

## THE FORUM

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# Re-Assessing the “Power of Power Politics” Thesis: Is Realism Still Dominant?<sup>1</sup>

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*Disagreements frequently arise over the dominant role played by realism in the study of international relations. Even though some scholars characterize the discipline by its rich theoretical diversity, others see realist concerns overshadowing all alternative theories. John Vasquez's *The Power of Power Politics* (1983) demonstrated how the realist paradigm had informed more than 90 percent of the data-based articles published from the end of World War II to 1970. In this Forum, we reevaluate the centrality of realism in international relations scholarship. Reviewing 515 data-based articles published from 1970 to 2000, we find that the proportion of articles informed by realism has been declining over the past three decades. From 1995 to 2000, liberalism surpassed realism as the leading guide to inquiry. This new theoretical pluralism calls into question the power of power politics thesis as a fitting description of contemporary research in international relations.*

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In this Forum, we assess the dominance of realism and the status of alternative research traditions within the discipline of international relations through a review of the international relations literature. Leading scholars frequently disagree over the standing of political realism. Many envision political realism as one of several theories guiding inquiry. In a review entitled “International Relations: One World, Many Theories,” Stephen Walt (1998) explored the field’s theoretical and methodological diversity. Joel Rosenthal (1995:317) similarly noted that international relations over “the past fifty years is an unwitting and curious combination of [liberal and realist] approaches.” Joseph Legro and Andrew Moravcsik (1999) have argued that even self-labeled realists are now exploring questions inconsistent with traditional realism. Other scholars, however, see far less theoretical diversity and are quick to acknowledge the predominance of political realism. Michael Doyle (1997:41) has observed that “realism is our dominant theory. Most international

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relations scholars are either self-identified or readily identifiable Realists." Kenneth Waltz is perhaps the most determined champion of political realism. Asked about the viability of alternative theories to neorealism, Waltz (1998:383) responded: "I wish there were. I just don't know of any other theories." For Waltz, realism towers over all other theoretical frameworks in international relations.

The question of realism's dominance may be more consequential than prevailing in an academic popularity contest. If realism does indeed constitute the dominant, self-contained, self-regulating Kuhnian paradigm, for which theoretical alternatives are rare, critical scholarship may diminish. Thomas Kuhn (1970:24) asserted that when one paradigm dominates, scholars are "intolerant" of alternative theories and choose to work closely within the dominant framework. He referred to this practice of concentrating on small pieces of the larger paradigmatic puzzle as "normal science." Critics of Kuhn, led by Karl Popper (1970, 1994), have long noted how the drift toward one dominant theoretical framework tends to impoverish inquiry by limiting both scholarly vision and problem-solving skills.

In line with this Popperian critique, several international relations scholars have pointed to possible dangers posed by realism's dominance. In one scathing polemic, Richard Ashley (1984:258) asserted how the discipline's heavy reliance on realism "neuters the critical faculties . . . limits rather than expands political discourse [contributing to] an ideology that anticipates, legitimizes, and orients a totalitarian project of global proportions." Michael Banks (1990:58) has claimed that realism's dominance forges a narrow discipline that is "intellectually totalitarian" and largely bereft of "the humanism and breadth of the classic writers." For Banks, realism's monolithic position unjustifiably diminishes alternative theoretical viewpoints and consolidates research along one narrow and rigid track.

Questions over the extent of realism's influence on scholars and scholarship are therefore central to any serious reflection on the past and future of the field of international relations. Yet few have addressed these questions in a sustained and rigorous manner. One exception is the work of John Vasquez (1979, 1983, 1997, 1998), who has provided the most convincing statement of realism's dominance in the study of international relations. Vasquez (1983) reported that over 90 percent of the data-based studies in international relations from the end of World War II through 1970 were anchored by a realist theoretical orientation along the lines of Hans Morgenthau's (1948) *Politics Among Nations*. Vasquez's findings stand as a widely recognized ledger of realism's dominance in international relations research.

In the most recent edition of *The Power of Power Politics*, Vasquez (1998:183) reasserts that research over "the past fifteen to twenty years has convinced me more than ever of the tenacity of the [realist] paradigm's grip on scholars, especially in the United States, and of the need to abandon it as a guide to both theory and practice." Although rich with insight on recent theoretical developments, missing from this second edition of his book is a systematic update of data supporting the continued dominance of realism. Instead, Vasquez relies on the work of Waltz (1979) and a few other leading scholars to demonstrate realism's continued dominance. With such a small sample size, realism's standing over the past 30 years remains open to question.

The purpose of this Forum is to assess realism's position in international relations scholarship from 1970 to 2000. Like Vasquez, we concentrate on reviewing data-based articles that are characterized by their use of large-N, quantitative data sets; by their explicit and operationalized variables; and by their transparent and parsimonious hypotheses—all of which facilitate reliable coding. Rather than using a bimodal, realist/nonrealist typology as Vasquez has done, we classify these articles along four distinct dimensions: realist, liberal, three-cornered fights, and other. Based on a review of 515 articles, our results suggest that realism has declined dramatically as a guide to data-based research. Indeed, between 1995 and 2000, liberalism surpassed realism as the leading guide to research. In our conclusions,

we discuss some of the implications this new theoretical pluralism has for the study of world politics.

### Revisiting Vasquez

Vasquez's (1979) study, entitled "Coloring It Morgenthau: New Evidence for an Old Thesis on Quantitative International Politics," was the first thorough examination of realist dominance in international relations. Ironically, this appeared in the *British Journal of Political Science*—far removed from the data-based research addressed in the study. Four years later, Vasquez offered more extensive evidence of realism's dominance in his book *The Power of Power Politics: A Critique*. In these early works, Vasquez (1979, 1983) demonstrated how core realist concerns had influenced concept formation, data-making efforts, and hypothesis testing in the vast majority of quantitative studies in international relations.

In assessing the literature, Vasquez (1983) relied exclusively on an inventory of quantitative, data-based articles on international politics compiled from Susan Jones and J. David Singer's (1972) abstracts of data-based research. Jones and Singer compiled and abstracted 158 data-based articles and book chapters published before 1970. By relying on this compilation, Vasquez (1983:158) restricted his study to "behavioral research, that is, research defined as descriptive, or correlational/explanatory analysis that uses data." As we observed above, data-based studies are identifiable by their use of large-N, quantitative data; by their explicit hypotheses; and by their transparent and reproducible findings. From the 158 articles abstracted by Jones and Singer, Vasquez coded individual hypotheses as either realist or non-realist in their theoretical orientation. He identified realist hypotheses by three features recurrent in Morgenthau's (1948) *Politics Among Nations*, namely, the primacy of the state, struggles for power between states, and a clear divide between domestic and international politics (that is, a focus on order versus anarchy).

Vasquez found that the realist paradigm had generated the overwhelming majority of hypotheses tested in data-based work during this time period. Based on the Jones and Singer abstracts, Vasquez (1983:170) demonstrated that more than 94 percent of the independent and dependent variables used in data-based tests up through 1970 were rooted in the realist paradigm. Very few of these hypotheses, however, yielded significant findings. Vasquez (1983:202) concluded that "the realist paradigm produced only 48 scientifically important findings out of 7,158 realist hypotheses tested from 1956 to 1970." Realist hypotheses, according to Vasquez, have consistently failed to be empirically corroborated. He also pointed out that nonrealist hypotheses were far more likely to be statistically significant. In other words, when theoretical frameworks other than realism guided inquiry, there was a higher likelihood of success. According to Vasquez, the discipline's adherence to realism is the primary culprit for the persistent shortcomings in data-based work not the use of a large-N, statistical methodology. The robust finding on the democratic peace, a liberal hypothesis, further underscores how the *theory* and not the *method* may well be responsible for the comparative dearth of realist findings in early data-based research.

Perhaps the most widely noted of Vasquez's work is his critique published in the *American Political Science Review* in 1997. Following the lines of his earlier works, he charged that neorealism has not only dominated recent research but has also been a "degenerative" guide for international relations scholarship. He supported his point by examining the influence that Waltz's (1979) neorealist proposition on balancing has exercised on the field and observed how little empirical corroboration this proposition has enjoyed. The article sparked lively responses from Waltz (1997) and other leading realists.

The most recent and comprehensive statement of Vasquez's thesis is found in the second edition of his *The Power of Power Politics* published in 1998. Most of the first

edition's text is kept in tact but several new essays on neorealist works from the 1980s and 1990s are added to document realism's continued dominance. No effort is undertaken to update the data on quantitative studies that were coded in the first edition. Instead, Vasquez claims that the recent work of Kenneth Waltz (1979), Robert Gilpin (1981), Stephen Walt (1987), and John Mearsheimer (1990) demonstrates realism's continued dominance as well as the degenerative nature of the realist research program in a Lakatosian sense. Although these works are central to the discourse in international relations, they may not be fully representative. Walt (1997:934) refers to Vasquez's (1997) critique as "a classic illustration of the hazards of small sample size." In spite of limited analysis of recent research, Vasquez's second edition remains the most systematic study of realism's dominance in the field of international relations even though the rigorous measurement of such dominance ends in 1970.

Vasquez's findings have been cited and discussed by a diverse group of scholars with a variety of methodological temperaments. For a sample of the various scholars citing Vasquez, see James Rosenau (1984), Bruce Bueno de Mesquita (1985), John Burton and Dennis Sandole (1986), Zeev Moaz (1989), Charles Kegley (1993), Frank Wayman and Paul Diehl (1994), Michael Doyle (1997), Waltz (1997), Michael Nicholson (1998), K. J. Holsti (1998), Brian Schmidt (1998), Michael Brecher (1999), Steve Smith (2001), and Fred Chernoff (2004). On its dust jacket, Singer lauded Vasquez's first edition as "a very useful examination of our discipline's intellectual history and development [that] will fill a major gap in the literature." Perhaps the warmest reception came from nonquantitative scholars in Britain. From the London School of Economics, Michael Banks (1985:215) pronounced the book "an obvious classic," referring to Vasquez as "a scholar's scholar, a source of authoritative reference." Banks (1985:220) also claimed that Vasquez's text may be "the most important single work to have emerged from the behavioral movement in international relations." Vasquez's findings are frequently used to demonstrate realism's postwar dominance and as evidence of the so-called "intellectual imperialism" perpetuated by realist scholars (Smith 2001). However, because his systematic measurement ended in 1970, updated evidence of realism's dominance is necessary to sustain these claims. To this task we now turn.

### Selecting Cases: 515 Data-Based Articles

To compile a list of data-based articles from 1970 to the present, we began with those abstracted by Gibbs and Singer (1993). This volume was a follow-up to that of Jones and Singer (1972), which, as we observed earlier, provided the articles for Vasquez's original study. Between 1970 and 1991, Gibbs and Singer (1993:6) report the publication of 289 data-based articles testing hypotheses on world politics and note that these studies "produced, or used, data-based descriptions of and/or attempts to explain the behavior, conditions, or events in the international system." The use of systematically collected data was the key for inclusion of a study in the Gibbs and Singer compilation as it was for Jones and Singer (1972). In effect, both sets of abstracts focused on studies that involved large-N, quantitative data sets; the operationalization and measurement of variables; and explicitly stated hypotheses regarding questions inherent to the relations among states.

Even though Gibbs and Singer provide us with the best selection of articles to update Vasquez, their abstracting ended in 1991. To extend the time period closer to the present, we compiled data-based articles for the years 1992–2000 published in four international relations journals: the *International Studies Quarterly*, *International Organization*, *World Politics*, and the *Journal of Conflict Resolution*. These particular journals were selected because of their recent ranking by US political scientists as the four leading international relations journals in terms of impact, evaluation, and familiarity (see Garand and Giles 2003:296). These four journals

also provided the lion's share of articles compiled by Gibbs and Singer. Indeed, the *Journal of Conflict Resolution* and the *International Studies Quarterly* provided the largest number of articles for the Gibbs and Singer abstracts, 68 and 48, respectively. In reviewing the articles in these four prominent journals, we identified 226 data-based pieces on world politics for the years 1992–2000.

Our exclusive focus on data-based studies means that we have not included in this evaluation of the dominance of realism research using case studies, constructivist-oriented articles, or pieces involving formal or mathematical models. Indeed, we recognize that realist concerns over the balance of power have been explored with formal models (Niou, Ordeshook, and Rose 1989) and that formal models have also been used to explore liberal concerns in studies of the democratic peace (Buono de Mesquita et al. 1999). Moreover, Samuel Barkin (2003) has pointed out that constructivism is as compatible with realism as it is with liberalism. In fact, as James Fearon and Alexander Wendt (2002:52) have proposed, both rationalism and constructivism are “fruitfully viewed pragmatically as analytical tools, rather than as metaphysical positions or empirical descriptions of the world.” Efforts to systematically compare approaches like constructivism and formal modeling to descriptive theories such as realism and liberalism leads to confusion. As guides to research, both realism and liberalism—as *theories*—provide testable propositions and predictions concerning how the world supposedly works; case studies, constructivism, and formal modeling—as *analytical tools*—are distinct from descriptive and predictive theories.

Even though incorporating articles taking these approaches would certainly have shed more light on the theoretical trends we are interested in assessing, like Vasquez, we restrict this paper to data-based studies. We do so for several reasons. First, studies involving purely formal models or a constructivist orientation are largely absent for the early years of the time period we are exploring. Moreover, the number of case studies has gradually declined over the same period (Sprinz and Wolinsky-Nahmias 2004:15). Second, and more pragmatically, data-based articles are easier to classify. With explicit hypotheses and operationalized data, such articles provide a certain parsimony that ensures reliable coding. Third, we rely on data-based articles because of the precedent set by Vasquez (1983). Because he concentrated exclusively on classifying data-based articles, for the sake of some crude comparability we look to articles using the same approach. Although we realize that our choices mean that this examination falls short of a comprehensive survey of research in international relations, the 515 data-based articles that we found provide us with better evidence of realism's dominance than the relatively few neo-traditional realist works selected by Vasquez (1998) in his second edition.

Although we adhere to Vasquez's emphasis on data-based articles, we diverge from his coding procedures. Rather than examining each individual hypothesis in an article, we evaluated the general theoretical tenor of the articles. This decision constitutes a compromise between the two extremes pursued by Vasquez in the two editions of *The Power of Power Politics*. In the first edition, Vasquez (1983) coded every hypothesis in 158 data-based studies. In the second edition (Vasquez 1998), he relied on only a few influential works to draw inferences regarding realism's continued predominance. Given the growth in data-based work since 1970 (see Sprinz and Wolinsky-Nahmias 2004), coding individual hypotheses in 515 data-based studies would have been an enormous undertaking. Even Vasquez (1998:1) notes that a true update of his first edition “would require an immense effort and is certainly worth doing, but it is not clear that this sort of additional evidence would change anyone's mind about the argument [that is, the continued dominance of realism].” However, relying on a handful of studies to demonstrate continued realist domination, as Vasquez (1998) did in his second edition, is not the only solution. We, therefore, pursue a more extensive survey than Vasquez's (1998) reliance on a few neo-traditional studies. And compared with Vasquez's (1983)

survey of 158 data-based studies, our survey of 515 articles provides a more extensive sampling of research—but one less intensive in terms of detail. Still, with our 515 observations of data-based studies from 1970 to 2000, we can better assess the continued dominance of realism in international relations.

### A Refined Typology

A second important divergence from Vasquez is related to the typologies we each use. Whereas Vasquez relied on a bimodal typology of realist versus nonrealist hypotheses, we expand the typology to four categories: realist, three-cornered fights, liberal, and other. This refined typology allows us to evaluate theoretical trends in the field in a more nuanced manner. Given that each category in this typology diverges from Vasquez, a detailed description of the criteria for inclusion and specific examples are in order.

#### *Realist Articles*

When considering an article to be realist in orientation, we adhered to the broad criteria used by Vasquez. Relying on the central concerns of Morgenthau (1948), Vasquez (1983:26–31) highlighted the importance of states as actors and their struggles for power. Vasquez (1983:18) also maintained the "sharp distinction between domestic and international politics" as a third essential element of the realist paradigm in international relations. These three concerns constitute the core of realist theory and served as our focus for coding articles as realist.

Many articles with a realist orientation measure the material capabilities of states and how these capabilities influence behavior in the international system. Such studies often concentrate on questions regarding the balance of power, polarity, and how the distribution of power in the international system is associated with conflict. Examples of these studies from across the three decades (1970–2000) include Cynthia Cannizzo's (1978) effort to track changes in capabilities between major powers, Henk Houweling and Jan Siccamà's (1988) study of power transitions and war, and Edward Mansfield's (1993) research measuring power concentration in the international system. Each of these examples addresses some aspect of how distributions of power can affect levels of international conflict—one of the central concerns of political realists.

Realist studies also include those exploring *realpolitik* foreign policy approaches (that is, those in which states wield material capabilities to influence the behaviors of other states). Many of these involve the examination of the use of coercion like Robert Mandel's (1986) study of the effectiveness of gunboat diplomacy. Others assess how material capabilities influence the success of deterrence (Huth and Russett 1984). Also included are studies measuring the efforts of one state to influence a client state by allocating foreign economic or military aid (Rai 1980). Because this type of research tracks efforts to use material capabilities to achieve *realpolitik* ends, they fit within Morgenthau's (1962) discussion of foreign aid as another way of using power in the international system. We also included in the realist category studies of foreign policy substitutability that explored the multiple power resources states have at their disposal (see Morgan and Palmer 2000). Even though such studies do not address systemic capabilities, they still fit neatly within the realist tradition forged by Morgenthau.

A final set of realist articles included in this category were those descriptive of trends in the international system that are especially relevant to realists. One example of the latter is Bueno de Mesquita's (1975) study of changes in polarization. Although largely descriptive, this article revolves around a variable—the distribution of power in the international system—that is of interest primarily to scholars working within the realist tradition.

In sum, the majority of articles classified as realist involved either polarization-balance of power issues or how various elements of power are wielded in the international system. Over the three decades examined here, realist articles remained closely tied to these issues while advancing in concept measurement and methodological sophistication.

### *Liberal Articles*

Whereas Vasquez relied on Morgenthau as the exemplar of the realist paradigm, liberalism lacks an obvious leading voice. In the study of international relations, a broad canopy shelters a series of distinctly liberal concerns. Doyle (1997:206), for instance, claims that “what we call liberalism resembles a family portrait of principles and institutions, recognizable by certain characteristics—for example, individual freedom, political participation, private property, and equality of opportunity.” For the most coherent representatives of liberalism in international relations, we look to the writings of Immanuel Kant and Thomas Paine, two of the founders of liberal thought in considerations of relations among nations. Kant is frequently cited by scholars of international relations. Although Paine is less cited, Michael Howard (1978:29) has argued that every liberal “who has written about foreign policy since [the publication of *Rights of Man*] has been able to provide little more than an echo of Paine’s original philippic.” Both of these liberal authors represent a certain vision of international politics based upon individual rights, democratic governance, and international peace resulting from democracy, free trade, and international cooperation. Both Kant and Paine were critical of realist, power-based explanations of international relations. Kant’s liberal international thought is best represented in his 1795 essay, “Perpetual Peace” (see Kant 1991); Paine’s is in his *Rights of Man* from 1791 (see Paine 1969). For more recent surveys of the international thought of Kant and Paine, see Doyle (1997) and Walker (2000), respectively. As a practical matter, we coded articles as having a liberal orientation if they addressed questions of the democratic peace, the differences that democratic governance makes in a state’s foreign policy—the democratic difference, peace through trade, support for international law and organization, international regimes, and human rights enforcement.

Like the realist articles over the 30-year period, liberal articles tended to emphasize the same sets of questions. Nowhere is this more apparent than the democratic peace literature. Although the inter-democratic peace claim can be traced back to Paine’s works during the American and French revolutions (Walker 2000:58), it was first explored in a data-based study by Small and Singer (1976). Small and Singer’s efforts to identify a democratic difference were followed by a cascade of research. Examples of democratic peace research range from Erich Weede’s (1984) study of democratic war-proneness to Bruce Russett, John Oneal, and David Davis’ (1998) paper, which examines the relative importance of democracy, trade, and membership in international organizations for the reduction of militarized interstate disputes (MIDs) between states. Also included is Brian Lai and Dan Reiter’s (2000) study of democratic alliance patterns. Although it could be argued that alliances are largely realist constructs, the search for variation between democracies and authoritarian states in their respective alliance behavior is rooted in liberalism, dating back to Kant’s idea of a federation of democratic states. As a rule, when studies explored the effects that democratic regimes have on foreign policy behaviors, we classified them as liberal studies.

Other articles coded as liberal included those exploring whether or not trade reduces conflict between states, such as that by Solomon Polachek (1980). Articles examining how international organizations manage violent conflict were also coded liberal (Haas 1983). Finally, descriptive studies tracing support for world

organization and order were categorized as liberal (Angell 1973). Collectively, these articles fall within the framework of liberal thought in international relations.

### *Three-Cornered Fights*

Perhaps the most challenging alteration from the Vasquez typology involves our inclusion of three-cornered fights as a distinct category. Imre Lakatos (1970) notes how three-cornered fights provide valued insights when evaluating rival research programs or theories. A three-cornered fight can be thought of as a study whose central question is rooted in contested conjectures from two theoretical frameworks but is evaluated by one empirical test. Two corners of the fight consist of the two contradictory theoretical conjectures with the third corner consisting of the evidence that bears on these conjectures. Even though many studies exhibit some element of a three-cornered fight, we focused on those articles in which the conjectures directly related to a realist and a nonrealist conjecture.

Examples of three-cornered fights include the alliance-war studies conducted by Charles Ostrom and Francis Hoole (1978) and by Jack Levy (1981). These were coded as three-cornered fights because both realists and liberals predict associations between alliances and war, albeit opposite kinds of associations. Indeed, liberals from Thomas Paine to Woodrow Wilson warned of the dangers posed by forming military alliances. One of the first liberal critiques noting the dangers of alliances was Paine's claim (see Paine 1908:27) in 1787 that England's "speculative alliances served rather to draw her into a continental war . . . than extricate her from a war." More than a century later, Wilson concluded that any system of "offensive and defensive alliances made settled peace impossible" (in Claude 1962:82). For liberals, alliances contribute to mistrust among states and may spark a spiral of insecurity leading to higher probabilities of war. Realists disagree with this scenario. For realists, alliances compose a central feature of the balance of power and are thought to promote peace not war as liberals posit. Waltz (1979:128), for instance, warns that failing to balance through alliances or arms increases "may risk one's own destruction." In a world fraught with anarchy and self-seeking actors, realists look to alliance-making as one way to promote peace by signaling resolve, enhancing deterrence, and maintaining a balance of power. In short, realists see alliances as a potential source of international stability and peace whereas liberals view them as sources of increasing threats, spirals of insecurity, and higher probabilities of war.

The alliance and war hypothesis stands as a classic example of a three-cornered fight between liberals and realists. With the Vasquez typology, these studies were coded exclusively realist. This practice may exaggerate the importance of realism while systematically underestimating the presence of nonrealist conjectures. We, therefore, classified such studies in a separate category. However, given our concern with the dominance of realism, all three-cornered fights lacking a realist component were coded in the "other" category. For our purposes, three-cornered fights are studies that test realist conjectures against nonrealist alternatives.

Other examples of three-cornered fights include Michael Wallace's (1982) and Susan Sample's (1998) studies of arms races in which realist and liberal predictions are directly contrasted. Jochen Mayer and Ralph Rotte's (1999) analysis of how arms transfers might lead to either successful deterrence or conflict spirals in client states also fits within the three-cornered fight category. Another example of a three-cornered fight is Russell Leng's (1993) study of the effectiveness of *realpolitik* bullying compared with more liberal policies of accommodation. Moreover, three-cornered fights encompass those studies that contrast realist rational actor models (that is, Allison's [1971] Model I) with organizational or bureaucratic politics models (Models II and III). For example, Jacek Kugler, A. F. K. Organski, and Dan Fox (1980) examine whether military spending levels can be explained by a rival's



spending (that is, a realist, Model I explanation) or by organizational interests and past spending levels (that is, an organizational, Model II explanation).

However, it is important to emphasize that whenever two realist hypotheses were contrasted, we did not code the article as a three-cornered fight. For instance, a power transition model contrasted with a balance of power model constitutes a test anchored firmly in realism because both posit that the distribution of power in the system impacts the likelihood of war. But if a balance of power model was contrasted with an explanation outside of realism, we considered it a three-cornered fight. By identifying three-cornered fights, we can better assess the frequency with which realist-oriented studies incorporate alternative theoretical explanations.

#### *Other Studies Outside of Realism and Liberalism*

The fourth category we used is a residual category consisting of articles that do not clearly fit within realism or liberalism. Many of these studies track trends in international behaviors over time. John Sigler (1971), for instance, examined trends of conflict and cooperation between leading powers over a 5-year period. Similarly, Charles Gochman and Zeev Maoz (1984) reported the frequencies of MIDs over time without a clear-cut theoretical emphasis. Although their description of the data set did not address specific theoretical concerns, MIDs have been used in liberal and realist studies alike. Indeed, Oneal and Russett (1999) relied on MIDs in their Kantian exploration of peace-through-trade and democratic peace hypotheses. On the other hand, Richard Stoll (1984) used MIDs in a realist study assessing the levels of conflict within differing concentrations of power. When trends and data sets are reported in a descriptive manner and with no clear theoretical underpinning, we classified them in this residual category, even though the data could prove useful for different theoretical purposes. The MID data set is perhaps the best example.

This “other” category is by no means a-theoretical. Many of these studies are well-developed in terms of causal and theoretical logic, but they simply fall outside the frameworks of realism and liberalism. Included are studies exploring the connection between domestic and international conflict and diversionary theory. Beginning with Charles Kegley, Neil Richardson, and Gunter Richter (1978) and Dieter Eberwein et al. (1979), the theme of how domestic political conflict affects foreign policy behavior was repeatedly examined over the 30-year period. As a rule, these studies were coded in the residual category. However, studies of the frequency of diversionary tactics between authoritarian and democratic states was coded liberal because the independent variable is regime type. The claim that authoritarian leaders will resort to diversionary acts more frequently than their democratic counterparts has a long liberal lineage reaching back to Paine in 1791 (Paine 1969:99). According to this coding criterion, studies of diversionary theory devoting little attention to regime type are classified in the other category (Fordham 1998). But we code studies like that of Christopher Gelpi (1997), which explores the propensity of democratic regimes to divert in the liberal category. The latter asks a question central to liberal thought concerning whether democratic regimes do, indeed, behave differently in the international arena.

Some further studies fitting into the other category include Levy and Morgan's (1986) study of war-weariness, Henderson's (1997) study of how ethnic divisions can contribute to war-proneness, and Patrick Regan's (1996) analysis of factors leading to successful international interventions in civil wars. Finally, we coded studies that tested a large number of hypotheses drawn from across the theoretical spectrum in this category. One example is Stuart Bremer's (1992) wide-ranging study of various correlates of interstate war, which included factors like power and militarization as well as regime type and geography.

### Illustrations of Categories

A summary of examples of articles coded into our fourfold typology in chronological order is presented in Table 1. Within the realist category, the central concerns were measuring and wielding state power. Within the liberal category, regime type and international organizations were predominant, with studies of the democratic difference becoming more frequent in the 1990s. Three-cornered fights represent those studies in which a realist conjecture was matched up with a contending conjecture from another theoretical perspective. In the "other" category are studies that fall outside realism or liberalism.

These four categories offer a mutually exclusive and logically exhaustive coding scheme for data-based articles. As previously noted, coding only data-based articles may limit our findings. However, these articles have two distinct advantages over a more comprehensive survey of international relations research. First, we found it relatively easy to classify data-based studies, with their explicit hypotheses and operationalizations of variables. In assessing theoretical orientation, data-based studies leave relatively little to interpretation. As a result, intercoder reliability was high and we can report our findings with a high degree of confidence. In fact, intercoder reliability tests of random blind codings proved robust at higher than 95 percent. Second, a probably more important reason for relying on data-based articles exclusively has to do with comparability. Given that Vasquez based his claims of the predominance of realism on data-based studies, to further explore this question we chose to do so with a comparable population of cases. The 515 articles we classified represent cases similar to those examined by Vasquez (1983) in his first edition of *The Power of Power Politics*.

### Findings

Several trends emerge from the categorization of the 515 data-based articles we reviewed that were published from 1970 to 2000. First, the number of data-based articles that have been published in the four leading international relations journals has dramatically increased over the past three decades. Only 37 data-based articles were published from 1970 to 1975 according to Gibbs and Singer's (1993) compilation. From 1995 to 2000, more than 150 data-based articles appeared in *International Organization*, *World Politics*, the *International Studies Quarterly*, and the *Journal of Conflict Resolution*. This steady increase in data-based research has also been acknowledged by Sprinz and Wolinsky-Nahmias (2004).

Table 2 shows the percentage of articles informed by realism, three-cornered fights, liberalism, and other theoretical concerns. Over the entire period, realism still remains the single most important theoretical guide. Realism informed 36 percent of the data-based studies whereas liberalism informed just under 21 percent of these studies. Three-cornered fights accounted for 17 percent of the articles, and other theoretical concerns informed the remaining 26 percent.

Although realism remains dominant over the past three decades, there is a marked decline in its influence. As concerns with the Cold War balance of power retreat into the distant past, the number of studies exploring polarity, concentration of power, and coercion have, in turn, declined. For the final 6-year period coded (1995–2000), realism accounted for less than 22 percent of the data-based studies in world politics.

This decline in the focus on realism has been met, perhaps unsurprisingly, with the relative ascent of liberalism. Whereas realism has declined to less than 22 percent from 1995 to 2000, liberalism has come to inform 39 percent of the data-based articles. Much of this increase in liberal-informed studies results from various concerns with the democratic peace and how the democratic regime type can alter foreign policy. The increase in studies informed by liberalism can, perhaps, be traced to end of the Cold War and the new wave of democratization. But it might

TABLE 1. Examples of Coded Articles over Three Decades

Realism	Liberalism	Three-Cornered Fights (TCF)	Other
Bueno de Mesquita (1975)	Angell (1973)	Ostrom and Hoole (1978)	Sigler (1971)
Cannizzo (1978)	Small and Singer (1976)	Kugler, Organski, and Fox (1980)	Eberwein et al. (1979)
Huth and Russett (1984)	Polachek (1980)	Levy (1981)	Gochman and Maoz (1984)
Houweling and Siccama (1988)	Haas (1983)	Wallace (1982)	Levy and Morgan (1986)
Mansfield (1993)	Russett, Oneal, and Davis (1998)	Leng (1993)	Bremer (1992)
Morgan and Palmer (2000)	Lai and Reiter (2000)	Sample (1998)	Henderson (1997)

TABLE 2. Number and Percentage of Data-Based Articles Per Category for Each Five-Year Period, 1970–2000

Year	Realist	TCF	Liberal	Other	Total
1970–1974	18 (48.64%)	9 (24.32%)	3 (8.1%)	7 (18.91%)	37
1975–1979	29 (46.77%)	10 (16.12%)	8 (12.9%)	15 (24.19%)	62
1980–1984	37 (38.14%)	23 (23.71%)	12 (12.37%)	25 (25.77%)	97
1985–1989	30 (48.38%)	9 (14.06%)	10 (15.62%)	15 (23.43%)	64
1990–1994	36 (36%)	19 (19%)	13 (13%)	32 (32%)	100
1995–2000	34 (21.93%)	20 (12.90%)	61 (39.35%)	40 (25.80%)	155
Total	184 (35.72%)	90 (17.47%)	107 (20.77%)	134 (26.01%)	515

also be explained by the progressive nature of the democratic peace research program (Chernoff 2004). The growing influence of liberalism in the study of world politics is most pronounced in the latter part of 1990s.

Perhaps the most encouraging sign for those proponents of theoretical pluralism is the large number of three-cornered fights and studies that are not directly tied to liberalism and realism. Over the past three decades, three-cornered fights remained relatively steady, accounting for, on average, 17 percent of the data-based studies. An additional 26 percent of the studies were coded in the residual category (that is, studies informed by neither realism nor liberalism). These findings suggest far more theoretical diversity in international relations over the past 30 years than that depicted by Vasquez (1998).

Another way of assessing the standing of realism in the field is to aggregate three-cornered fights with realist-coded articles. Recalling that three-cornered fights had one corner informed by realism, this aggregation provides an alternative measure of realism's influence in the field. To create a dichotomous typology along the lines examined by Vasquez, we combined realist-oriented studies with three-cornered fights to create a broad realist category. For the nonrealism category, we combined the liberal and other categories. The resulting bimodal distribution of realist and nonrealist categories approximates the procedure used by Vasquez (1983). Even with this privileged coding (that is, by classifying those studies that are partially realist as realist exclusively), there is still a noted decline in realism.

From 1970 to 1974 realist studies and three-cornered fights accounted for nearly 73 percent of the data-based studies published during this time period. By 1995–2000, the broad realist category had fallen to 35 percent. This is a drastic decline from the more than 90 percent that Vasquez reported for the period before 1970. The evidence suggests that realism is one of many theoretical lenses currently guiding scholarship in international relations. It also suggests that the decline in realism has been met with a dramatic increase in articles addressing questions rooted in liberal theory. Even though this decline of realism in the 1990s may be

TABLE 3. Number and Percentage of Data-Based Articles Categorized as Realist/Three-Cornered Fight Versus Liberal/Other, 1970–2000

Year	Realist/TCF	Liberal/Other	Total
1970–1974	27 (72.97%)	10 (27.02%)	37
1975–1979	39 (62.90%)	23 (37.09%)	62
1980–1984	60 (61.85%)	37 (38.14%)	97
1985–1989	39 (60.93%)	25 (39.06%)	64
1990–1994	55 (55%)	45 (45%)	100
1995–2000	54 (34.83%)	101 (65.16%)	155
Total	274 (53.20%)	241 (46.79%)	515

unsurprising to some, many leading scholars have continued to characterize the field as realist dominant. While highlighting realism's inadequacies, for example, Alexander George (2000:ix) granted that structural-realist theory remains "the dominant international relations theory in American political science." Leaving aside the question of realism's success or failure as a theory, the data in Table 3 indicate that it is no longer the dominant framework that it once was. Instead, the field of international relations is currently characterized by a theoretical diversity with a leaning toward liberalism.

### Conclusions

Scholarly investigations, especially in the social sciences, rarely take place in a vacuum. More than a century ago in 1891, the historian Frederick Jackson Turner (1938:52) reflected on how "each age writes the history of the past anew with reference to the conditions uppermost in its own time." International relations scholars surely take many of their cues from the contemporary global environment—*those conditions uppermost in their own time*. As world politics unfolds in distinct eras, scholars seek to describe and explain these conditions. Recognizing the importance of presentist influences, it is probably not surprising that during the height of the Cold War Vasquez would find that the vast majority of data-based research in international relations was oriented around realist theory. This period was characterized by events and attitudes that were particularly suited for realist explanations. Issues over balance of power, alliances, arms transfers, coercive diplomacy, and crises were all very salient for the times. But the times have changed.

With the end of the Cold War, the expansion of democracy, and the increasing importance of global trade and international organizations, the world is no longer neatly suited to realist concerns. All these phenomena demand scholarly explanation that realist theory is unable to provide. The discipline's drift away from Cold War concerns regarding power balances and *realpolitik* is reflected in the shifting theoretical orientations of the field's data-based studies. From 1970 onwards, we witness a gradual decline in realist-oriented studies. Accompanying this decline in realism is an increase in studies informed by liberalism. In the last years of the twentieth century, liberalism surpassed realism as the single most important theoretical guide to data-based work in world politics. The degree to which studies of the twenty-first century could be influenced, in turn, by terrorist threats and military efforts to combat them remains to be seen. Perhaps realism will reemerge as the dominant theoretical framework.

Evidence from 1970 to 2000, however, tracks a declining importance of realism. This decline might have been more dramatic had we included constructivist works, case studies exploring domestic political institutions, or studies examining international political economy and trade. But as previously noted, for reasons of comparability with Vasquez's earlier works, we concentrated on data-based studies exclusively. Even within this population of studies—long considered a bastion of realist scholarship—realism no longer informs the majority of the work. Although realism is far from absent in the recent study of international relations, it no longer wields the influence that Vasquez (1983, 1998) reported for earlier periods. The "power of power politics" and other references to realism's dominance do not appear to be accurate descriptions of recent international relations research.

In effect, research in international relations is no longer bound by one paradigmatic vision of global politics. Evidence presented here shows a field with a plurality of theoretical concerns. Rather than a Kuhnian paradigm, recent research suggests theoretical diversity. Even though advocates for normal science may frown at this theoretical fragmentation, others will celebrate it. For the latter, multiple theoretical frameworks are necessary for the broad inquiry and criticism so essential to a solid basis of knowledge. According to Popper (1994:143), researchers "should keep the

flow of ideas running from all tributaries." For advocates of theoretical pluralism, the decline in the "power of power politics" thesis is an encouraging sign for the field of international relations.

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