's scope.

Finally, because presidential systems separate the electoral origins of the executive and legislative branches, foreign policy is likely to reflect parochial and particularistic interests. Since congressmen need not tie their chances for re-election to a national policy position, they can spend a great deal of time 'courting personal followings in their own district'.¹⁴⁵ Since presidential democracies encourage legislative participation in policy making so as to provide effective checks and balances on executive action, foreign policy is likely to reflect the partisan and local interests that dominate congressional attention; narrow ideological and local interests will often influence foreign-policy choices and take precedence over the demands of national security. This was especially the case with regard to military strategy prior to the War of 1812. Despite the more moderate stance of the executive, a majority of Congress favoured war with Britain in order to advance their particular sectional interests. In this case, logrolling in Congress determined the course of US security policy.

The preceding comments underscore the irony of domestic institutional choice – while decision makers may initially adopt presidentialism in order to solve the foreign-policy problems of the moment, this institutional design is likely to generate long-term problems for foreign policy which its designers neither intended nor anticipated. I have argued that advocates of democratization will often have strong incentives to choose presidential systems precisely because present foreign-policy performance will be weighted heavily in the decision-making calculus. Indeed, the fact that many newly independent states decide in favour of presidential government casts doubt on a growing scholarly consensus that parliamentarism is best. According to current wisdom, countries

¹⁴⁴ Richard Gunther and Anthony Mughan, 'Political Institutions and Cleavage Management', in R. Kent Weaver and Bert A. Rockman, eds, *Do Institutions Matter? Government Capabilities in the United States and Abroad* (Washington, DC: The Brookings Institution, 1993), p. 276.

¹⁴⁵ Shugart and Carey, *Presidents and Assemblies*, pp. 170–3, 227; R. Kent Weaver and Bert A. Rockman, 'Assessing the Effects of Institutions', in Weaver and Rockman, eds, *Do Institutions Matter?*, pp. 17, 33.

opting for democracy should reject presidentialism because its zero sum and 'winner take all' character heightens the dissatisfaction of losing groups and, by extension, increases the likelihood of domestic conflict.¹⁴⁶ But, as this article has demonstrated, when the leaders of newly independent states choose between democratic alternatives, they will not merely be interested in their *domestic* consequences. If an emerging state is faced with external threats, statesmen cannot afford to concentrate only on long-term domestic stability – they must also consider short-term *foreign-policy* performance. In terms of increasing immediate foreign-policy options, presidential democracy may appear as a more attractive option than parliamentary alternatives.

A comparison between US democratization and the more recent democratic revolutions in Eastern Europe underscores this international–national connection. In the US case, international threats were coupled with poor foreign-policy performance under a decentralized democratic system. As a result, the Framers of the US Constitution tried to design a new democratic government which would minimize the impact of parochial interests on foreign policy and were predisposed to a system which would maximize executive autonomy. Because international circumstances threatened national survival, an executive less likely to be buffeted by societal whims became all the more necessary. Thus presidentialism was an attempt to adapt domestic circumstances to a rapidly deteriorating external environment. By contrast, a number of East European countries have opted for parliamentary institutional designs.¹⁴⁷ To be sure, parliamentarism has been defended there because of its perceived capacity for ensuring that the interests of both government and opposition are represented in the new system. Yet, had the international environment been more threatening, reformers would have had to weigh these domestic advantages against the likely consequences of parliamentarism for foreign policy. With the external threat of Soviet intervention removed, East European reformers did not have to worry about creating a strong executive capable of decisive and independent action in foreign affairs. They needed to be less concerned about whether a powerful legislature would be likely to bloc foreign-policy action for local and particularistic goals. Indeed, contrary to the experience of the Framers of the US Constitution, East European reformers had many more choices. Adopting parliamentarism posed far less of a risk in Eastern Europe than it did for the early American republic. Increased centralization and a strengthening of the executive branch of the state *vis-à-vis* society was an option rather than an imperative.¹⁴⁸

¹⁴⁶ See, for example, Linz and Valenzuela, eds, *The Failure of Presidential Democracy*.

¹⁴⁷ Hungary, the Czech Republic and Slovakia have chosen parliamentary systems.

¹⁴⁸ Whereas severe external threat tends to be associated with presidentialism, the absence of exogenous pressures fails to produce any determinate domestic outcome. Under permissive international conditions, statesmen have an increased range of choice. Parliamentarism, presidentialism and regimes that present a mixture between the two are each viable alternatives. That the new Europe displays such a wide array of democratic institutional types lends support to this argument.

In sum, any generalized claim for the causal priority of international or domestic explanations of small state behaviour is unwarranted. Both levels of analysis matter because while the international environment influences domestic political choices, these institutional decisions shape foreign policies in later periods. In emerging states, domestic institutional development may often be a reaction to external circumstances, but there is no guarantee that ensuing foreign-policy strategies will reflect these international exigencies. The recent democratization of Eastern Europe presents a golden opportunity for studying these issues. Since these events have provided a set of new cases of small states which have also opted for particular democratic governments, they can supply additional empirical evidence about how current constitutional experiments might influence subsequent small state foreign policy. As newly independent states increasingly turn towards democracy, we should benefit from this careful and systematic study of domestic politics in general and alternative political systems in particular.