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Anomaly and commonplace in European political expansion: realist and institutional accounts David Strang

While European expansion into the Americas, Asia, and Africa is often treated as central to the dynamics of capitalism,¹ it is little used to reflect back on the political dynamics of the Western state system. I would argue that this is a mistake. Western political expansion sheds light on the processes of polity construction and transformation which are obscure in analyses limited to the contemporary world system and which are hard to trace in European history.

A central concern of Western international studies is the stability and instability of polities, where instability refers to annexation, secession, or unification (as opposed to the instability of regimes through revolutions or coups d'état). This article examines the problem of stability through an analysis of the ways in which non-European polities have entered into and moved within the Western "family of nations" during the period from 1415 to 1987. It defines three categories of international status accorded to non-European polities by the Western state system—sovereignty, dependency, and nonrecognition—and argues that the frequency of transitions within and across these socially defined categories reveals a certain kind of order. To make sense of that order, it explores two perspectives on the Western state system: the realist and institutional perspectives.

The classic realist tradition involves an analysis of balance-of-power politics and statecraft. Neorealism formalizes some of the insights of this tradition in treating states as unitary, rational utility maximizers concerned with "self-help" in an anarchic world. In both versions, realism focuses on the

I thank Ronald Jepperson, Stephen D. Krasner, John W. Meyer, Robin Stryker, Ann Swidler, and Nancy B. Tuma for comments on earlier versions of this article. The research was supported in part by a MacArthur Dissertation Grant under the auspices of the Stanford Center for International Security and Arms Control.

1. The classic account of European expansion from a Marxist perspective is Vladimir Ilich Lenin's *Imperialism, The Highest Stage of Capitalism* (London: Martin Lawrence, 1933). For a periphery-based analysis, see Andre Gunder Frank, "The Development of Underdevelopment," in R. Rhodes, ed., *Imperialism and Underdevelopment* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1970), pp. 4–17.

distribution of power across states as the key to understanding system outcomes.

An institutional perspective is counterposed to the realist view. This approach has entered the international relations literature mainly through the study of international regimes,² a line of research linked thematically to a classical interest in the legal, cultural, and religious underpinnings of the Western state system. In general, an institutional perspective views politics as embedded in a structure of definitions, models, and rules that shape their activity.

It seems clear that a balanced, general understanding of the Western state system should attend to both realist and institutional perspectives. Much is also gained, however, by counterposing fairly strong versions of each account. While this article cannot do justice to the depth of scholarship on the sources of international order, it attempts to make progress through a general interpretation of some central arguments. It asks what patterns of stability each perspective leads us to expect and compares these expectations with empirical patterns.

Accounts of stability

The realist approach

An important tradition in the study of international relations can be described as realist. Of course, a single label ignores the important differences between the classic tradition represented by E. H. Carr, Hans Morgenthau, and Raymond Aron and the formally theoretical work of neorealists.³ For present purposes, however, these differences can be overlooked. While I will rely on the theoretical structure provided by neorealists in presenting the realist perspective, I would contend that the discussion also embraces more historical versions.⁴

A realist perspective begins with assumptions about the nature of states and the international system in which they are embedded. States are con-

ceptualized as rational, self-interested actors endowed with all or nearly all the "power capabilities" within the international system. The system in which states act is conceptualized as anarchic, as lacking a central or overarching ruler. Given the absence of enforceable constraints on state action, regularities in international relations are seen as the product of the rational choices of states.

What most distinguishes the realist perspective, however, is not these assumptions but the deductions drawn from them. Realists argue that the combination of state rationality and systemic anarchy makes international relations inherently conflictual.⁵ Central to this argument is the notion that states have no security guarantee, no assurance of survival. For realists, as Joseph Grieco argues, anarchy means that "there is no overarching authority to prevent others from using violence, or the threat of violence, to destroy or enslave them."⁶ This causes a "relative gains problem" where states cannot simply maximize their own benefits but must also maximize the difference between their benefits and those accruing to other states. The absence of a security guarantee thus leads the state system to be a Hobbesian war of all against all.

The argument that states can "destroy or enslave" each other has a crucial implication. It suggests that departures from rational self-interest are unstable. Irrational or unselfish behavior will be extinguished, since the pursuit of such strategies could lead to elimination from the system. As Kenneth Waltz notes, however, not all states need to be rational utility maximizers at any given time. As long as some states are rational, selection pressures will force the others to behave rationally as well or be absorbed by stronger competitors. The operation of selection allows realists to make much weaker behavioral assumptions about states than would otherwise be required.

Anarchy might seem a recipe for constantly shifting boundaries and frequent annexation. High levels of instability would parallel the market discipline assumed in neoclassical economics, which realist arguments often paraphrase. But based on the logic of the "balance of power," realists argue that an anarchic system is in fact quite stable. Waltz suggests the notion of a balancing strategy, in which states characteristically support the weaker rather than the stronger side in a conflict.⁷ Balancing may be considered rational in the international context, since the accumulation of power by any system member poses a threat in the long run to all system members. As

2. See Friedrich Kratochwil and John G. Ruggie, "International Organization: A State of the Art on the Art of the State," *International Organization* 40 (Autumn 1986), pp. 27-52. For a variety of approaches to international regimes, see the contributions to Stephen D. Krasner, ed., *International Regimes* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1983).

3. See E. H. Carr, *The Twenty Years Crisis, 1919-1939* (London: Harper, 1964); Hans Morgenthau, *Politics Among Nations* (New York: Knopf, 1978); and Raymond Aron, *International Relations: A Theory of Peace and War*, 5th ed. (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1973). Among the major neorealist works are Kenneth Waltz's *Theory of International Politics* (Reading, Mass.: Addison-Wesley, 1979) and Robert Gilpin's *War and Change in World Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981).

4. For a view that casts classic realism much closer to the institutional perspective described in this article, see Richard K. Ashley, "The Poverty of Neorealism," *International Organization* 38 (Spring 1984), pp. 225-85.

5. A liberal view begins with the same premises but instead emphasizes the potential for cooperation. See, for example, Robert Axelrod, *The Evolution of Cooperation* (New York: Basic Books, 1984); and Robert O. Keohane, *After Hegemony* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1984).

6. Joseph M. Grieco, "Anarchy and the Limits of Cooperation: A Realist Critique of the Newest Liberal Institutionalism," *International Organization* 42 (Summer 1988), pp. 498-99.

7. See Waltz, *Theory of International Politics*. For a decision-making rule that includes both realist and institutional elements, see Morton Kaplan, *System and Process in International Politics* (New York: Wiley, 1962).

long as no member is stronger than all others combined, world empire cannot be achieved. According to the realist view, generalized balancing behavior should thus ensure the stability of the system as a whole. It may also provide considerable security for individual system members, who may be maintained as buffer states to block the growth of expansionary states.

In offering a general account of stability, a balance-of-power logic also points to two conditions that foster instability. First, instability is likely if the destruction of an individual state has little effect on the larger distribution of power. That is, if a state targeted for annexation is small, lacks military or economic capacity, or has a nonstrategic location, third-party states should not oppose its annexation energetically. In today's world, this suggests that incursions in Africa, for example, would trigger less opposition from third parties than would incursions in the Middle East. Second, instability is likely if the territorial gains of one power are balanced by equivalent gains by other powers. When this occurs, the futures of individual polities are precarious, even though the system as a whole remains stable. Edward Gulick's analysis of the various changes in European boundaries proposed during the Congress of Vienna provides abundant illustrations of balance-of-power politics.⁸ He discusses a proposal to relocate the Kingdom of Saxony in Alsace-Lorraine and Prussia's demands for a rational accounting in which territorial losses would equal territorial gains. A balance-of-power logic may thus be satisfied by either balancing annexation or by the defense and preservation of existing polities.

The institutional approach

An alternative perspective argues that the cultural framework of the international system shapes state action. Robert Keohane labels this approach "reflectivist," since its logic often centers on the complex ways in which individuals reflect on their self-definition, motives, and strategies.⁹ Because other mechanisms can be stressed, however, and because I wish to connect these ideas to important lines of work in the social sciences more generally, I will instead use the term "institutional" to describe this approach.¹⁰

8. Edward V. Gulick, *Europe's Classical Balance of Power* (Binghamton, N.Y.: Vail-Baillou Press, 1955).

9. Robert O. Keohane, "International Institutions: Two Approaches," *International Studies Quarterly* 32 (December 1988), pp. 379-96.

10. For institutional approaches stressing other processes, see James G. March and Johan P. Olsen, "The New Institutionalism: Organizational Factors in American Political Life," *American Political Science Review* 78 (September 1984), pp. 734-49; Oran R. Young, "International Regimes: Toward a New Theory of Institutions," *World Politics* 39 (October 1986), pp. 104-22; and Stephen D. Krasner, "Sovereignty: An Institutional Perspective," *Comparative Political Studies* 21 (Spring 1988), pp. 66-94. For a sociological view, see John W. Meyer, John Boli, and George M. Thomas, "Ontology and Rationalization in the Western Cultural Account," in George M. Thomas et al., eds., *Institutional Structure* (Beverly Hills, Calif.: Sage, 1987), pp. 12-37.

Most analysts using this approach identify institutions as rules or models formulating appropriate behavior. Oran Young defines social institutions as "recognized practices consisting of easily identifiable roles, coupled with collections of rules or conventions governing relations among the occupants of these roles."¹¹ Keohane describes institutions as "complexes of rules and norms" and notes that international regimes can be conceptualized as issue-specific institutions. Following John Rawls, Keohane goes on to distinguish "summary" and "practice" conceptions of rules: the first simply describes empirical patterns of behavior, while the second defines appropriate behavior.¹² In this article, I use "institution" in the latter sense.

Institutions are considered exogenous to individual choice, at least in the short term. They may be thought of as built up from previous decisions, or in James March and Johan Olsen's phrase, as "history encoded into rules."¹³ But even so, they are sticky or hard to change. And as Keohane notes, even rational choice approaches find it analytically necessary to posit some institutional framework as prior to and constitutive of actors, rather than the other way around.¹⁴ This is more obvious when the "actors" of interest are complex social structures rather than individual human beings.

Institutions are argued to importantly shape behavior, though it is not maintained that they are complied with automatically. Accounts of how this happens are informed by the rich ethnographic works of writers such as Clifford Geertz, who seeks to establish the cultural or ideational as a concrete and distinct realm of activity.¹⁵ Geertz emphasizes the extraordinarily complex ways in which actors employ cultural understandings to forge self-definitions and solutions to new problems. The same point is made in a different way in discussions of taken-for-grantedness, where choice is rendered vacuous by the limited number of alternatives that are cognitively available. Institutional accounts do not dispense with notions of self-interest, but they do argue that these are conditioned by the manner in which self-definitions and the larger system are organized around institutional rules. For example, it may be difficult for an actor to mobilize support for strategies that deviate substantially from the expectations of others.

An institutional perspective thus involves an alternative conceptualization of the international system. The larger structure of the system is viewed as a network of institutional rules. The notion of an institutional structure generating state action replaces the realist notion of the absence of a central authority. At the level of the state, notions of rule-following behavior supplant realist notions of rational self-interest.

11. Young, "International Regimes," p. 107.

12. See John Rawls, "Two Concepts of Rules," *Philosophical Reviews*, vol. 64, 1955, pp. 3-32; and Keohane, "International Institutions."

13. March and Olsen, "The New Institutionalism," p. 741.

14. Keohane, "International Institutions," p. 390.

15. Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Basic Books, 1973).

The institution that seems most basic to the international system, sufficiently so to affect state stability, is sovereignty. In recent discussions, John Ruggie, Stephen Krasner, and Robert Keohane have reintroduced sovereignty as a central term in the analysis of international relations.¹⁶ They interpret sovereignty as a legal status, a bundle of rights that define the state as possessing final jurisdiction over a delineated population and territory and external autonomy in its policies toward other such entities. The institutional structure of sovereignty can thus be understood as a form of legitimation that both gives states the right to act (external autonomy) and privileges them over individuals, ethnic groups, multinational corporations, and world federations.

States are not individually empowered as sovereign actors, however, who *then* establish relations with each other. Rather, notions of sovereignty imply a state society founded on mutual recognition. The status of each state is thus tied up with that of the others in a continuing process of mutual legitimation.¹⁷ It can be argued that to enter into state society is to accept its rules, most importantly the rights of other states to internal jurisdiction and external autonomy.

It is not crucial to this article, which is an exercise in comparative statics, to trace the origins of the institutional structure of sovereignty. Two points should be noted, however. First, the Western institutional structure is historically unusual. Most state systems have been comprised of a dominant empire ringed by client states. They have not been based on the concept of sovereignty in the Western sense but, rather, on the concept of asymmetric relations of dominance and subordination. The Chinese and Roman empires, for example, recognized no equals and possessed no boundaries.¹⁸ Second, it is by no means obvious that the institution of sovereignty would be adopted by rational, utility-maximizing actors. It is particularly unclear why powerful or hegemonic states would acquiesce to this institution. While powerful states might enter into alliances to achieve specific ends, the rationale of power politics would hardly recommend generalized and unconditional recognition of the weak.

The organization of a state system around the institution of sovereignty can be argued to enhance stability. According to the logic of mutual rec-

ognition, state decision makers would not treat annexation as a standard policy option, states defeated in war would be routinely reconstituted as members of the international system, and violations of a state's sovereignty would produce generalized condemnation and intervention. In addition, the institutional framework of sovereignty should insulate polities from internally generated instability. Recognized sovereignty confers rights to suppress internal rebellion and control economic activity which are taken for granted in contemporary political discourse. States lacking internally generated resources, in particular, visibly organize on the basis of these rights.¹⁹

The institutional perspective thus provides an alternative interpretation of the outcomes that realists explain through power politics. More important, for the purposes of this article at least, an institutional approach points to sources of variation in stability that are quite distinct from those suggested by realists. It suggests that stability will vary greatly with the sovereign status of a polity. Polities defined as sovereign should be stable, according to the logic outlined above. Polities outside the network of mutual recognition should be much less stable.

In the political expansion of the Western state system, two groups of nonsovereign polities can be delineated. The first consists of non-European polities viewed by Western states as outside international society. In this context, it should be recalled that the contemporary global state system grew out of a European state system roughly coincident with Western Christianity. European states signed treaties and even allied themselves with non-Western polities, but they generally did not regard non-Western polities as possessing claims to sovereignty equivalent to their own.²⁰ The second group of non-sovereign polities is made up of the colonial dependencies of Western states.

The institutional perspective suggests that unrecognized polities and colonial dependencies should face considerably higher rates of instability than sovereign states. Acts that would be treated as intolerable aggression when the injured party is a member of Western state society may be condoned or applauded when directed at polities outside the network of recognition. And dependencies may be transferred as the spoils of war without raising any of

16. See John Gerard Ruggie, "Continuity and Transformation in the World Polity: Toward a Neorealist Synthesis," *World Politics* 36 (Spring 1983), pp. 261-85; Krasner, "Sovereignty"; and Keohane, "International Institutions."

17. For conceptualizations of the state system as a society, see Hedley Bull, *The Anarchical Society* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1977); and Martin Wight, *Systems of States* (Leicester, U.K.: Leicester University Press, 1977).

18. See Friedrich Kratochwil, "Of Systems, Boundaries, and Territoriality: An Inquiry into the Formation of the State System," *World Politics* 39 (October 1986), pp. 27-52. For a detailed account of a quite different conception of states and state systems, see Clifford Geertz, *Negara: The Theatre State in Nineteenth-Century Bali* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1980).

19. See John W. Meyer, "The World Polity and the Authority of the Nation-State," in A. Bergeson, ed., *Studies of the Modern World-System* (New York: Academic Press, 1980), pp. 109-38; and Stephen D. Krasner, *Structural Conflict* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985).

20. This is most clear in nineteenth-century writings on international law. For example, as Hall argued in *A Treatise on International Law*, "It is scarcely necessary to point out that as international law is a product of the special civilisation of modern Europe, and forms a highly artificial system of which the principles cannot be supposed to be understood or recognized by countries differently civilised, such states only can be presumed to be subject to it as are inheritors of the civilisation. . . . But states outside European civilisation must formally enter into the circle of law-governed countries. They must do something with the acquiescence of the latter, or some of them, which amounts to an acceptance of the law in its entirety beyond all possibility of misconception." See W. E. Hall, *A Treatise on International Law*, 8th ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1924), pp. 47-48; cited in Wight, *Systems of States*, p. 115.

the issues encountered in the annexation of a sovereign state. These forms of instability are consequential from a realist perspective, since a predatory state may grow more powerful by seizing unrecognized territory or colonial dependencies. But from an institutional perspective, they are unproblematic.

The conceptual framework of the study

To examine these arguments empirically, it is necessary to enumerate a set of polities and map their stability. This task is nontrivial, involving theoretical questions about the nature of political organizations as well as the collection of data. Below I sketch the conceptual framework utilized in this study, beginning with some general principles and then detailing specific criteria.

Defining statehood: general considerations

Perhaps the most widely cited definition of the state is Max Weber's:

A "ruling organization" will be called "political" insofar as its existence and order is continuously safeguarded within a given *territorial* area by the threat and application of physical force on the part of the administrative staff. A compulsory political organization will be called a "state" insofar as its administrative staff successfully upholds the claim to the *monopoly* of the *legitimate* use of physical force in the enforcement of its order.²¹

At least as generally interpreted, Weber's conceptualization bears little relation to empirical studies of the modern nation-state. Researchers do not ascertain which organizations continuously patrol a given territory. They use lists of members of the United Nations or those units reporting national data in various compendiums.

Thus, what Weber takes for the special distinguishing characteristic of the state—namely, a successfully upheld *claim*—researchers conventionally take for the whole. Further, it is the claim accepted within the international community, rather than the internal claim to constitutional independence, which guides cross-national studies.²² L. F. L. Oppenheim's dictum that "through recognition only and exclusively a State becomes an International Person and a subject of International Law"²³ is a more accurate summary of research procedure.

21. Max Weber, *Economy and Society* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1968), p. 58.

22. Alan James, *Sovereign Statehood* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1986).

23. L. F. L. Oppenheim, *International Law*, 8th ed. (New York: Longmans, Green, 1955), p. 125.

In the study presented here, I self-consciously adopt external recognition as the criterion of statehood. In a practical sense, it is difficult to see how else to proceed. Theoretically, this approach allows a straightforward test of the institutional arguments emphasizing external recognition as a condition for stability; it also allows one to ask whether realist arguments make sense of variations in stability across institutionally grounded categories. The particular coding rules employed in this study are described below. Of course, they represent only one of the many possible specifications that could be used in an approach based on external recognition.

Defining international political status: specific criteria

A definitional system based on recognition cannot pretend to be universal; a particular point of view must be taken. Here, prevailing understandings within the Western international system define three statuses: sovereign, dependent, and unrecognized. Briefly summarized, sovereign states are entities recognized by European nations as members of the Western state society; formal dependencies are entities that Western sovereigns claim to possess or control; and unrecognized polities are entities considered by Western states to be outside Western state society.

I assume that all non-European polities are initially unrecognized by Western states. In 1415, the starting date of the study, Europeans generally viewed the non-European world as either *terra nullius* (unoccupied) or as governed by states whose claims to sovereignty carried little weight. This is evident in the way that the famous Treaty of Tordesillas divided the non-Christian world between Spain and Portugal as well as in the routine ceremonies that Western explorers (generally chartered by European states) used to claim sovereignty over their discoveries.²⁴

Movement from unrecognized to dependent status can occur through the construction of a new political entity distinct from any existing indigenous polity. An example is the British colonial charter for Virginia. Control or possession can also be explicitly ceded by an indigenous polity. Since dependencies must be formally administered polities rather than mere territorial claims, informal hegemony and "unequal treaties" creating economic spheres of interest are not treated as constructing formal relations of dependence.

Movement from unrecognized to sovereign status is measured through the accreditation and reception of the diplomatic representatives of Western

24. For descriptions of the ceremonies used to claim sovereignty, see Arthur S. Keller, Oliver J. Lissitzyn, and Frederick J. Mann, *Creation of Rights of Sovereignty Through Symbolic Acts, 1400–1800* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1938). For the opposing argument that Western states implicitly recognized non-Western polities through treaty making, see Charles Henry Alexandrowicz, *An Introduction to the History of the Law of Nations in the East Indies: Sixteenth, Seventeenth, and Eighteenth Centuries* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1967).

states. The creation of diplomatic ties is a conventional mode of recognition in international law²⁵ and marks the beginnings of regularized formal interaction between polities. In this investigation, a non-European polity must develop diplomatic ties with at least two Western states to be regarded as having entered into Western state society.

Dependencies return to unrecognized status if they are abandoned by the colonial power or seized by a non-Western state. For example, the Dutch abandoned Mauritius as unprofitable in 1638 and again in 1710; the Portuguese were driven out of Mombasa in 1698. A sovereign state returns to unrecognized status if fewer than two Western states continue to recognize it.

Dependencies become sovereign through the recognition of that status within the Western international society. In the absence of a clear signal from other powers, metropolitan recognition is sufficient. But if the metropolitan stance is widely contested, as in the case of South Africa's contemporary claim that the Bantu homelands are sovereign states, the prevailing interpretation within the Western international system is considered decisive. Dependencies can become sovereign either as independent states or by full incorporation into an existing sovereign state. Examples of the latter transition include France's redefinition of its *colonies anciens* as overseas departments in 1946 and India's incorporation of Goa in 1961.

Sovereign states in turn become dependent through explicit subordination to another sovereign state. To provide a strong test of the perspectives discussed above, wide latitude is given to the notion of political dependency. The imposition or acquisition of constitutional controls on the internal jurisdiction or foreign policy of a state, such as the controls that the United States acquired over several Central American states in the early twentieth century,²⁶ is coded as producing dependency. Dependencies that have been formally integrated into the metropolis are "recolonized" if they return to a subordinate, separate status. However, informal domination or economic penetration does not constitute dependency in this investigation.

Finally, movement within dependent and sovereign status refers to mergers and dissolutions (which include successful instances of absorption and secession). An example of such events is the unification of Egypt and Syria to form the United Arab Republic, as is its later dissolution. If a merger is relatively equal, transitions are coded for both polities; if one polity absorbs the other, a transition is coded for the absorbed polity alone. Transitions within dependent status also include transfers of sovereignty among system members (for example, the sale of the Danish West Indies to the United States).

25. Hersch Lauterpacht, *Recognition in International Law* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1947), p. 381.

26. See Julius W. Pratt, *America's Colonial Experiment* (New York: Prentice-Hall, 1950).

The scope of the study

The above definitions are used to identify the status of political units constructed during European expansion into the Americas, Asia, and Africa between 1415 and 1987. The study attempts to cover all instances of the initial organization or recognition of non-European polities by Western states and the subsequent "careers" of these polities within the Western system. The central sources are the works of David Henige, Arthur Banks, and J. David Singer and Melvin Small.²⁷ Henige provides comprehensive data on the founding and independence dates of overseas European colonies from 1415 to 1970. Banks gives information on dependencies and sovereign states since 1970. Singer and Small provide a listing of the diplomatic missions sent by Western states (coded at five-year intervals).

These sources were supplemented through secondary research, which was largely concerned with bringing data from the above sources into line with the definitions described above. Theoretically derived criteria sometimes moved specific cases away from common understandings, though the data set is not in general at odds with such understandings. For example, the independence of most Latin American countries is coded at the point of their recognition by two European great powers, rather than at the point of the expulsion of Spanish troops. I would hasten to add that I do not claim expertise on the spatial and temporal scale of this study and am sure that closer local knowledge would have improved the quality of the data set. I would not expect such refinements, however, to fundamentally alter the empirical patterns discussed below.

The data set in this study excludes two groups of polities. First, it excludes both sovereign states and dependencies situated within Europe. Second, it excludes the history of non-European polities prior to their entry into the Western international system. That is, the study maps movement out of unrecognized status but not movement within unrecognized status.

In coding transitions, the study treats events changing the status of one or more discrete political entities. It excludes territorial expansions and contractions affecting the size but not the status of an entity. This means that the initial construction of a dependency is included, but the gradual expansion of its jurisdiction is not. Likewise, exchanges of territory are included only if two discrete political entities are involved and the status of one of them changes. For example, American incorporation of the short-lived independent state of Texas is included, while the Mexican Cession is not.

27. See David Henige, *Colonial Governors* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1970); Arthur S. Banks, ed., *Political Handbook of the World, 1987* (Binghamton, N.Y.: CSA Publications, 1987); and J. David Singer and Melvin Small, *Diplomatic Exchange Data, 1815-1970* (Ann Arbor, Mich.: Inter-University Consortium for Political and Social Research, 1985).

Finally, it is important to stress that the study is limited to an examination of forms of political instability at the international level (such as colonization, merger, and secession). It does not examine forms of instability at the level of regimes (such as revolutions and coups d'état), nor does it assume that instability at the two levels covaries in some simple manner. The study simply treats the movement of polities across and within international status as an important issue in its own right.

Empirical findings and theoretical expectations

Variations in political stability during the period from 1415 to 1987 are assessed using two indicators of movement across and within categories. The first is $N(ij)$, the number of polities that move from status i to status j during the period of study. The second is the waiting time, $w(ij)$, defined as the average number of years that polities spend in status i before moving to status j (constructed here under the simplifying assumption that transition rates are constant over time). The indicator $w(ij)$ can be treated as correcting $N(ij)$ for the number of polities at risk of a transition and the length of time they are observed. While $N(ij)$ indicates how common and central a transition is within the Western world system, $w(ij)$ indicates how quickly an individual polity tends to make the transition.

The results are shown in Figure 1. Waiting times are not estimated for movement out of unrecognized political status, since there is no measure of the length of time that polities are at risk of this event.

Patterns of political stability

Figure 1 strongly documents the stability associated with sovereign status. In over five centuries of Western expansion, only 11 non-European polities recognized as sovereign have been formally subordinated as dependencies. Non-European polities recognized as sovereign have merged or dissolved only 15 times. The anomalous character of both events is in sharp contrast to the frequency with which unrecognized polities are subordinated and colonial dependencies merge, dissolve, or are transferred between Western powers. Altogether, the stability associated with recognition is extraordinary in a world where, by Hobbesian logic, life should be "nasty, brutish, and short." In the language of stochastic processes, sovereignty is virtually an "absorbing state" which once entered is not left.

Robert Jackson and Carl Rosberg vividly illustrate the stability of sovereignty in their discussion of newly independent African states.²⁸ At the

28. Robert Jackson and Carl Rosberg, "Why Africa's Weak States Persist: The Empirical and the Juridical in Statehood," *World Politics* 35 (October 1982), pp. 1-24.

		Status after movement			Raw total
		Unrecognized	Dependent	Sovereign	
Status before movement	Unrecognized		263	11	274
	Dependent	18 (2173)	251 (153)	167 (225)	436 (87)
	Sovereign	0 (∞)	11 (612)	15 (448)	26 (258)

FIGURE 1. Number of status transitions (with waiting times in parentheses) of non-European polities, 1415-1987

moment of independence, it seemed unlikely that these polities would endure. Because state boundaries had been drawn by colonial powers without reference to ethnicity, the inhabitants lacked the sense of a common language, culture, and history; prior claims of ethnic identity and a larger African identity competed with the new claim of national identity. In addition, as Jackson and Rosberg point out, the weaknesses of the administrative infrastructure of African states produced high levels of regime instability. Nevertheless, the map of Africa has changed little since independence. Tanganyika and Zanzibar merged to form Tanzania; the Federation of Mali, which unified Senegal and the French Sudan shortly before independence, lasted less than a year; similarly, the merger of Egypt and Syria dissolved three years later. No African states have been recolonized, nor have any been annexed. Contrary to early expectations, African states have been highly stable.

Tables 1 and 2 list all 26 instances of instability among sovereign polities. It is of interest that only a few of these involved military force. Of those that did, the most notable were Japan's annexation of Korea, Italy's colonization of Abyssinia (Ethiopia), and the unification of North and South Vietnam. Relatively peaceful mergers and dissolutions were more common. These included the breakup of Gran Colombia and the United States of Central America in the nineteenth century and the formation of Tanzania, the United Arab Republic, and the Federation of Malaysia in the twentieth

TABLE 1. *Non-European polities that moved from sovereign status to dependent status, 1415–1987*

<i>Polity</i>	<i>Number of years in sovereign status</i>	<i>Date of change to dependent status</i>	<i>New sovereign</i>
French Guiana	8	1803	France
Guadeloupe	8	1803	France
Ile-de-France	8	1803	France
Réunion	8	1803	France
Saint-Domingue	8	1803	France
Dominican Republic	63	1907	United States
Korea	11	1910	Japan
Nicaragua	72	1912	United States
Haiti	71	1915	United States
Abyssinia	36	1935	Italy
Saint Pierre and Miquelon	9	1985	France

TABLE 2. *Sovereign non-European polities that merged or underwent dissolution, 1415–1987*

<i>Former polity</i>	<i>Number of years in sovereign status</i>	<i>Type of change^a</i>	<i>Date of event</i>	<i>New polity or polities</i>
Gran Colombia	1	Dissolution	1831	Colombia, Ecuador, and Venezuela
United States of Central America	10	Dissolution	1840	Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, and Nicaragua

TABLE 2. *continued*

<i>Former polity</i>	<i>Number of years in sovereign status</i>	<i>Type of change^a</i>	<i>Date of event</i>	<i>New polity or polities</i>
Mexico	10	Dissolution	1840	Mexico and Texas
Haiti	19	Dissolution	1844	Dominican Republic and Haiti
Texas	6	Merger (with the United States)	1846	United States
Colombia	72	Dissolution	1903	Colombia and Panama
Syria	17	Merger (with Egypt)	1958	United Arab Republic
Egypt	6	Merger (with Syria)	1958	United Arab Republic
Federation of Mali	1	Dissolution	1960	Mali and Senegal
United Arab Republic	3	Dissolution	1961	Egypt and Syria
Singapore	4	Merger (with Malaya, British North Borneo, and Sarawak)	1963	Federation of Malaysia
Zanzibar	1	Merger (with Tanganyika)	1964	Tanzania
Federation of Malaysia	2	Dissolution	1965	Malaysia and Singapore
Pakistan	24	Dissolution	1971	Bangladesh and Pakistan
South Vietnam	22	Merger (with North Vietnam)	1976	Vietnam

^aIf a merger was relatively equal (as in the merger of Egypt and Syria), a transition within the category of sovereign status was coded for each partner. If a merger was unequal and involved the absorption of one polity by another (as in the mergers forming Tanzania and Vietnam), a transition was coded only for the absorbed polity (for Zanzibar and South Vietnam).

(as well as the subsequent dissolution of the latter two unions). In the twentieth century, there was even a peaceful recolonization of Saint Pierre and Miquelon, whose population voted to return to the status of an overseas collectivity of France.

While Tables 1 and 2 provide little indication of a relationship between instability and historical time, the "youth" of the polity does seem important. Of those polities that experienced subordination, merger, or dissolution, the average length of time between the acquisition of sovereignty and instability was 19 years (and median polity age at the point of instability was 8.5 years). The parallel to the "liability of newness" noted in the organizational literature is striking. Studies of organizational mortality show that rates of mortality typically decline with age, as effective internal routines are established and external legitimacy is acquired.²⁹ This relationship also appears to hold in the international context, where the ability of polities to resist colonization, merger, and secession presumably grows over time.

While movement from sovereignty to dependency is uncommon, the colonization of unrecognized polities is a fundamental, routine feature of Western political expansion. Altogether, this study located 263 instances of colonization; on only 11 occasions did Western states recognize non-European polities as sovereign. As Europeans penetrated the Americas, Asia, and Africa, they found it convenient and reasonable to establish colonial dependencies; it is even possible to argue that colonization often occurred by accident. Much territory was acquired from nonterritorially organized peoples by treaty. Where indigenous states could not be ignored, they were conquered or brought under Western "protection." The Spaniards thus destroyed the Inca and Aztec empires (while theologians debated whether Indians possessed sovereignty under natural law).³⁰ In the late nineteenth century, the European "scramble for Africa" was conducted along the lines laid down at the Conference of Berlin.

The instability of dependent polities was also commonplace during the period studied. One of the most frequent forms of instability was decolonization. Of the 167 dependencies that achieved sovereignty, 133 did so by becoming new states, 22 were incorporated into a metropolis, and 12 were incorporated into other states. Massive decolonization expanded the scope

29. Stinchcombe introduced the notion of the "liability of newness." See Arthur L. Stinchcombe, "Social Structure and Organizations," in James G. March, ed., *Handbook of Organizations* (Chicago: Rand McNally, 1965), pp. 153-93. For empirical demonstrations, see John Freeman, Glenn R. Carroll, and Michael T. Hannan, "The Liability of Newness: Age Dependence in Organizational Death Rates," *American Sociological Review* 48 (October 1983), pp. 692-710; and Jitendra V. Singh, David J. Tucker, and Robert J. House, "Organizational Legitimacy and the Liability of Newness," *Administrative Science Quarterly* 31 (June 1986), pp. 171-93.

30. See J. H. Parry, *The Spanish Theory of Empire in the Sixteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1940).

of the international community of mutually recognizing states, defocusing Europe in the process.

In addition to decolonization, movement within dependent status was common and frequent. Dependencies were transferred between Western powers 86 times as the spoils of war. Britain acquired much of France's overseas empire by 1815; in the twentieth century, German and Japanese colonies were handed over to the Allies as international mandates. And dependencies merged 143 times and dissolved 22 times, indicating that they have little integrity as political units. Overall, the waiting time until some form of instability was three times as high for dependencies as it was for sovereign states.

A comparison of theoretical predictions and empirical findings

The pattern of great stability for sovereign polities and great instability elsewhere meshes with institutional arguments. There are few constraints on the policies that Western states may legitimately employ toward polities understood to be outside Western state society. Given the large military advantage favoring Western states, unrecognized polities are likely to be subordinated as their dependencies. As dependencies, the instability of these polities remains high. But when non-European polities become recognized members of the Western state system (as most do), rates of instability drop dramatically.

The external support afforded to sovereign members of the system is perhaps best illustrated by the independence of the Belgian Congo.³¹ Katanga's attempted secession from the newly proclaimed Republic of the Congo can be understood in terms of ethnic divisions, economic differentials, and the internal disorder following Belgium's sudden departure. The new state was held together, in large part, by the arrival of a United Nations contingent, which removed Belgian soldiers and mercenaries from Katanga and forced Tshombe into submission. This none too subtle prevention of secession was grounded in the new state's status as a sovereign member of the international community. It was on the basis of this recognition that the Republic of the Congo could appeal to the United Nations for support. Although Katanga was supported in many Western circles, it was never formally recognized.

How plausibly can realism account for these general patterns? It is important to note at the outset that a bare-bones realist perspective need not

31. My discussion of Katanga's attempted secession is based on the following accounts: Catherine Hoskyns, *The Congo Since Independence* (London: Oxford University Press, 1965); and Jules Gerard-Libois, *Katanga Secession* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1966).

explain all of the movements enumerated in Figure 1. Specifically, it need not account for the merger of dependencies or the achievement of sovereignty through metropolitan incorporation, since these events have no impact on the international balance of power. But it should be able to account for transitions that directly affect the way in which global resources are politically distributed—that is, the colonization of formerly unrecognized polities and sovereign states, the transfer of dependencies, the independence of formerly dependent polities, and the merger and dissolution of sovereign states. To explain the frequencies of these different kinds of movement, a realist account needs to identify conditions that render spurious the apparent effects of international status. In this regard, two arguments might be advanced.

One realist explanation for the instability of non-European polities would be that European states regarded their acquisition or loss as having a trivial impact on the global balance of power. It may be contended that the location of non-European polities made them less strategically important, in general, than comparably sized polities situated within Europe itself. Further, the ease with which most non-European polities were subordinated may be taken as evidence of their military insignificance.

Nevertheless, the argument is hard to maintain. It fails to explain why, if Europe's colonies were unimportant, colonization engaged so much attention or even occurred at all. Theorists of the world system and students of Western economic growth have often contended that imperialism fueled the economic development of Europe. It is not necessary to enter into a debate over how critical colonial raw materials and markets were to see that they were far from trivial. Major European conflicts, most notably the Seven Years War, were struggles for the control of non-European territory. Overseas empires were seen as essential to both the economic well-being and the political stature of the European powers. The fact that the Netherlands, France, and Portugal were willing to use military force to oppose the independence of their chief colonies suggests their importance.

According to a second realist argument, the instability of the nonsovereign polities is explicable as a complicated balancing act, where the acquisitions of one European power are matched by the acquisitions of other powers. Imperialism was indeed a competitive process in which one state's expansion tended to produce reactive imperialism on the part of other states. This is vividly evident in the "scramble for Africa."

But the results of the competition do not support the argument. During the sixteenth, seventeenth, and eighteenth centuries, Spain and Portugal reaped the richest rewards of political expansion. After that time, imperialism benefited Great Britain far more than any other European state. By 1900, the British Empire embraced about 325 million people and was the most important Western empire in terms of military potential and economic ex-

change with the mother country.³² The second largest empire, the French, embraced approximately 50 million people and generated foreign trade amounting to about one-ninth of that of the British dependencies.³³ Other major powers, such as Germany, Austria-Hungary, Italy, and the United States, had colonies of little economic and military value. Imperialism was thus not egalitarian; the European balance of power was importantly altered by the possession of colonial dependencies.

In fact, direct competition between Western states generally led to recognition of the disputed polity, rather than to balancing annexation. This occurred where several European powers sought to develop trading privileges (as in China) and where expanding colonial empires collided (for example, in Afghanistan and Siam). In each case, economic spheres of influence replaced the relations of political dependence being created elsewhere.³⁴

Of course, there may be alternative realist arguments that make better sense of the fact that unrecognized, dependent, and sovereign polities have such different frequencies of instability. But one fundamental difficulty for alternative explanations may be noted: the fact that we are comparing the *same* polities at different stages in Western political expansion. For example, to make the argument that significance for the global balance of power is the operative principle involved in stability, one would have to show that non-Western polities became much more important to the global balance of power over time. But it can be as easily maintained that non-European polities have become much less important in geopolitical terms; a balanced view might hold that their significance has not changed fundamentally. In general, the fact that we are comparing the same polities, before and after recognition, makes it difficult to see what arguments could demonstrate that the linkage between stability and international status is spurious.

Conclusions

By formalizing the notions of sovereign, dependent, and unrecognized status within a political community, this article has examined some of the basic patterns involved in Western political expansion. The empirical materials discussed here are not news: the frequency of colonization, decolonization, and movement within dependent status is well known, as is the rarity with which sovereign states are colonized, merge with each other, or dissolve. But these regularities are less often treated as relevant to an understanding of the Western state system.

32. J. Scott Keltie, ed., *The Statesman's Year-Book, 1900* (London: Macmillan, 1900).

33. *Ibid.*

34. See William L. Langer, *The Diplomacy of Imperialism* (New York: Knopf, 1935).

I would argue that the pattern of Western political expansion cannot be plausibly explained without taking its institutional underpinnings into account. In particular, it seems useful to emphasize the cultural constitution of the Western state system as a community of mutual recognition. By taking sovereignty seriously, one can develop a theoretical understanding of why European states seem to systematically treat unrecognized, dependent, and sovereign polities differently. By contrast, realist arguments seem ill-equipped to explain variations across categories of international status.

The stability associated with recognized sovereignty is particularly consequential for the realist position. High levels of stability make it hard to argue that international relations are inherently conflictual because states can potentially "destroy or enslave" one another. If states hardly ever do so, an emphasis on the rewards rather than the risks of cooperation becomes more sensible. Further, low rates of annexation render unpersuasive the notion that selection pressures enforce state rationality. This makes it necessary for realists to argue that states are inherently rational, rather than having rationality thrust upon them.

I do not wish to argue that realist explanations of order should be rejected out of hand. I would contend, however, that it is necessary to embed notions of state rationality and conflict within models of the institutional structure of the state system. The refinement of realist and institutional approaches in isolation seems condemned to diminishing returns; what is needed is the more difficult theoretical task of combining their insights. While this article does not offer a framework for accomplishing this, it has sought to indicate the need for one.

In this regard, empirical study of the stability of European polities would be particularly useful. European history is dotted with enough mergers, dissolutions, and annexations that one would not find the non-European pattern of virtually complete stability for recognized polities.³⁵ On the other hand, much instability occurred in the context of national unification (often involving the amalgamation of tiny semisovereign polities) and the breakup of multinational empires, rather than annexation and secession. And over time, the danger of universal empire has become more remote. An analysis of stability and instability within Europe itself would thus provide a rich opportunity to weave realist and institutional arguments together and add substantially to our understanding of the Western state system.

35. According to Tilly, there were on the order of five hundred European polities in the sixteenth century, while there are about twenty-five today. See Charles Tilly, "Reflections on the History of European State-Making," in Charles Tilly, ed., *The Formation of National States in Western Europe* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1975), p. 15.

The East European countries and GATT: the role of realism, mercantilism, and regime theory in explaining East-West trade negotiations Leah Haus

One of the major changes currently occurring in the international political economy is the reintegration of the East European countries. The importance of this topic increased dramatically in the late 1980s, when the explosion of events in Eastern Europe placed the subject of East-West economic reintegration firmly on the agenda. The new developments clearly call for an attempt to come to grips with the question of how reintegration will proceed in the post-Cold War world. In addressing that question, this article focuses on the subject of the participation of East European countries in the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT).

GATT was established in 1947 as part of the broader U.S. design to reconstruct a multilateral system of world trade.¹ The agreement incorporated the main principles that were to guide trade relations in the postwar era. Its norms and rules were geared toward ensuring the maintenance of an open, nondiscriminatory market in which government intervention is minimized and tariffs and prices guide the decisions of private firms. Participation by East European countries with nonmarket economies poses an anomaly for GATT, since the functioning of their economic systems directly contradicts the market orientation of the neoliberal trade institution. Tariffs and prices have little or no influence over decision making in planned economic systems in which decisions about resource allocation, imports, and exports are administratively determined by the government.

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1. For a detailed explanation of the negotiations regarding the reconstruction of the postwar international economic order, see the classic work by Richard N. Gardner, *Sterling-Dollar Diplomacy in Current Perspective: The Origins and the Prospects of Our International Economic Order*, expanded ed. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1980).