The President's Dominance in Foreign Policy Making

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In the fall of 1991, George Bush saw his own attorney-general defeated in an off-year Pennsylvania senatorial race. Richard Thornburgh, once a popular governor, fell victim to attacks by Harris Wofford, an aging, politically inexperienced, unabashedly liberal college professor. The Democrats succeeded in a state that had rejected their candidates in every Senate election since 1962.

Curiously, the defeat came after Bush had presided over the fall of the Berlin wall, the reunification of Germany, the democratization of Eastern Europe, and the resolution of the conflict in Nicaragua. If the voters had forgotten these early triumphs, Bush could brag that in the very year of the Pennsylvania election he had won a spectacular victory in the Persian Gulf War, negotiated a breathtaking arms control agreement with the Soviet Union, promised a further unilateral cut in nuclear weapons, supported Gorbachev in his final showdown with conservative forces within the Soviet Union, arranged the first international peace conference on the Middle East, helped achieve a settlement among contending forces within Cambodia, and facilitated a political settlement between blacks and whites in South Africa. Ad-
mittedly, history had not yet quite come to an end.¹ Disasters had struck the Philippines, the Serbs were fighting the Bosnians in Yugoslavia, and a military coup had reversed democratic tendencies in Haiti. But George Bush could tout foreign policy successes beyond the wildest imagination of his predecessors. Not surprisingly, Bush’s standing in the polls reached levels that none of his postwar predecessors could match, achieving a spectacular 87 percent in February 1991.²

Harris Wofford ignored these accomplishments. The president, he said, was spending too much time on world affairs; more attention had to be given to domestic matters. Noting that the recovery from the 1990-1991 economic recession had petered out, Wofford emphasized how heartless George Bush had been in refusing to extend benefits to the unemployed. Health care costs were growing while millions of Americans were unable to secure medical insurance. Even some of Bush’s foreign policy triumphs were dubious, Wofford claimed, alleging that the free trade negotiations with Mexico would cost Pennsylvania thousands of blue-collar jobs. By the end of the campaign, the president’s travel abroad had actually become a political liability; Wofford’s campaign workers wore teeshirts celebrating Bush’s “Anywhere but America” world tour.

The day after the election, the president announced that his Thanksgiving trip to the Far East had been canceled. On the day Americans celebrated their Pilgrim Fathers, Bush put Peking Duck and sashimi to one side and ate turkey (and crow) instead. By Thanksgiving Day, Bush’s popularity rating had fallen to just 51 percent.³ Quite clearly, George Bush, for all his foreign policy successes, was beginning to discover that the domestic front was quite another matter.

The denouement came within a year. George Bush was unable to transform his foreign policy achievements into a reelection victory. His opponent, Bill Clinton, eschewed foreign policy in favor of domestic and social policy themes. One of his key advisers was Harris Wofford’s campaign manager, who placed a sign on his desk reminding him that the issue was “The Economy, Stupid!” Despite the fact that Clinton, a little known governor of a small, southern state, had avoided the draft by studying at Oxford, he defeated a commander-in-chief who could claim credit for having brought the cold war to an end.

Although the differences between the politics of foreign and domestic policy seldom reveal themselves this dramatically, they have been enduring features of American politics. At the same time, the distinctions between the foreign and domestic arenas faded during the years following the Vietnam war. The loss of Vietnam and the scandal named Watergate subverted executive authority. Control of the legislative and executive branches was usually divided between the two political parties. The parties themselves became internally more homogeneous and increasingly differentiated from one another. Foreign policy issues seemed to be completely absorbed into domestic disputes.

These changes raised key questions concerning the conduct of the nation's foreign policy. Had partisanship become so intense it no longer stopped at the water's edge? Had a prolonged period of almost continuous divided government handicapped the president's capacity to formulate foreign policy? Had the congressional role in the making of foreign policy been so enhanced that the differences between the making of foreign and domestic policy been all but obliterated?

It is the burden of my argument that the changes in American politics during the post-Vietnam era did not eliminate the distinction between foreign and domestic political arenas—primarily because the nature of the international system precludes it. To respond to external threats, the United States needs a relatively centralized, coordinated foreign policy-making system. Because of this international reality, presidents remain the most potent political force in the making of foreign policy.

Though Congress began to play a more important role in the years following the Vietnam war, especially when the executive's capacity to defend the national interest was diminished, the primary locus of decision making remained in presidential hands. As Bush's foreign policy triumphs illustrated, the presidency continued to be the dominant foreign policy-making institution. For all of Capitol Hill's increased involvement, it still remained a secondary political player. Conflict between the branches remained more contained than has been generally realized.

### A HARD TEST

The United States is, in some respects, the last place one would look for international constraints on the making of foreign policy. According to a number of theorists, the international system is expected to have a greater effect on the foreign policy making of small nations compared
to large ones, on the choices of weak nations compared to strong ones, and on economically dependent nations compared to economically self-sufficient ones. Theorists also expect policy making to be centralized in the hands of the executive when external threats are immediate rather than distant.

If these are correct estimates of the occasions when international constraints are greatest, then the postwar United States is a hard case, where external constraints are least likely to be controlling. As a large nation well endowed with natural resources enjoying the world’s largest and most self-sufficient economy and containing the world’s most powerful military arsenal, the United States was, of all nations, the one best able to compel others to act in accord with its wishes and the one least likely to be subject to constraints imposed by the external environment. If any nation-state can ignore external pressures, it was the richest and most powerful one. Thus, if one discovers that processes within the United States are constrained by external forces, then it is very likely that these constraints are quite general.

It is possible but unlikely that small countries have greater latitude on security questions than do large, powerful ones. It could be argued that they can do as they please and “free ride” on the more powerful. But free riders must be acquiescent riders; they can hardly let domestic politics interfere with the demands more powerful countries might place upon them.

Admittedly, the United States was not free of external threats during the cold war. Some may argue that it was particularly constrained by its need to protect the interests of the free world. Once the United States spread its economic, military, and nuclear umbrella, it was much more constrained than smaller nations who could free ride under U.S. protection. But if the cold war constrained U.S. choices, it was no more constrained than other countries. Had the United States not fulfilled its responsibilities, the impact on other nations would have been more devastating than on the United States itself. The threat posed by the Soviet Union to the United States was less direct and

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immediate than its threat to Europe, Asia, and almost any other country one can imagine.

Soviet expansion had to be contained, the possibility of sudden nuclear warfare was frightening, and revolutionary movements supported by the Soviet Union and motivated by communist ideology seemed threatening. Though the United States was the dominant figure in world politics, it hardly felt secure. But the precariousness of the international environment during the cold war was little different from the instabilities of earlier epochs. Thucydides, Machiavelli, and Bodin took a threatening international environment for granted. Wars and rumors of wars marked most of the twentieth century—though the United States sometimes pretended that it could ignore them. Indeed, the bipolar conflict of the cold war was more predictable and more manageable than the multipolar conflicts that preceded it.6 Hardly before the cold war has come to an end, serious students of international relations became nostalgic about the regularities of bipolarity.7

Not only have the external constraints on the foreign policy choices of the United States been less than those facing other nations, but its constitutional framework makes it particularly difficult for U.S. foreign policy to be centrally led by a strong executive.8 By separating the government into three branches, the Constitution insured that a wide variety of groups and interests would participate in decision-making processes. And by assigning most of the governing authority to a Congress divided between a Senate and a House, the Constitution further facilitated the intrusion of parochial considerations into the making of foreign policy.

The weakness of the presidency on issues of foreign policy within the U.S. constitutional framework is not always appreciated. The Constitution makes—and the courts have delineated—no clear distinction between foreign and domestic issues. The only powers given exclusively to the president are the powers to receive foreign ambassadors, grant

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6 Kenneth N. Waltz, Theory of International Politics (New York: McGraw Hill, 1979), chap. 9. The United States may have been the least constrained by the international system in the nineteenth century, when the country was protected from strong European powers by its isolation in the western hemisphere. This may account for the perpetuation of a relatively weak presidency throughout the nineteenth century. The power of the executive branch expanded with the increasing threat to the United States posed by the international system in the twentieth century.


pardons, and "execute" the laws of Congress. Admittedly, the president is also assigned the responsibility of commander-in-chief, but no specific powers are granted along with this responsibility and the Constitution quite specifically grants to Congress the authority to declare war, raise an army, and prepare for the common defense. The presidential powers to appoint ambassadors and make treaties are shared with the Senate. The president can veto congressional legislation, but this negative power can be overridden by a two-thirds vote in both Houses. Finally and ultimately, Congress can remove a president from office, but the reverse is not true. Thus, there is little in the U.S. constitutional framework that encourages executive dominance of the foreign policy-making system.

Over the past twenty-five years, the power of the presidency in foreign affairs has been especially weakened by two events that undermined executive branch credibility. The president and his advisers, who had in the decades since World War II enjoyed the enormous prestige that comes from winning a world war, were humiliated in Vietnam by their inability to resolve to their country's satisfaction a conflict with an underdeveloped nation. Simultaneously, a set of illegal and unconstitutional political practices by the executive were exposed as part of the Watergate scandal. For the first time in American history, a president was almost impeached and was forced to resign from office. Under the circumstances, Congress could no longer be expected to defer to executive expertise, the news media could be expected to hunt for presidential peccadillos, and the public could be expected to become distrustful of the country's political leadership.

Divided partisan control of the legislative and executive branches of government further undermined the basis for a consensual, executive-led foreign policy-making system. The Democratic party controlled the House of Representatives for all but four years during the postwar period and the Senate for all but ten of these years. Meanwhile, until the election of Bill Clinton, the Republican party had won the presidency in every election since 1968, save for the very close election of Jimmy Carter immediately after the Watergate crisis. The ethnic heterogeneity and decentralized internal structure of the Democratic party made it a very effective organization for winning congressional elections, while the more homogeneous, centrally directed Republican party made it more suitable for electing presidents. The Democratic party had the advantage of holding the more popular position on economic and social issues that tended to influence the outcome of congressional
elections, while the Republican party had the political advantage on foreign policy and cultural issues that often played an important role in presidential politics. The leaders of each party—presidential in the Republican case, congressional in the Democratic—had a vested interest in perpetuating the institutional structure and issue orientation that helped it remain in power within its institutional domain. And each party was able to use the political resources of the branch it controlled to facilitate the reelection chances of incumbents.

Consequently, both political parties have developed a set of partisan interests in the institutional power of a particular branch of government. The Democrats, after once having been the party of strong presidents (Andrew Jackson, Woodrow Wilson, Franklin D. Roosevelt, and Lyndon B. Johnson), became the defenders of congressional prerogatives. And Republicans, once the congressionally-based party (Whiggism, radical Republicans, Henry Lodge, interwar isolationists, anti-New Dealers, and Robert Taft), championed the prerogatives of the executive.

PARTISAN POLITICS AND FOREIGN POLICY

Given these political realities, it is not surprising that foreign policy making became more partisan. Party differences existed long before the early 1970s, of course. Harry Truman was accused by Republicans of having lost China and harboring communists within the State Department. Dwight Eisenhower scored heavily in the 1952 election when he announced that he would “go to Korea.” John Kennedy “discovered” a missile gap as he was launching his presidential campaign in 1960. Republicans attacked Kennedy for the disaster in the Bay of Pigs, and in the months leading up to the Cuban missile crisis, New York Republican Senator Kenneth Keating attacked President Kennedy for his inability to identify missiles ninety miles from the Florida coast. Debates over Central and Latin America have divided the two parties at least since the Kennedy administration.

But if parties are endemic to American politics, their role was enhanced after Vietnam. Congressional oversight of intelligence opera-

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tions intensified.\textsuperscript{12} Within the foreign policy committees, critical questioning of administrative witnesses became an increasingly partisan affair.\textsuperscript{13} Party unity increased and partisan conflict intensified on foreign and defense roll calls cast in the House of Representatives.\textsuperscript{14} Party leaders became increasingly active on foreign policy questions.\textsuperscript{15} Many, if not most Democrats on Capitol Hill opposed the bombing of Cambodia in 1970, resisted the Reagan defense build-up of the 1980s,\textsuperscript{16} and withheld support for the contras in Nicaragua.\textsuperscript{17} Nor was partisan opposition simply a matter of Democratic legislators opposing Republican presidents. During the few years that Jimmy Carter was in office, he encountered strong Republican resistance to the Panama Canal and the SALT II treaties.

The apotheosis of partisanship may have occurred in the mid-1980s in the debate over the strategic defense initiative and the strains it placed on the interpretation of the antiballistic missile treaty negotiated by Richard Nixon and Leonid Brezhnev. The Republican administration headed by Ronald Reagan interpreted the treaty without reference to the debates taking place in Congress at the time of ratification, while a Democratic Congress refused to allow the strategic defense initiative to proceed beyond its understanding of the correct interpretation of that treaty.\textsuperscript{18}

This increase in partisan conflict might be thought to have grave implications for the capacity of the executive to conduct foreign policy. For one thing, partisan opposition is effective opposition. While non-partisan factions and special interests come and go, parties have an identity and a continuity that makes their involvement of more long-lasting significance.\textsuperscript{19} Members of Congress are usually loyal members of their party, and if possible, they will support their partisan colleagues in institutional or policy struggles. Also, members of the interest group community and the policy elite often have partisan ties

\textsuperscript{12} Loch Johnson, "Playing Hardball with the CIA" in ibid., 49-73.
\textsuperscript{13} Paul E. Peterson and Jay P. Greene, "Questioning by the Foreign Policy Committee" in ibid., 74-97.
\textsuperscript{15} Steven S. Smith, "Congressional Party Leaders," in ibid., 129-57.
\textsuperscript{16} Ralph Carter, "Budgeting for Defense," in ibid., 161-78.
\textsuperscript{17} Pastor, "Disagreeing on Latin America."
\textsuperscript{18} Alton Frye, "Searching for Arms Control" in Peterson, The President, the Congress, 179-203.
\textsuperscript{19} Perhaps the best discussion of this point is to be found in V. O. Key, Southern Politics (New York: Random House, 1949), who argued that it was the absence of parties in the South that made opposition to dominant economic elites episodic and ineffective.
and connections, however much they may wish to appear separate and apart from partisan fracases. Partisan conflict, moreover, is portable. It can move from the legislative arena to the electoral arena quickly and decisively. Presidents cannot simply ignore with impunity the demands and complaints of their partisan opponents.

EXECUTIVE DIRECTION OF U.S. FOREIGN POLICY

But even though partisanship intensified after the Vietnam war, the fundamental responsibility for conducting the nation’s foreign policy remained in the hands of presidents and their executive-branch advisers. Jimmy Carter negotiated the SALT II agreement, which took practical effect despite the Senate’s refusal to ratify it. Carter reversed a policy of détente with the Soviet Union, once the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan had taken place. He canceled participation in the Olympic Games, imposed a grain embargo, and instituted a major increase in defense expenditures. The Carter administration facilitated the Camp David agreement between Israel and Egypt. And the Carter administration failed to anticipate the consequences of the Iranian revolution for U.S. interests, undertook a misbegotten rescue attempt, and finally negotiated the release of U.S. hostages.

Next the Reagan administration continued the defense build-up and successfully concluded the START and INF arms negotiations. Finally, the Bush administration invaded Panama, defined the U.S. response to the democratization of Eastern Europe and the collapse of the Soviet empire, and committed troops to Saudi Arabia, forcing congressional acquiescence to the Gulf war.

If one turns to international economic policy, the story is much the same. The crucial decision to leave the gold standard and float the dollar was made by the Nixon administration. Congress played only a marginal role on decisions concerning U.S. participation in the international monetary fund and the World Bank. The U.S. commitment to free trade was articulated and defended by the executive, with Congress left to complain and carp from the sidelines.20

One can find only a few examples in which, arguably, Congress participated in resolving issues of comparable import. When the Ford administration chose not to commit U.S. forces to Vietnam, even after

the North failed to abide by the terms of the 1973 peace agreement, it may have been due to the congressional ban on expenditures for such purposes (though Ford very likely took into account public as well as congressional opposition to renewed conflict in Southeast Asia). Congressional opposition is sometimes used as a euphemism for more broadly based public opposition. This is understandable as political rhetoric, but analysts need to keep clear the distinction when assessing the relative power of Congress and the presidency as institutions.

When the Bush Administration negotiated an agreement with the Nicaraguan government, its decision was in all probability influenced by the strong congressional opposition to continued aid to the contras. Strong congressional support for Israel has complicated State Department efforts to encourage a resolution of the Palestinian question. Although interest-group pressures account for some cases of significant congressional impact, in others Congress was influential because in retrospect it seems to have assessed more correctly the national interest than did the executive. Congress refused to appropriate development funds for Reagan’s strategic defense initiative, because such expenditures violated an antiballistic missile treaty. Similarly, Congress cut defense expenditure in the mid-1980s, because the executive’s assessment of the international danger seemed unusually extreme. The failure of the Soviet offensive in Afghanistan, the deterioration of the Soviet economy, and the growing pressures for democratization within the Soviet Union all indicated a weakening, not an intensification, of the international threat to the United States.21

The comparison with trade is instructive. More economists have concluded that the United States has little to gain from a protectionist trade policy, no matter how popular such a policy might be with certain industries and constituents in some congressional districts. By adhering to free trade policies and using the threat of protection mainly to open up foreign markets, the executive branch has chosen a course of action that most disinterested observers regard as in the long-run interest of the country. In this context, protectionist sentiments on Capitol Hill, though loudly expressed, have had only a modest policy impact.22

When the executive has steered a mainstream course considered by policy elites to be in the best interest of the country, congressional

21 Frye, “Searching for Arms Control.”
22 Destler, “Delegating Trade Policy.”
pressures have been more of a nuisance than a policy determinant. If Congress has exercised somewhat more influence than in the past, its increased role hardly seems to have been dangerous. Instead, the relative openness of the American political system seems to have facilitated an adjustment of policy when executive leadership was misjudging the national interest.

These instances of congressional involvement have not been so frequent as to indicate a major shift in power from the White House to Capitol Hill. Quite aside from the resolution of specific controversies, the authority of the executive to conduct foreign policy remains largely intact. The president can still reach executive agreements with foreign countries on almost any and all issues, thereby avoiding the necessity of winning consent of two-thirds of the Senate. Also, the courts have been increasingly willing to uphold executive interpretations of congressional intent. Unless the congressional delegation of power is exceedingly detailed, limited, and explicit, members find it very difficult to challenge in court an executive interpretation of that delegation.23 Congressional delegations of authority, moreover, can no longer be hedged by a legislative veto.24

But if executive control over foreign policy has remained largely intact, even in the most partisan moments of the post-Vietnam era, it is worth considering theoretically the conditions that make this likely. To understand the relations between the branches, we must appreciate the extent to which day-to-day politics are constrained by the workings of the international system.

**The Two Presidencies**

The distinction between foreign and domestic issues has long been noticed. Two decades ago, in a classic essay written under the fetching title, “The Two Presidencies,” political scientist Aaron Wildavsky argued that modern presidencies were fraternal—but hardly identical—twins. The one—the domestic policy president—was subject to the

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24 But Congress still has the power to ask the executive departments to report implementing decisions to congressional committees for their advance review, a power that often is as effective as the legislative veto. Jessica Korn, “Separation of Powers in Practice: The Limits of the Legislative Veto and the Impact of Chadha” (Ph.D. diss., Harvard University, 1993).
debate, pressure politics, and congressional infighting that is a concomitant of the ordinary workings of democratic processes. The other—the foreign policy president—enjoyed an independence, respect, and prestige that enabled him to manage the external relations of the country quite autonomously. Wildavsky identified several factors that differentiated domestic from foreign policy:

- Since foreign policy questions often require “fast action,” they are more appropriate for executive than legislative decision making.
- Presidents have vast “formal powers to commit resources in foreign affairs,” and they have “far greater ability than anyone else to obtain information on developments abroad.”
- Since voters know little about foreign policy issues, they “expect the president to act in foreign affairs and reward him with their confidence.”
- On foreign policy questions, “the interest group structure is weak, unstable, and thin.”
- Members of Congress follow a “self-denying ordinance. They do not think it is their job to determine the nation’s defense policies.”

Wildavsky’s analysis was not so much an original statement as a summary of a more generally held scholarly perception. Robert Dahl had put forth much the same argument more than a decade earlier: “In foreign policy the President proposes, the Congress disposes,” Dahl wrote, adding that “in a very large number of highly important decisions about foreign policy, the Congress does not even have the opportunity to dispose.” Samuel Huntington similarly concluded that “strategic programs are determined in the executive rather than the Congress.” “Just as power to legislate strategic programs was at one time, at least in theory, shared by President and Congress, so it is now, very much in practice, shared by the President and a variety of agencies within the executive branch.” Richard Fenno’s views were little different: “Foreign Affairs members . . . help make policy in an environment strongly dominated by the President. . . . [They] have been hard put to develop any strategic posture other than one calling for responsiveness to executive branch expectations.”

As mainstream a statement as the two presidency theory originally was, it became the subject of steady criticism in subsequent decades. Wildavsky's own empirical test of his generalizations—a comparison of a limited number of roll calls—was woefully inadequate. Subsequent efforts to replicate his results on a wider set of data produced inconsistent and uncertain results. Some of these studies suggested that the two presidency theory, though accurate enough for the Eisenhower era, did not explain the politics of foreign policy making in the years following the Vietnam war. Writing with Duane Oldfield, Wildavsky himself concluded that "as ideological and partisan divisions have come to reinforce each other ... foreign policy has become more like domestic policy—a realm marked by serious partisan divisions in which the president cannot count on a free ride." Finally, two presidency "theory" was not much of a theory at all. It was only a set of observations about certain tendencies in American politics at a particular point in time. The structural underpinnings that might produce such a tendency were given little attention in either Wildavsky's essay or subsequent critiques.

But if two presidency theory is in disrepair, nothing very substantial has arisen to take its place. Instead, analysts of American politics are drawing few if any distinctions between foreign and domestic affairs. Instead, it is claimed that both arenas are equally likely to be the subject of partisan debate, voter interest, group activity, and legislative involvement. The president has as much—or as little—control over the one as the other. Within both arenas, the nature of the times, the skill of the participants, and the contingencies of the moment determine outcomes.

When generalizations are made about the making of foreign policy, they mainly chronicle changes that have occurred in the last quarter of a century. Congress is said to be more involved in foreign policy decisions, the process is more partisan than it used to be, the public is more attentive to and polarized by foreign policy questions, and

29 Detailed discussions of various methodological problems associated with roll call analysis are contained in the articles included in Shull, The Two Presidencies.


31 Duane M. Oldfield and Aaron Wildavsky, "Reconsidering the Two Presidencies" in ibid., 181–90.
interest groups with foreign policy concerns use the congressional channel more efficaciously than they once did. It was the new Wildavsky, writing with Oldfield, who once again best expressed the now revised conventional wisdom: "If members of Congress disagree with the basic objectives of a president's foreign policy, deference is much less likely. . . . The press has [also] grown less deferential. . . . Ideologically oriented interest groups have come to play a greater role. . . . There are also more domestic groups with foreign policy agendas. . . . All of these changes have added to the difficulty of keeping foreign policy isolated from public scrutiny and pressure." 33

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS THEORY AND DOMESTIC POLITICS

Nor has the theoretical vacuum been filled by students of international relations. Theories of international politics typically treat individual nation-states as unitary systems whose internal politics can be safely ignored. 34 "A systems theory of international politics deals with the forces that are in play at the international, and not at the national level," writes Kenneth Waltz. "An international-political theory does not imply or require a theory of foreign policy any more than a market theory implies or requires a theory of the firm." 35 Instead, each nation-state can be assumed to be governed by a single leader who considers the country's interests within the international system.

In traditional political theory, this point is cast in normative categories. Though Aristotle preferred a mixed constitution, he recognized a need for "the general with powers delegated for war." Less restrained in his recognition of the necessity of strong leadership, Machiavelli praised "the Roman practice of creating a dictator in emergencies." Not only was the "dictator very useful . . . when the Roman republic was threatened from without but also . . . 'in the increase of the empire.'" 36

33 Oldfield and Wildavsky, "Reconsidering the Two Presidencies," 188.
In contemporary international relations theory, the stance is analytical but the theme hardly changes. To explain foreign policy decisions, says Hans J. Morgenthau,

we put ourselves in the position of a statesman who must meet a certain problem of foreign policy, . . . and we ask ourselves what the rational alternatives are from which a statesman may choose . . . and which of these rational alternatives this particular statesman . . . is likely to choose. It is the testing of this rational hypothesis . . . that . . . makes a theory of politics possible.\textsuperscript{37}

That Morgenthau uses the appellation "statesman" rather than "politician" indicates that it is the international, not the domestic political context, that provides the context in which choices are made.

Although Kenneth Waltz's analysis is internally more consistent than Morgenthau's, its point of departure is quite similar. Waltz defines the essential characteristic of the international system as anarchic, a Hobbesian state of nature in which each nation needs to guard its autonomy and security from external threat. This threat is so great—"war may at any time break out"—that individual countries must "worry about their survival, and the worry conditions their behavior."\textsuperscript{38} The external constraints are so great that it is not necessary to understand the way in which responses to these constraints are chosen. On the contrary, trying to explain relations among countries by studying the making of foreign policy within them makes as much sense as trying to understand the fall of the Niagara River by examining the shape of a drop in its spray.

The mutual deterrence theory that guided the United States and the Soviet Union through the cold war relied almost exclusively on the assumption that the nation-state was guided by a single, rational leadership. But it is not only the members of the realist school, represented here by Morgenthau and Waltz, who have given short shrift to internal foreign policy-making processes. The assumption that nation-states are unitary actors acting rationally on behalf of the national interest has been no less important to the political economy school of thought.\textsuperscript{39} These scholars suggest that the nation-state may not be as concerned about maximizing its security as its wealth. Since the international


\textsuperscript{38} Waltz, \textit{Theory of International Politics}, 102, 105.

system has become more stable, nations can—indeed, must—concentrate on maximizing their economic development. Those that fail endanger not just their external security but even their political coherence, as the collapse of the Soviet Union reveals. These theorists are more optimistic about the possibilities for international cooperation. They expect that countries will respect international principles and rules designed for their common, long-term good and not cheat when it seems to be in their immediate interest to do so. The leading industrialized countries of the world have learned to respect one another's borders, coordinate their fiscal and monetary policies, are eliminating many tariff and other trade barriers, consult one another when altering the value of their currencies, and draw upon a common pool of funds to assist nations in temporary financial difficulty.

It is too soon to tell whether such coordination can continue over the long run, especially now that the threat of international communism has disappeared. Many analysts believe that current, fragmentary arrangements are only a precursor to a more stable world order in the future. Yet even the enthusiastic proponents of a "new world order" do not ground their expectations in the workings of the foreign policy system of key countries. Instead, they try to show that cooperation is possible among the rational statesman of whom Morgenthau spoke. In Robert Keohane's words, "rational-egoist models [that assume rational, unitary decision making] do not necessarily predict that discord will prevail in relations among independent actors in a situation of anarchy. On the contrary, . . . if the egoists monitor each other's behavior and if enough of them are willing to cooperate on condition that others cooperate as well, they may be able to adjust their behavior to reduce discord."40

In short, there is considerable agreement among the various strains of international relations theory that states can be treated as unitary actors.41 Still, international relations theorists have, for the most part, yet to work out their theoretical argument to its logical conclusion. If the international system constrains the policies of nations, so also it must influence the way in which nation-states deliberate upon and decide these policies. On this topic, research has barely begun.

40 Keohane, After Hegemony, 83–84.
41 This same point is made in Graham Allison, Essence of Decision (Boston: Little Brown, 1971). Allison said that most international theorists assumed the state was a rational, unitary actor. The advantages and limitations of the unitary actor model are discussed in Paul E. Peterson, School Politics Chicago Style (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1976).
Waltz even imposes upon himself a self-denying ordinance, making the peculiar claim that international theory is no more relevant to a theory of foreign policy making than a theory of markets is relevant to an understanding of the behavior of a firm. But, certainly, economists regularly use market theory to analyze—and prescribe—firm behavior. If a firm gave no attention to the bottom line, it would not survive for long. Since it necessarily follows that most firms pay attention to the bottom line, it then becomes a question of understanding the ways in which firms attend to this objective. It may be that information costs, costs of negotiation, and costs of changing practices all limit the success with which the firm can maximize profits. But that hardly makes market theory irrelevant; it only requires a sophisticated elaboration when applying the theory to specific firms.42

What Waltz declares inadmissible, Peter Goerevitch attempts. In a lengthy review of a wide literature, he shows that the international system has often influenced the internal politics of a country. Britain’s insular position necessitated a navy but made a standing army pointless; Prussia’s permeable border in the middle of the European continent had the opposite consequence. Without the presence of a standing army, a parliament independent of the monarch was more easily established in Britain than Germany.43 It may be added that nations also learn from one another ways of best organizing their politics in order to protect their interests in a hostile world. Not only do they copy the military technology of more advanced countries, but they adopt and adapt those political structures that seem to work for competitors. For example, Britain, France, and, later, Japan created public bureaucracies that were capable of large-scale, organized activity, once the Prussians had demonstrated the potency of this organizational structure. The American executive began to model itself on European models when the United States acquired increasing international responsibilities. In short, international theory clearly implies that the executive is likely to dominate the making of foreign policy. The role played by the executive in foreign affairs is not due to transient factors such as the vagaries of public opinion or the momentary absence of interest group pressures. Instead, it is rooted in the requirements imposed on


the nation-state by the potentially anarchic quality of the international system. Wildavsky hinted at these international sources of executive power in his original essay on the two presidencies: “Compared with domestic affairs,” he wrote, “presidents engaged in world politics are immensely more concerned with meeting problems on their own terms. Who supports and opposes a policy [at home] . . . does not assume the crucial importance that it does in domestic affairs. The best policy presidents can find is also the best politics.”44 Policy takes precedence over politics because the international system both severely limits the sensible choices a country can make and shapes the processes by which these decisions are reached. International relations theory thus explains not only the policy choices of nations but also the existence of two presidencies.

Apart from encouraging the rise of a strong executive, what exactly are the requirements that the international system imposes on the domestic policy-making processes of a nation-state? Peter Katzenstein provides a useful point of departure for answering this question in his study of the small nations of Europe. Katzenstein points out that small countries are particularly vulnerable to changes in the international environment. Because international trade constitutes a higher percentage of their gross national product, policies must be designed carefully so that they do not adversely affect the countries’ place in the international system. As a result, he says, “domestic quarrels are a luxury not tolerated in such adverse circumstances.” Pointing out that “political metaphors [used by politicians in these countries] often emphasize . . . that all members of society sit in the same small boat, that the waves are high, and that all must pull on the same oar,” he finds that “groups are held together by the pragmatic bargains struck by a handful of political leaders at the summit. Political compromise across the main social cleavages assures political quiescence and . . . reinforces political control within each camp. The greater the degree of segmentation dividing these societies, the more pronounced are . . . arrangements which defuse conflict.”45 In short, Katzenstein finds that in those countries where the international system places the greatest constraints on policy choice, there are strong pressures for elite consensus and centralized decision making.

In short, if the international system constrains the choices of the United States government, there are likely to be two presidencies. On

foreign policy questions, the executive is dominant, Congress follows a “self-denying ordinance,” interest group influence is weak and episodic, and voters look to the president for guidance and action.

INTERNATIONAL CONSTRAINTS ON THE MAKING OF FOREIGN POLICY

The external constraints that differentiate foreign from domestic policy making are evident even in the years of partisan politics and divided government that characterized the post-Vietnam years. The capacity to formulate foreign policy remained concentrated in the hands of the executive branch. Even the notable instances when Congress played a significant role do not necessarily demonstrate that external constraints are irrelevant to the foreign policy-making process. In many of these cases, the president’s policy proposals constituted a dubious assessment of the country’s long-term interest within the international system. Should the United States unilaterally reinterpret an international treaty in a way inconsistent with statements that were made at the time of its signing and ratification? Congress decisively argued against the position taken by the president, and in retrospect it seems warranted in doing so. Congress also moderated the defense build-up in the 1980s; once again, its decisions hardly seem to have done much harm. On the contrary, when Congress intervened into areas in which the executive branch traditionally exercised its prerogative, the actions seemed as appropriate as they were unusual.

It may even be argued that the need for the executive to defend its foreign policy positions before Congress helps to insure that foreign policy decisions are carefully reasoned. The sharing of information between key congressional committees and key executive branch agencies, and the close cooperation between these institutions may strengthen the influence of those who are best able to articulate the long-range interests of the country within the framework imposed by the international system. If a country is going to be led by people who take into account the long-term interest of the nation, then policy must be rooted in accurate assessments of the international situation, not based on myths or ideologies. To the extent that one branch or another indulges in fanciful myths or ideological thinking, the other branch should—and often does—become a more influential participant. Congress becomes more influential on defense and arms control policies when executive branch proposals seem unreal and fanciful. But when Con-
gress ignores the interdependence of the United States and international economies, as it tends to do in the case of trade policy, the executive assumes a dominant role. As Morgenthau observed, to explain policy choice “we put ourselves in the position of a statesman who must meet a certain problem of foreign policy, . . . and we ask ourselves what the rational alternatives are from which a statesman may choose. . . . It is the testing of this rational hypothesis . . . that . . . makes a theory of politics possible.”46 And, it might be added, if a leader is not to be found in the executive branch of government, one will emerge in the legislative.*

46 As quoted in Keohane, After Hegemony, 66.

* This article is a revised version of “The International System and Foreign Policy” in Paul E. Peterson, ed., The President, the Congress, and the Making of Foreign Policy (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1994), 3–22.