

**Systems Thinking and Culture in International Relations:  
A Foreign Policy Approach**

By

**Roozbeh Safdari Ghandehari**

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**uOttawa**

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## Abstract

The mainstream theories of international relations (IR) can be categorized under two approaches: Cultural and Systems. Although the two approaches appear to be at the opposite ends of the spectrum, this paper aims to evaluate both approaches, and to provide a systemic approach to foreign policy: The systems thinking and culture (STC).

STC attempts to incorporate domestic culture, a unit-level force, in analyzing states' behavior in the international system, while still preserving the structure, as emphasized in systemic theories like neorealism. The STC model shows how the domestic culture as a unit-level force, and the structure as a systems-level force, can shape a state's behavior and policies in the international political system.

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## 1. Introduction

Most theories of international relations (IR) try to explain how the international system functions. As shown in figure 1 below, the mainstream theories of international relations (IR) can be categorized under two broad categories: Cultural and Systems.

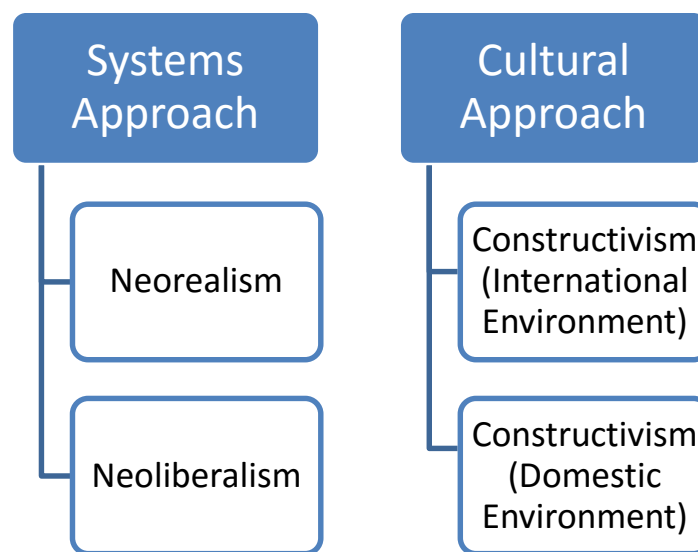


Figure 1

In practice, both systemic and cultural theories have analyzed different types of political events. For instance, systemic theories like neorealism dominated the field's discourse during the Cold War, but they could not explain the end of the war (Mathias & Cederman, 2010). On the other hand, cultural theories like constructivism have the advantage of explaining events such as the end of the Cold War, "which was precipitated largely by domestic changes within the

Soviet Union" (Mathias & Cederman, 2010). This paper aims to evaluate both systemic and cultural theories, and also to propose a single synthetic approach, the systems thinking and culture, based on a simple model, where the domestic culture as a unit-level force and the structure as a systems-level force can shape a state's behavior and policies in the international political system.

## 2. Methodology

### 2.1. Categorizing Theories of International Politics

Theories of international politics can be categorized as "systemic" and "reductionist" (Waltz, *Theory of International Politics*, 1979). Reductionist theories of international politics "concentrate causes at the individual or national level" while theories that "conceive of causes operating at the international level as well are systemic" (Waltz, *Theory of International Politics*, 1979, p. 18). Any systemic approach or theory of international politics needs to explain "how the systems level, or structure, is distinct from the level of interacting units" (Waltz, *Theory of International Politics*, 1979, p. 40). A theory or approach in IR could be considered systemic "when it makes the international system the dependent variable, [or] when it makes the international system the independent variable" (Wendt, 1999, p. 11). The main objective of a systemic theory in the "dependent variable" sense, is to explain "aggregate patterns of behavior" at the systems level, and the objective of a systemic theory in the "independent variable" sense is to emphasize "the casual powers of the structure of the international system in explaining state behavior" (Wendt, 1999, p. 11).

## 2.2. Theories of Foreign Policy

Unlike theories of international politics, theories of foreign policy aim to explain the behavior of individual states (Wendt, 1999). Because both their independent and especially their dependent variables operate at the national level, they are considered reductionist. Any reductionist theory of foreign policy refers to the properties and interactions of "agents" (states), in order to explain the behavior of individual states (Wendt, 1999). It could also refer to the properties and interactions of the sub-units within those states. For instance, a theory that tries to explain state behavior based on the psychology of its individual leaders would also be a reductionist approach, even though technically speaking the psychology of the state's leader is not the property of the state but of sub-units within each state. It is important to note the distinction between theories of international politics and foreign policy. Theories of international politics take systemic features and outcomes as their dependent variable (i.e. what they try to explain). Theories of international politics could be either systemic (independent variables are systemic) or reductionist (independent variables are features/interactions of the state or of sub-state units). Theories of foreign policy, by contrast, take state behavior (i.e. foreign policy) as their dependent variable. In theory, they too could be

either systemic or reductionist—in other words, theories of international politics and theories of foreign policy only specify the “dependent” variable, whereas reductionist and systemic theories specify the “independent” variables.

### 2.3. Systems Thinking and Culture Approach

At the national level, approaches or theories of foreign policy do not necessarily have to be reductionist. Any theory or approach in foreign policy that refers to the “structure of the international system” to explain the behavior of individual states shall be considered “systemic” (Wendt, 1999). In the systems thinking and culture approach (STC), presented in this paper, it is shown how the domestic culture as a unit-level force and the structure as a systems-level force can shape a state's behavior and policies in the international system. In practice, STC draws on both systemic and reductionist independent variables but because of its high emphasis on the structure, it can be considered a “systemic” approach to foreign policy.

STC presents an abstract model of foreign policy that draws on but attempts to go beyond Kenneth Waltz's systems-level neorealist theory of international politics. It is very largely a theoretical and analytical exercise; though the thesis briefly discusses a handful of empirical examples, these are only very

basic plausibility probes. There is no detailed empirical study, and the examples provided are merely illustrations of the generic plausibility of the approach. The schools of thoughts that are directly analyzed in the thesis are realism, liberalism, institutionalism, and Constructivism. Also the English school is covered indirectly as it emphasizes the centrality of international society and social meanings to the study of world politics (Slaughter, 2015). Since the main goal of this thesis is to create a foreign policy approach that can be systematically connected with (or partially derived from, or at least consistent with) a theory of international politics, the purely unit-level theories are excluded.

### 3. Literature Review

#### 3.1. The Systems Approach

##### 3.1.1. Kaplan Models

One of the earliest attempts to introduce systemic theorizing in IR was provided by the 1957 publication of Morton Kaplan's *System and Process in International Politics*. The book presents six models of "international systems" (Kaplan, 1957). Kaplan's models show how the structure affects interactions of units in each of the six international systems. Any systemic theory or approach in IR consists of a "structure" and of "interacting units" (Waltz, *Reductionist and Systemic Theories*, 1986) "A structure is defined by the arrangement of its parts" (Waltz, *Political Structures*, 1986). These six models illustrate different structures of the international system.

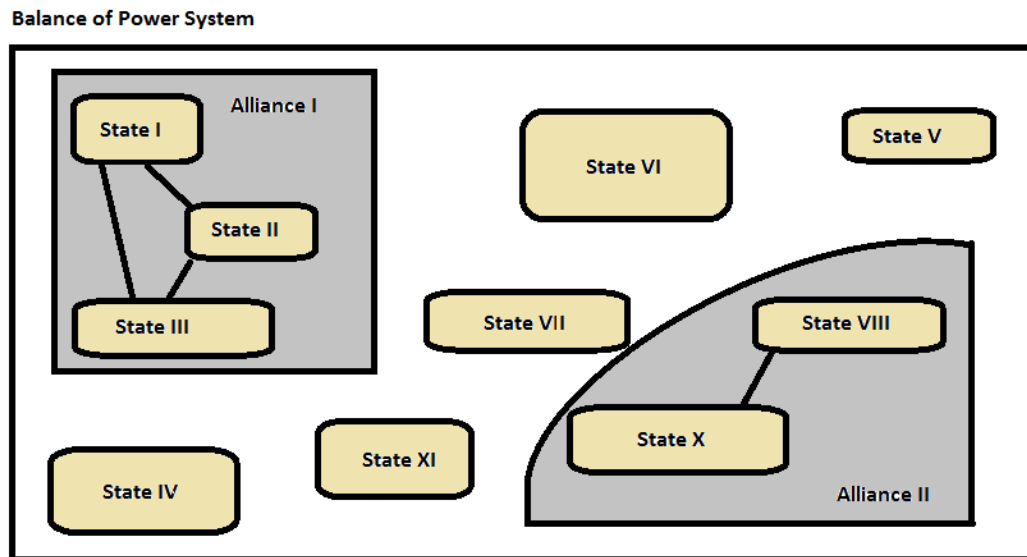


Figure 2

As shown in figure 2, the first model is the "balance of power" system which is characterized by a small group of "national actors" (Boulding, 1958). Kaplan introduces six rules to be followed in the balance of power system:

1. Act to increase capabilities, but negotiate rather than fight.
2. Fight rather than pass up an opportunity to increase capabilities.
3. Stop fighting rather than eliminate an essential national actor.
4. Act to oppose any coalition or single actor which tends to assume a position of predominance with respect to the rest of the system.
5. Act to constrain actors who subscribe to supranational organizing principles.
6. Permit defeated or constrained essential actors to re-enter the system as acceptable role partners or act to bring some previously inessential

actor within the essential actor classification. Treat all essential actors as acceptable role partners (as cited in McGowan & Rood, 1975).

In the balance of power system, the states are not authoritatively regulated by a political subsystem, "such as a fully effective United Nations" (McGowan & Rood, 1975). "Kaplan argues that the six essential rules of the balance of power system operate to produce fluid alliances that *regulate* the system and prevent any one power or coalition of powers from achieving hegemony" (McGowan & Rood, 1975). By looking at the six essential rules, it is evident that states are assumed rational, and that they form alliances solely based on the current state's "interests" and "threats", not based on "ideologies and cultural affinities" (McGowan & Rood, 1975).

Loose Bipolar System

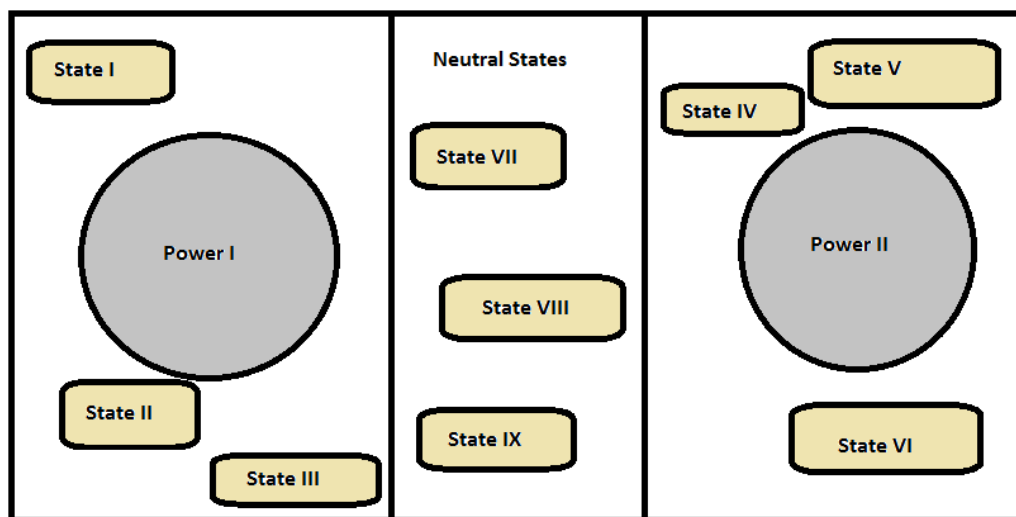


Figure 3

The second model, figure 3, is the "loose bipolar system", which comprises a system with two major powers, and in which the other actors tend to group around the two powers, or remain neutral (Boulding, 1958).

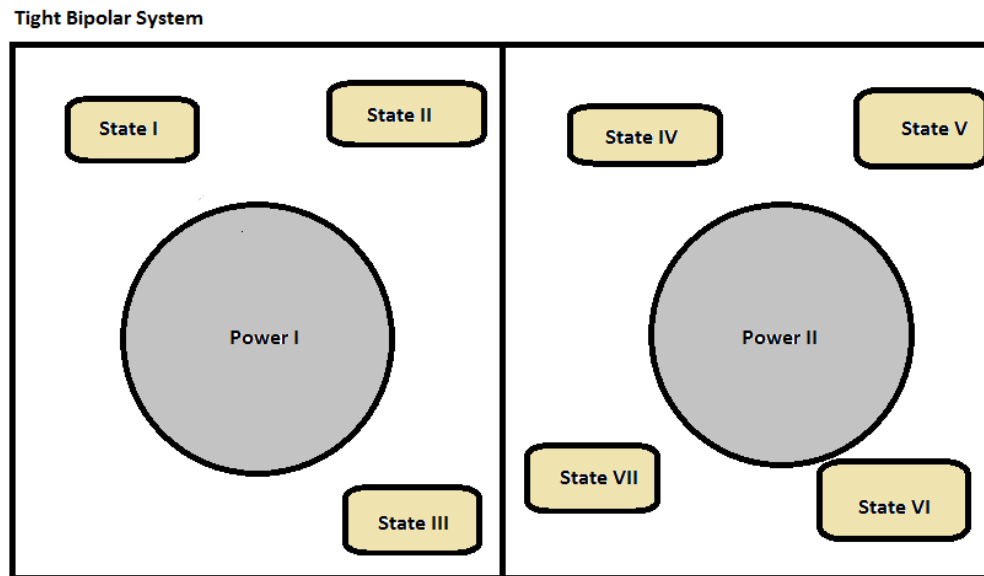


Figure 4

The third model, figure 4, is the "tight bipolar system" where the system is reduced to two blocs (Boulding, 1958). This model is the extreme version of the loose bipolar system, where there are no neutral actors.

Universal International System

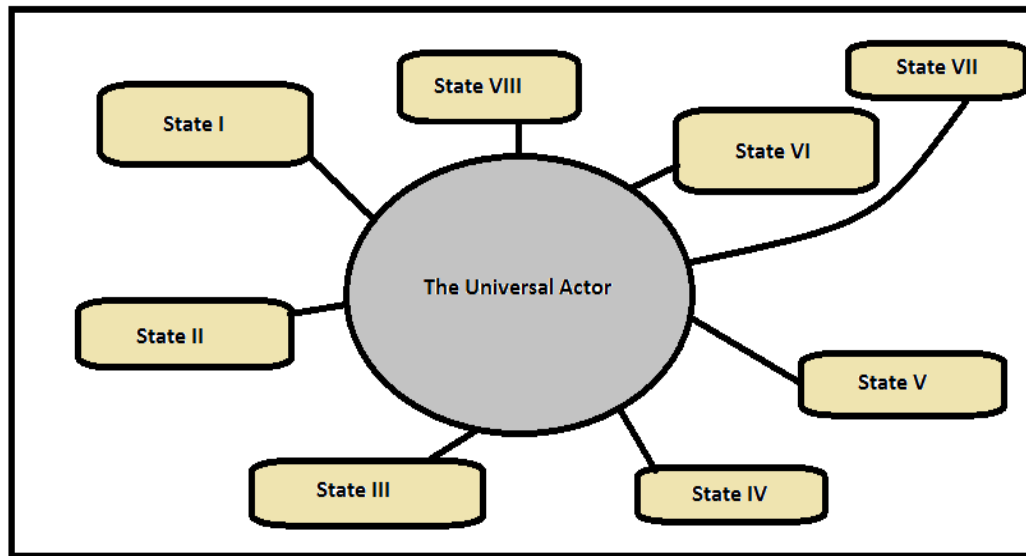


Figure 5

The fourth model, figure 5, is the "universal international system", in which the "Universal Actor" is powerful enough to prevent war among the national actors, but the national actors will still try to maximize their power, in order to be in a better position within the framework of the universal actor (Boulding, 1958).

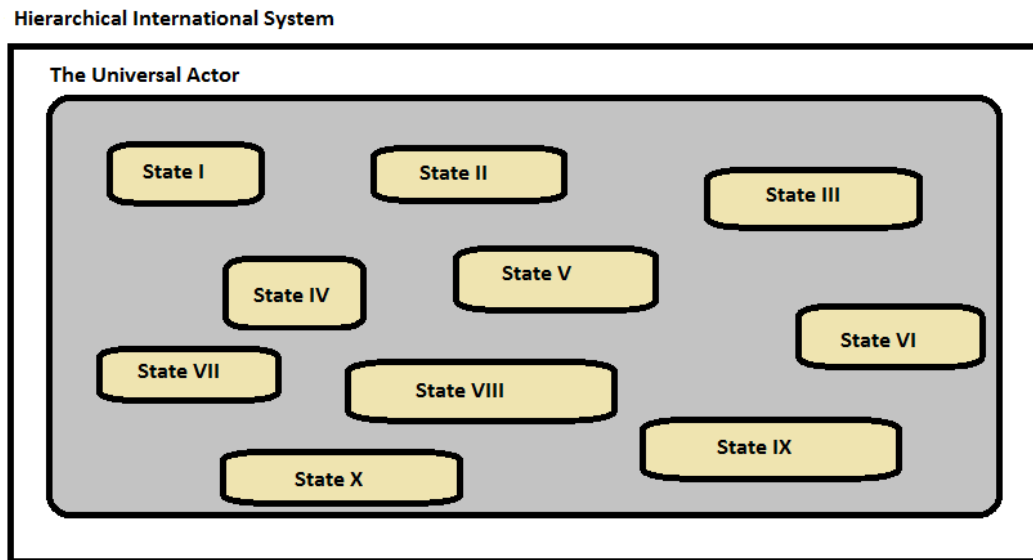


Figure 6

The fifth model, figure 6, is "the hierarchical international system", in which the Universal Actor virtually absorbs all the others, and only one nation is left in the world" (Boulding, 1958).

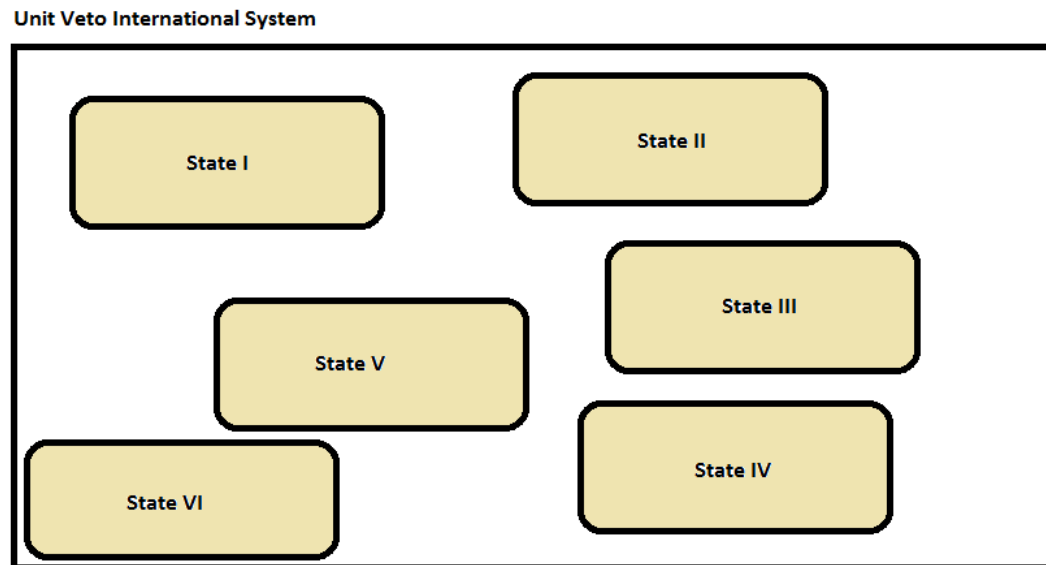


Figure 7

The sixth model, figure 7, is the "unit veto international system", where each state can secure itself, without forming alliances; there is "mutually assured destruction", and every state has to give consent (Carson & Flood, 1998).

### 3.1.2. Neorealism

One of the most influential approaches to systemic theorizing in IR was provided by the 1979 publication of *Theory of International Politics* by Kenneth Waltz. Waltz's theory, neorealism, proposes a systemic perspective based on the notion of "anarchy" in "international life", as opposed to the "hierarchy of domestic politics" (Mathias & Cederman, 2010). "Anarchy" and "hierarchy" are both types of structure. Anarchy is the structure of the international system, whereas hierarchy is the structure of the domestic political system. According

to Waltz, each structure produces quite different systemic outcomes within their respective spheres. Neorealism considers "anarchy", "material forces", and the "distribution of relative power", as the main determinants of international politics (Copeland, 2000). States are considered to be the units of the international system, and they behave according to their place in the system. Because of the existence of anarchy, states have to deal with uncertainty; therefore, they need to gain relative power through alliances, military expansion, economic capabilities, and other material forces. The theory is "fundamentally structural", and Waltz emphasizes "systemic constraints" rather than domestic factors, such as culture (Mathias & Cederman, 2010):

The structure of a system acts as a constraining and disposing force, and because it does so systems theories explain and predict continuity within a system. A systems theory shows why changes at the unit level produce less change of outcomes than one would expect in the absence of systemic constraints (Waltz, *Theory of International Politics*, 1979, p. 69).

Definitions of structure have to be free from the "characteristics of units" as structures concentrate on "how units relate to one another" (Waltz, *Political Structures*, 1986). The typical understanding of "relations" is a "dynamic" one;

it focuses on the actions of and interactions between the units. But Waltz argues that relations between units in this sense are unit-level characteristics: thus the behavior of states, and even the interactions between states, are considered characteristics of the units themselves. The meaning of "relations" that Waltz wants to focus on is "positional": how are the units positioned relative to each other, or how are they "arranged" in relation to one another. Since "distribution of capabilities across units" is a structural concept, the ability of states to achieve their objectives is constrained by the structure. Consequently, units of the greatest capabilities play the major roles in the international system. Given a distribution of capabilities, states in an "anarchic condition" produce an expected range of outcomes, which explains the continuity within a system (Waltz, *Theory of International Politics*, 1979, p. 70).

### 3.1.3. Liberalism & Neoliberalism

The systems and culture approach (STC) presented in this paper is not directly inspired by Liberalism and neoliberalism; however, since they can be considered systems-level challenges to neorealism, it is important to include them. Moreover, in the coming sections, it is explained why STC does not take advantage of liberalism and neoliberalism, particularly the role of institutions.

Keohane and Nye's liberalism argues how regimes and international institutions, as non-state actors, can affect states' interactions by facilitating cooperation. Neoliberalism suggests that if institutions provide information which reduces uncertainty, they can influence actors' behavior in the absence of changes in the structure (Keohane, *Theory of World Politics: Structural Realism and Beyond*, 1986).

The 1977 publication of *Power and Interdependence: World Politics in Transition* by Robert O. Keohane and Joseph S. Nye, along with the 1984 publication of *After Hegemony: Cooperation and Discord in the World Political Economy* by Robert O. Keohane are among the leading texts in liberalism and neoliberalism, respectively.

In *Power and Interdependence*, four models are presented to explain regimes, "that is, the rules of the game governing decision making and operations in international relations on particular problems..." (Cowhey, 1978). In the "economics process" model, maximizing economic gains are central to states' interests and they are willing to shift their policies to achieve these gains (Cowhey, 1978). In sharp contrast with neorealism, the "economic process" model "ignores questions about the international distribution of power" (Keohane & Nye, *Power and Interdependence: World Politics in Transition*,

1977, p. 129). In the "structural" model, designed to reflect realist arguments, the regime's functions and contents are shaped by the "international distribution of power", so the dominant powers play major roles (Cowhey, 1978). The "structural" model is similar to neorealism's definitions of structure and the distribution of capabilities. In the "issue structural" model, the regimes are determined not only by the international distribution of power, but also by the issue-specific power distribution (Cowhey, 1978). This model is not as "powerful" as the structural model, as it requires information on how "power is distributed by issue area" (Keohane & Nye, *Power and Interdependence: World Politics in Transition*, 1977, p. 51). Moreover, "structures never tell us all that we want to know. Instead they tell us a small number of big and important things" (Waltz, *A Response to My Critics*, 1986, p. 329). Finally, in the "international organization" model transnational networks and particular bargaining tactics dominate regime operations" (Cowhey, 1978). This model assumes a type of world political structure where "a set of networks, norms, and institutions, once established," will stand in the way of the actors, even the ones with the greatest capabilities (Keohane & Nye, *Power and Interdependence: World Politics in Transition*, 1977, p. 55). Keohane and Nye state that the rise of "complex interdependence" increases the importance of

the "issue structural" and the "international organization" models (Cowhey, 1978). Complex interdependence takes place when states do not prioritize their goals in a fixed way, meaning they do not treat the different issues in international politics as having a clear and fixed hierarchy of importance (with military security always on top), the "use of force" is not worth considering, and actors have multiple "channels of contacts" (Cowhey, 1978).

Keohane's *After Hegemony* shows the link between "self-interest and cooperation" by arguing that cooperation is a "self-interested response" to disagreement where there are mutual interests (Buzan, 1985). The essence of the argument is that cooperation can occur even in the absence of one party being willing to "sacrifice" its interests or being forced to cooperate by a powerful hegemon (Buzan, 1985). The book focuses on the role that international institutions can play in promoting cooperation between states even under the hostile conditions of anarchy in the international system.

Similar to neorealism, neoliberalism is a "state-centric" theory; however, it places some emphasis on "non-state actors" (Dunne, Kurki, & Smith, *International Relations Theories 3e - Chapter 6*, 2013). The neoliberal theory focuses on how "cooperation" can be achieved among states and other actors. Neoliberals assume (like economists) that states seek absolute gains—to

maximize their own personal utility. Neorealists assume instead that states seek relative gains. Instead of cooperating whenever this maximizes their gains relative to the costs, according to neorealists, states will only cooperate when they gain relatively more than their cooperating partner. It does not mean that states will only cooperate when they make more absolute gains than their partner, it means that they will only cooperate when their gains improve (or maintain) their relative position vis-a-vis their partner. That means that a state will only cooperate with a prospective partner if the distribution of gains expected from their cooperation is in a ratio equal to or greater than the existing distribution of power between the two states. This of course makes cooperation extremely difficult, given that in any situation, gains are distributed in a zero-sum fashion. So neorealists generally argue that cooperation only occurs when the expected distribution of gains between two partners roughly reflects the existing distribution of power between them. Neoliberals think that the uncertainty caused by anarchy makes cooperation difficult, but not impossible. As long as there are effective mechanisms in place to reduce uncertainty to acceptable levels, fears that your partner will cheat on their obligations and exploit you can be diminished, and cooperation can occur. Neoliberals believe that international institutions are particularly

effective mechanisms for reducing uncertainty and transaction costs that inhibit cooperation. In other words, as long as effective, formal institutions are present, they can help states overcome the negative effects of anarchy and achieve cooperation in situations of mutual benefit. "International institutions" and "regimes" are the means to facilitate cooperation, although due to the obstacles presented by anarchy, cooperation *per se* is difficult to achieve (Dunne, Kurki, & Smith, *International Relations Theories 3e - Chapter 6*, 2013). But neorealists say that states worry about the high risks associated with getting exploited or cheated on—risks for their security and their very survival. For neoliberals, the main challenges of designing institutions are "bargaining, defection, and autonomy" (Dunne, Kurki, & Smith, *International Relations Theories 3e - Chapter 6*, 2013). It is challenging to design institutions with the collective approval of nation-states, to deal with the problem of defection by members, and to have institutions that have internationally-agreed autonomy.

#### **3.1.4. Systems and Foreign Policy Analysis**

Systemic theorists in IR, like Waltz, emphasize that their theories are merely of international politics and not of foreign policy (Waltz, *Anarchic Orders and Balances of Power*, 1986). It is the foreign policy analysts' job to make the

connection between the two of them (Hudson, Chapter Six: The Levels of National Attributes and International System: Effects on Foreign Policy, 2014). At the system-level the distribution of capabilities plays the most important role in international politics. Therefore, there are two steps to analyze the effects of the structure on the foreign policy choices of states: First, an examination of each state's place in the system. Second, an examination of the nature of the system.

The overall level of power relative to other states in the system determines the place in the system. In turn, a state's level of power relative to other states in the system is determined by a variety of national attributes, among which the following seven factors are the most important: "size", "natural resources", "geography", "demographics", "political system", "military capabilities", and "economic capabilities" (Hudson, Chapter Six: The Levels of National Attributes and International System: Effects on Foreign Policy, 2014). As these 7 factors are the prime determinants of state power, they have considerable influence on state behavior. Also it is important to note that these stated factors—and even the capabilities of a given state—cannot tell us about the distribution of capabilities, nor about that state's place in the system, because the distribution of capabilities and a state's place in the

system are inherently relational (and systemic) concepts: they require comparison between the capabilities of more than one state. That is a distinct point from the point that none of these stated factors alone can tell us the overall capabilities of a given state, because the capabilities (or power) of a given state is an aggregate indicator which combines all of these factors together. For example, Canada and the China are both large states but their differences in military capabilities, demographics, and economic capabilities have caused China to be considered relatively more powerful despite the fact that it is smaller than Canada.

Size can affect a state's foreign policy choice. For example, when a small state has a large state as its neighbor, alignment with the large state tends to be an attractive foreign policy choice for the small state (Hudson, Chapter Six: The Levels of National Attributes and International System: Effects on Foreign Policy, 2014). Though if it did the opposite—align against the large state—that too could be considered neorealist “systemic” behavior: balancing rather than bandwagoning behavior.

“ Natural resources, or the lack thereof, may also play a role in foreign policy” (Hudson, Chapter Six: The Levels of National Attributes and International System: Effects on Foreign Policy, 2014, p. 163). For instance, the extensive oil

reserves in Saudi Arabia shape its foreign policy and its relations with both the states that import its oil in large volumes, and also with other major oil producers like Russia.

Geography can also affect foreign policy (Hudson, Chapter Six: The Levels of National Attributes and International System: Effects on Foreign Policy, 2014). "Access to ports, waterways, and strategically important land features is an aspect of geography with great import for foreign affairs" (Hudson, Chapter Six: The Levels of National Attributes and International System: Effects on Foreign Policy, 2014, p. 165). Landlocked states need their neighbor states for access to the sea, therefore their foreign policy choices take into account the necessity to have warm relations with the neighbor states that have coastlines. (Hudson, Chapter Six: The Levels of National Attributes and International System: Effects on Foreign Policy, 2014).

"The characteristics of a nation's population may also have foreign policy repercussions" (Hudson, Chapter Six: The Levels of National Attributes and International System: Effects on Foreign Policy, 2014, p. 166). Countries with very high population growth face challenges to meet the needs of their citizens while states with negative population growth face different challenges, for

example, to maintain economic growth. In both cases the impact of demographics on foreign policy is inevitable.

The type of political system in a state can have impact on its foreign policy (Hudson, Chapter Six: The Levels of National Attributes and International System: Effects on Foreign Policy, 2014). For example, the foreign policy of a state with a democratic political system is affected by the democratic process while that is not the case for a state with nondemocratic political system.

Military capabilities have been one of the oldest national attributes that affect states' foreign policy. Superior military capabilities affect states' foreign policy by allowing to "press for one's own advantage more aggressively than otherwise" (Hudson, Chapter Six: The Levels of National Attributes and International System: Effects on Foreign Policy, 2014).

"Dependence" is the key factor in explaining how economic capabilities can shape foreign policy choices of states (Hudson, Chapter Six: The Levels of National Attributes and International System: Effects on Foreign Policy, 2014). For instance, when a state's economy depends on importing or exporting certain goods or services, the foreign policy of that state and its relations with other states tend to reflect this economic dependence.

Beside the nation-states' attributes that have already been stated, the nature of the system also plays an important role in affecting states' foreign policies. As mentioned in earlier sections, one of the first attempts to analyze the nature of the system was provided by Kaplan's six international systems models. In the "balance of power" system he introduced six rules that show how the nature of the system can impact states' foreign policy. The "neorealist notion of anarchy" is also a system-level attribute that refers to the nature of the system (Hudson, Chapter Six: The Levels of National Attributes and International System: Effects on Foreign Policy, 2014). For instance, anarchy makes cooperation hard to achieve and therefore states tend to always maintain offensive military capabilities. It is an example of how structure shapes states' foreign policy choices. The concept of "cultures of anarchy" introduced by Alexander Wendt, which was mentioned in earlier sections, also tries to show how cultural factors determine the nature of the international system and consequently can affect states' foreign policies.

However, there are limitations in analyzing foreign policies solely based on each state's place in the system and the nature of the system. Cultural factors such as ideology can cause some states, to at least some degree, to disregard their places in the system and the nature of the system when making foreign policy

choices. The systems thinking and culture approach (STC) advanced in this paper, tries to overcome this limitation by incorporating domestic cultural factors in explaining states' decision-making. Identifying these domestic cultural factors can also help us address any cultural factors at the international level, like those mentioned by Wendt, that affect states' foreign policies. For any international cultural factors have to first be internalized by states before they can have an impact on their foreign policies. Therefore, according to STC, it is sufficient to take into account the domestic culture and that automatically captures any effective cultural factors in the international system.

## 3.2. The Cultural Approach

### 3.2.1. Constructivism

One of the earliest attempts to introduce the cultural approach in IR was through the 1989 publication of *World of Our Making: Rules and Rule in Social Theory and International Relations* by Nicholas Onuf; the book introduced constructivism in IR. Onuf argues that the existence of society and people is the result of the "construction" of each by the other (Groom, 1991). The book is highly theoretical with a strong focus on "social theory" (Carty, 1992). "Constructivism is based on the general notion that international relations are socially constructed" and it rejects the materialist perspective of state-centric theories like neorealism. (Dunne, Kurki, & Smith, *International Relations Theories 3e - Chapter 10*, 2013). Notions like "states", "international regimes", "alliances", and "hegemons" do not exist to be discovered, they are "social phenomena" that are human constructions (Dunne, Kurki, & Smith, *International Relations Theories 3e - Chapter 10*, 2013). Constructivism does not undermine the role of structures. It argues that identities are part of the structure of the international system. Constructivists define structure quite broadly, to include the social, and not just the material, structure of the international system. Thus, identities, norms, values, ideas, etc. are all part of the social

structure of the international system at any given time, and they all contribute to affect how actors interpret the significance of the material aspects of structure—the distribution of capabilities/power.

### 3.2.1.1. Culture and International Environment

The 1999 publication of *Social Theory of International Politics* by Alexander Wendt is one of the most influential contributions of constructivism in IR. The book elaborates on “social theory”, and also applies “insights from social theory to international politics” (Makinda, 2000). According to Wendt, social structures are made up of both material elements, such as the international distribution of military power, and social elements, as in shared ideas. However, he argues that normally, the kinds of effects the material elements of structure have on states’ behavior depend on the social elements. So, the material elements of structure do have important effects, but which effects those are in different times and places depend on the social elements within the social structure—i.e. which norms, identities, values, etc. are dominant at that time and place. By including norms, identities, values, etc. in the definition of structure, Wendt adds too many intangible variables and therefore systemic analysis of states’ behavior becomes difficult. A typical solution for that problem among neorealists and other systemic theorists has been to ignore the

intangible cultural variables. However, the systems thinking and culture approach (STC) tries to solve this problem differently. As Wendt states, the social factors can alter the effects of material elements of structure. But it is not necessary to include the social factors in the definition of structure. States internalize some of these social factors and as STC shows, at certain times these internalized social or cultural factors along with other domestic cultural factors can determine a state's behavior in ways that are not consistent with the state's position in the power structure. Therefore, structure can still be defined materialistically like in neorealism. By taking into account the domestic culture of states in explaining states' behavior, the effects of cultural factors that Wendt emphasized are considered and that is without adding too many intangible variables to the definition of the structure.

Wendt rejects the neorealist logic of anarchy by introducing three "cultures of anarchy" representing the degree of cooperation in the international environment: "Hobbesian, Lockean, Kantian" (Copeland, 2000). Each of these three "cultures of anarchy" represents a different structure of the international system with different effects on systemic outcomes. In a Hobbesian culture, which dominated international politics until the "seventeenth century", states perceive each other as "enemies", and "violence"

is used as a basic "tool for survival" (Copeland, 2000). In a Lockean culture, which emerged after the "Treaty of Westphalia in 1648", states cast each other as "rivals" and may use "violence" but not to the point where they try to "eliminate" each other (Copeland, 2000). In a Kantian culture, which has characterized the recent relations between democracies, states view each other as "friends", they "do not use force to settle disputes, and work as a team against security threats" (Copeland, 2000).

The "behavioral norms" of the three cultures are "shared" by the states and can be "internalized" to three degrees (Copeland, 2000). In the first degree, every state complies because of the "threat of punishment founded on the relative superiority of other actors" (Copeland, 2000). In the second degree, states do not view the norm as "legitimate" but they believe it is in their "self-interest" to follow it (Copeland, 2000). In the third degree, the norm is "internalized" as "legitimate" and forms the states' identities (Copeland, 2000).

As shown in figure 8 below, the "degree of cooperation" and "degrees of internalization" create nine modes in international politics.

	Degree of Cooperation		
	1st-degree Internalized Hobbesian Culture	1st-degree Internalized Lockean Culture	1st-degree Internalized Kantian Culture
Degree of Internalization	2nd-degree Internalized Hobbesian Culture	2nd-degree Internalized Lockean Culture	2nd-degree Internalized Kantian Culture
	3rd-degree Internalized Hobbesian Culture	3rd-degree Internalized Lockean Culture	3rd-degree Internalized Kantian Culture

Figure 8

Despite being a cultural approach, Wendt's analysis can be perceived to be systemic. Wendt's argument about the role of states' interactions is that these interactions produce the social structure of the system, but it is the impact of the structure in turn on those behaviors that makes Wendt's theory a systemic one. However, it cannot be considered a systems thinking and culture approach, because the domestic cultural factors are not emphasized, and therefore, the role of the domestic environment is disregarded. STC, as an approach, combines the domestic cultural factors and the international systemic factors as the independent variables explaining individual states' foreign policies. Being systemic, Wendt's approach seems to be a constructivist response to neorealism, but, similar to neorealism, it does not take into account domestic

cultural factors. Instead, Wendt defines structure in terms of both "material conditions" and "ideas", as opposed to neorealism's materialistic definition of structure based on distribution of capabilities (Wendt, 1999).

### 3.2.1.2. Culture and the Domestic Environment

Published in 1996, *The Culture of National Security: Norms and Identity in World Politics*, edited by Peter J. Katzenstein, is one of the prominent constructivist texts in security studies that emphasizes the domestic environment along with the international environment. Katzenstein rejects systemic theorizing in IR, as the internal social factors of states are not sufficiently taken into account (Fietta). The cost of high level systemic theorizing in IR has been ignoring, partially or totally, the domestic environment and its social processes. That is why the systems thinking and culture, despite being a high level systemic approach, takes the domestic environment into account to analyze actors' behavior. The importance of the state's domestic environment is not properly captured in the major mainstream IR theories; as Robert Keohane states: "Without a theory of interests, which requires analysis of domestic politics, no theory of international relations can be fully adequate. . . . More research will have to be undertaken at the level of

the state, rather than the international system" (as cited by Katzenstein, 1996, p. 14).

There is no doubt that states pursue their interests; however, interests are not entities. According to Katzenstein, what results in recognition of interests by states is "the process of social interaction" (Katzenstein, 1996). *The Culture of National Security* has five main lines of argument: First, the norms in the international environment influence states' interests, and therefore their policies (Jepperson, Katzenstein, & Wendt, 1996). Second, the norms in both domestic and international environments impact states' "identities" (Jepperson, Katzenstein, & Wendt, 1996). The problem with the first two lines of argument is underestimating how the structure in terms of the material distribution of capabilities can limit the influence of both domestic and international norms. The pressure of certain international norms is not the same on all states; the relatively powerful states can afford to resist more than other states and even become immune. Third, identity alterations of states affect their interests and policies (Jepperson, Katzenstein, & Wendt, 1996). Fourth, "configurations of state identity affect interstate normative structures, such as regimes or security communities" (Jepperson, Katzenstein, & Wendt, 1996, p. 62). This line of argument refers to cases where actors seek to use "interstate normative

structures" to "institutionalize" their identities (Jepperson, Katzenstein, & Wendt, 1996). The third and fourth lines of argument fail to mention that identity "alterations" and "configurations" can be direct effects of changes in the distribution of capabilities, structure, and not necessarily of "interstate normative structure". Fifth, "State policies both reproduce and reconstruct cultural and institutional structure" (Jepperson, Katzenstein, & Wendt, 1996, p. 63). This means that the cultural and institutional structures per se cannot be treated as entities and their existence depends on the actors' interactions (Jepperson, Katzenstein, & Wendt, 1996). The fifth line of argument again lacks the reference to the states' relative capabilities and the place in the system which directly affect the states policies and consequently the "cultural and institutional structure".

### 3.2.2. Culture and Foreign Policy Analysis

Since the end of Cold War the importance of culture has dramatically increased, and the classic "international balance-of-power considerations in foreign policymaking" have lost their dominance of the field. (Hudson, Chapter Four: Culture and National Identity, 2014). As already mentioned, Wendt and Katzenstein are two notable constructivists who focus on cultural factors in domestic and international environments. The "vagueness of culture's

boundaries" makes it difficult for foreign policy analysts to incorporate culture into analyzing foreign policy decision-making (Hudson, Chapter Four: Culture and National Identity, 2014). By looking at the following five typical definitions of culture in the theoretical literature, it becomes evident why the study of how culture affects foreign policy choice is one of the least developed aspects of foreign policy analysis (Hudson, Chapter Four: Culture and National Identity, 2014).

The definition by LeVine: I use the term culture to mean an organized body of rules concerning the ways in which individuals in a population should communicate with another, think about themselves and their environments, and behave toward one another and towards objects in their environments. (as cited in Hudson, Chapter Four: Culture and National Identity, 2014, p. 120)

Kluckhohn's definition: Culture consists in patterns ways of thinking, feeling and reaction, acquired and transmitted mainly by symbols, constituting the distinctive achievements of human groups, including their embodiments in artifacts; the essential core of culture consists of traditional (i.e., historically derived and selected) ideas and especially

their attached values. (as cited in Hudson, Chapter Four: Culture and National Identity, 2014, pp. 120-121)

The definition by Triandis: Culture is a set of human-made objective and subjective elements that in the past have increased the probability of survival and resulted in satisfaction for the participants in an ecological niche, and thus became shared among those who could communicate with each other because they had a common language and they lived in the same time and place. (as cited in Hudson, Chapter Four: Culture and National Identity, 2014, p. 121)

The definition by d'Andrade: Culture [consists] of learned systems of meaning, communicated by means of natural language and other symbol systems, having representational, directive, and affective functions, and capable of creating cultural entities and particular sense of reality. Through these systems of meaning, groups of people adapt to their environment and structure interpersonal activities. (as cited in Hudson, Chapter Four: Culture and National Identity, 2014, p. 121)

The definition by Geertz: [Culture is] an historically transmitted pattern of meanings embodied in symbols, a system of inherited conceptions expressed in symbolic form by means of which men communicate,

perpetuate, and develop their knowledge about and attitudes towards life. (as cited in Hudson, Chapter Four: Culture and National Identity, 2014, p. 121)

From the definitions of culture stated above, one can detect the following variables: "rules", "thoughts", "feelings", "symbols", "achievements", "values", "traditions", "historically derived ideas", "languages", "meanings", "attitudes", etc. Therefore, in order to incorporate culture into analyzing foreign policy decision-making, the main concern is not about which cultural variables to "include" but actually which ones to "exclude" (Hudson, Chapter Four: Culture and National Identity, 2014). While the limitations of dealing with culture in foreign policy analysis needs to be considered, because of its importance in shaping states' foreign policies it cannot be neglected. The STC approach in this paper tries to combine the domestic cultural factors and the international systemic factors to analyze states' foreign policies. In this approach, culture is taken into account without the need to include or exclude specific cultural variables. The emphasis is on the domestic, and not the international, cultural factors. Therefore, inclusion or exclusion of cultural variables can be done in cultural studies of particular nations and not in a general foreign policy approach like STC.

## 4. Systems Thinking and Culture Approach (STC)

### 4.1. Rationale

#### 4.1.1. Systems

Crucial to any systems approach is "the belief that structures are powerful and that the characteristics of the elements matter less than their place in the system" (Jervis, Chapter One: Introduction, 1997). The "properties" of any system are different from those of its "parts", and the "whole" is not simply the "sum" of the parts (Jervis, Chapter One: Introduction, 1997). In the Cultural Approach section, it was already explained why the social and cultural factors do not have to be included in the definition of structure. Therefore, in any systems approach where there is a balance of power, "alliances often derive their influence less from norms", or values, than from systemic constraints that alter "states' concerns" (Jervis, Chapter One: Introduction, 1997). The nation states' behavior is mostly affected by the environment (the international system), but as shown in STC, it can also be directly affected by social factors, like the culture within each state. The social factors can also indirectly affect states' behavior since it is influenced by "their beliefs about how the system operates" (Jervis, Chapter One: Introduction, 1997). The environment itself is not totally static; states' behavior can change the

environment, "producing powerful dynamics" in the form of new systemic constraints (Jervis, Chapter Two: System Effects, 1997).

#### 4.1.1.1. Structures

In order to distinguish between "systems-level" and "unit-level" forces, a structure needs to be defined independently of the "characteristics", the "interactions", and the "behavior" of the units (Waltz, Political Structures, 1986). This distinction derives from the essence of structure as a "component that makes it possible to think of the system as a whole" (Waltz, Political Structures, 1986), and also as a "generative notion"; "the structure of a system is generated by the interactions of its principal parts" (Waltz, Reductionist and Systemic Theories, 1986). The term "principal parts" refers to the units of greatest capabilities in a system. Although capability is an attribute of unit, "distribution of capabilities across units" is a "system-wide" concept (Waltz, Political Structures, 1986). Therefore, considering structure as a "generative notion" is not in contrast with defining structures independently of units' attributes. Structure is the one characteristic that is unique to the system, and it cannot be reduced to the characteristics of the units. The structure ignores factors such as the domestic culture of the units and how units interact with each other. Instead, it emphasizes the way units are "arranged or

positioned" in the system (Waltz, *Political Structures*, 1986). Moreover, only units of the "greatest capabilities" can generate the structure of the international system by their interactions (Waltz, *Reductionist and Systemic Theories*, 1986). Structure allows us to use the term "like units" and explains why different units can produce an "expected range of outcomes" (Waltz, *Reductionist and Systemic Theories*, 1986). Although structures are "dynamic" and not necessarily "static", a "structural change" that alters the expected range of outcomes and changes the arrangement is a "revolution" (Waltz, *Reductionist and Systemic Theories*, 1986). A structure is dynamic in the sense that it can influence the "behavior" and "interactions" of the actors (Waltz, *Reductionist and Systemic Theories*, 1986).

Neoliberalism argues that in the absence of changes in the structure, institutions can influence actors' behavior by providing information that reduces uncertainty (Keohane, *Theory of World Politics: Structural Realism and Beyond*, 1986). However, information does not necessarily have to be correct or complete, so that institutions may provide information in a way that reflects and advances the interests of the most powerful states. In addition, the influence of institutions on actors' behavior is controlled by the structure, as the actors of greatest capabilities can amplify the institutional design

problems of "bargaining, defection, and autonomy" (Dunne, Kurki, & Smith, *International Relations Theories 3e - Chapter 6*, 2013; Dunne, Kurki, & Smith, *International Relations Theories 3e - Chapter 4*, 2013). Consequently, institutions are not immune to structural forces. Institutional design is often carried out by the more powerful states, and is often structured in a way that reflects the international distribution of power (i.e. the structure of the international system). Such structuring of institutions may exacerbate any issues of bargaining, defection, and autonomy. For instance, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank follow a weighted voting system based on the member states' economic power (Gianaris, 1990). Similarly, in the United Nations Security Council (UNSC), the five permanent member states with veto power have the greatest capabilities according to the power structure (UN Web Services Section, 2015).

#### 4.1.2. Culture

Culture is a broad term, and can be defined in many ways. In variants of constructivism, culture is generally defined as "shared values and norms within institutions or other social structures" (Dunne, Kurki, & Smith, *International Relations Theories 3e - Chapter 10*, 2013). Contrary to systems approaches like neorealism, the cultural approaches insist on social construction. For instance,

the importance of "military power" and "trade relations" comes from their social meanings that are "constructed from a complex and specific mix of history, ideas, norms and beliefs" (Slaughter, 2015). Wendt's concept of "cultures of anarchy" presents the international environment socially constructed by "shared ideas" (Copeland, 2000). Katzenstein's emphasis on "norms" and "identities", presented in the *Culture of National Security's* five main lines of argument, indicates the effects of social construction on an actor's domestic environment, as well as on the international environment.

The systems thinking and culture approach (STC) is a systemic perspective of international relations where the whole is not simply the sum of the socially constructed units. In fact, the domestic environment of each unit is socially constructed, but the international system does not have to be. This distinction allows us to view culture and structure independently. It was already explained in the Cultural Approach section that in order to take into account social factors such as norms, identities, values, etc. in the international environment, it is not necessary to include these factors in the definition of structure. This is because states can internalize the cultural factors in the international environment. By merely considering the domestic social factors in explaining states' behavior, the effects of norms and values in the international

environment are already taken into account. According to *STC*, the domestic environments of the units are constructed by the social and ideational factors within each unit. They may have been either originated from the international environment through internalization, or from the domestic environment through social process. However, the international environment is dominated by the structure, materially defined.

In *STC*, the term "culture" does not refer to the shared values and norms among the actors in the international system, as stated in Wendt's "cultures of anarchy". Instead, it refers strictly to the social and ideational factors, such as norms, identities, ideologies, etc. within each unit or state in a state-centric structure. There are three reasons for this distinction: First, *STC* is a systemic perspective consisting of structure and units, where the structure needs to be defined independently of the "characteristics", the "interactions", and the "behavior" of the units (Waltz, *Political Structures*, 1986). Consequently, Wendt's concept of "cultures of anarchy" contradicts the essence of the materialist definition of structure as it includes the social factors in the concept of structure. Second, "cultures of anarchy" refers to three separate cultures each obtaining among different sets of states, as opposed to a structure that defined in terms of the way all states are

positioned in the system, based on the distribution of capabilities. STC is trying to advance a general approach that explains states' behavior in international politics and that can be applied equally and universally to all states in all systems. Third, the shared ideas among the states are often the consequences of the structure and these ideas cannot replace structure. Those cultural factors in the international environment that could affect the material elements of the structure need to first get internalized by the states and therefore can be considered as part of the domestic culture. For instance, Wendt's Kantian culture, which characterizes the recent relations among democracies, can itself be understood as the byproduct of the structure. The democracies, first and foremost, are strategic allies who originally united against a common enemy in the form of the Warsaw Pact. In the process, they bandwagoned with the U.S., which, being the most powerful state among them, plays the leading role in the alliance of democracies. Similar to the process of natural selection in biology whereby "organisms better adapted to their environment tend to survive and produce more offspring" (Oxford Dictionaries, 2015), the shared behavioral norms among certain states have been adapted to the international structure. Therefore, culture in STC is only considered a unit-level force and not a systems-level force.

## 4.2. STC Perspective

The systems thinking and culture approach (STC) attempts to incorporate culture, a unit-level force, in analyzing states' behavior in international politics, while still preserving the structure, as emphasized in systemic theories like neorealism. The following three figures demonstrate non-systemic, systemic, and STC-driven thinking of international politics.<sup>1</sup> In all three figures,  $N_i$  represents a state internally and culturally generating its external effects (its outward behavior) (Waltz, *Political Structures*, 1986).  $X_i$  represents a state acting externally (acting on the international stage) and interacting with other states (Waltz, *Political Structures*, 1986). The arrows indicate effects. In the three figures, the arrows show how states, their domestic environments, the international environment, and the structure affect each other.

Figure 9, below, shows a non-systemic perspective, that the domestic culture of the actors generates their behavior and interactions in the international environment. It is evident that no "systemic force or factor" is present (Waltz, *Political Structures*, 1986). The three unidirectional arrows from  $N_i$  to  $X_i$  demonstrate the effects of the internal and cultural environment of the

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<sup>1</sup> The three figures are re-drawn and modified versions of the figures 4.1. and 4.2. in (Waltz, *Political Structures*, 1986, pp. 95-96). The interpretations of the figures are also different from the source.

state on its external behavior. The bidirectional arrows show how the external behavior of each state is affected by interacting with other states.

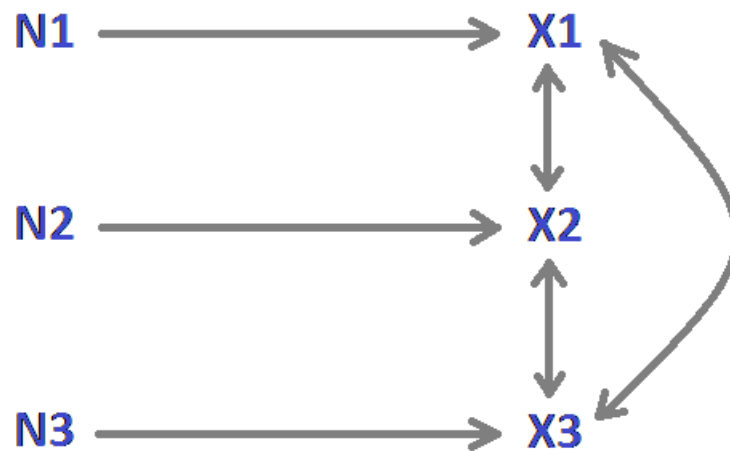


Figure 9

Figure 10 shows a systemic perspective where the circle represents the structure of the international political system. Since states "constrain" and "limit" each other, structure as a concept makes it possible to understand the constraining effects and "how structures and units interact and affect each other" (Waltz, *Political Structures*, 1986). The arrows indicate that the structure affects both the interactions of states and their internal environments. The way this model represents structure, the possibility that

the domestic cultural factors of a state can directly affect its external behavior is ruled out.

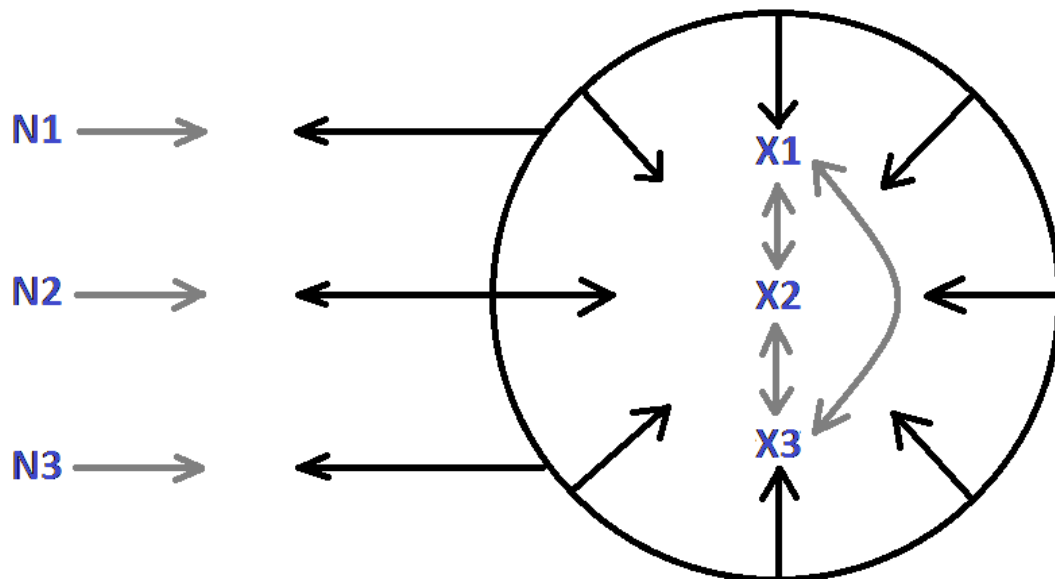


Figure 10

In figure 11, below, the perspective based on STC is demonstrated. In addition to the effects of the structure, the internal culture of the states can also directly affect the states' external behavior. This does not necessarily undermine the importance of structure. It only explains the case where a certain behavior of a state, under certain conditions, can be directly generated by its internal culture, and not entirely by the structure. However, in any systems thinking of international politics, structure remains the main determinant.

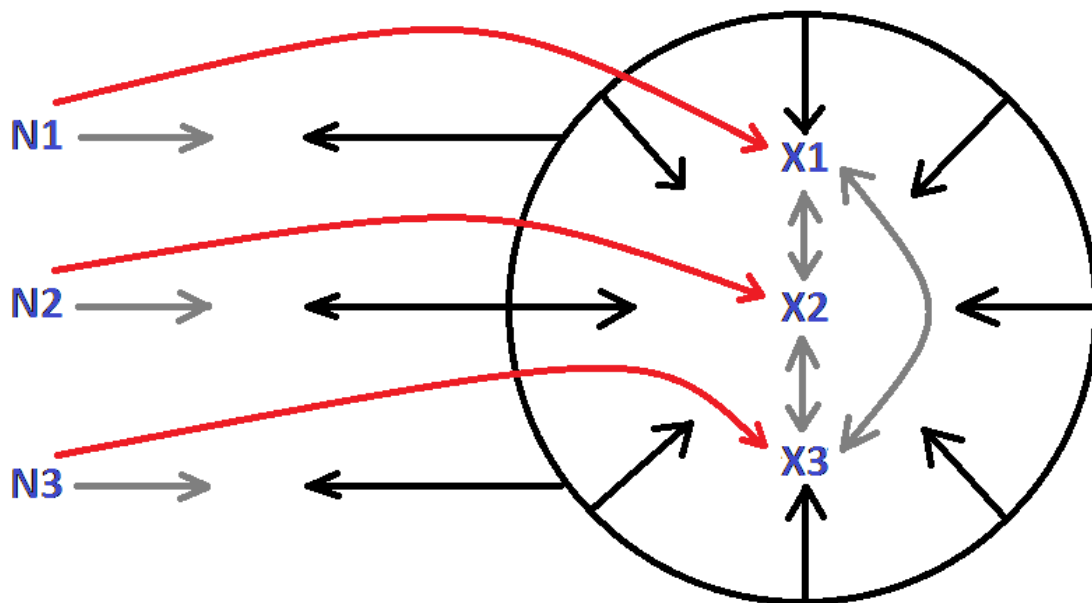


Figure 11

### 4.3. Systems Thinking and Culture Model

#### 4.3.1. Concept

The systems thinking and culture (STC) model shows how the domestic culture as a unit-level force and the structure as a systems-level force can shape a state's behavior and policies in the international political system.

Given that the STC approach tries to incorporate both systemic and domestic-cultural independent variables, one of the challenges STC faces is to identify the conditions under which each set of variables is causally active or under which it dominates the influence of the other set. STC identifies actors' time

horizons as a key condition affecting when and how systemic vs. cultural variables influence state behavior. Thus the concepts of "the short run" and "the long run" are introduced into the model. However, it is important to note that "the short run" and "the long run" are not interpreted as objectively defined temporal periods but in terms of actors' subjective expectations about the future and about their future prospects. The model provides an analytical framework for predicting how and when the actors' behavior and policies become systems-oriented or culture-oriented. Systems-oriented behaviors are those which are determined by the actor's place in the system. In other words, a systems-oriented behavior is one which rationally responds to objective constraints imposed by the distribution of capabilities. Culture-oriented policies refer to those behaviors which are not consistent with an actor's place in the system. As mentioned in earlier sections, the combinations of these seven factors are among the most important attributes that can determine capabilities of each state and consequently its place in the system: "size", "natural resources", "geography", "demographics", "political system", "military capabilities", and "economics capabilities" (Hudson, Chapter Six: The Levels of National Attributes and International System: Effects on Foreign Policy, 2014). To clarify, these seven factors are not variables in the STC approach to

explain behavior. They merely affect capabilities while the STC approach deals with the distribution of capabilities as a whole.

The systems-oriented and culture-oriented behaviors can be classified in relation to the assumption of actor rationality. Systems-oriented behavior can be best operationalized in terms of utility-maximization in relation to the objective conditions reflected by the distribution of capabilities. This way it can be said that any behavior that did not maximize states' utility vis-a-vis their position in the international distribution of capabilities could be said to be culture-oriented. Obviously, any state behavior that did not maximize that state's utility at all would automatically be culture-oriented as well. But this definition also leaves room for state actions that might maximize "other" forms of utility, but not utility defined in terms of that state's position in the structure of the system. Even though they would be rational relative to some goals, these alternative forms of utility-maximization would not be "systemically" rational, and would still qualify as culture-oriented under this definition. Moreover, "states are rational actors operating with imperfect information: they sometimes make serious mistakes" (Dunne, Kurki, & Smith, *International Relations Theories 3e - Chapter 4*, 2013). Therefore, systemic behavior can only diverge from objective systemic conditions when there are

failures of information; any other "mistakes" or deviations from systemic paths are therefore culture-oriented and not systemic behavior. To determine whether a given "systemically irrational" act was a case of culture-oriented behavior or a case of systems-oriented information failure, the subsequent and precedent behaviors need to be analyzed. If a state continues to pursue/has been pursuing policies that may worsen its place in the system, it can be concluded that its behavior is culture-oriented and not the case of information failure. In other words, it is assumed that long-term non-systemic behavior is unlikely to be evidence of information failure, because over the long term, a wide range of information about the nature of the system would have presumably accumulated. One can make a "perceptual" mistake once or twice, but is unlikely to do so over and over again; such repeated "errors" suggest other motivations.

It is worth noting that in any behavior, whether it is culture-oriented or systems-oriented, there are cultural elements that cause that behavior, so in that sense both systemic and non-systemic behaviors are culture-oriented! But in STC, for the sake of foreign policy analysis and the difficulty of dealing with culture in IR, which was explained earlier, cultural elements are intentionally ignored in systems-oriented behavior. This is because there are tangible and

universal materialistic/structural factors that dictate an expected range of behavior to any state that behaves systemically. Then in that case, it is not necessary to focus on cultural factors, which after all are typically different for every state. However, when states do not behave systemically, it leaves no choice for foreign policy analysts but to do a country-specific cultural study and find the cultural root causes of certain behavior of a state. For that reason, non-systemic behavior can be considered "culture-oriented" and in order to find out the expected range of behavior foreign policy analysts need to study the specific domestic cultural factors of the state in question. The STC, which is an analytical framework, not a full-blown theory, only goes as far as providing the conditions under which we do or do not need a domestic-level study. For STC to become a precise theory—a task not undertaken in this thesis—, it also has to explain how country-specific studies should be carried out in order to analyze culture-oriented behaviors.

At the unit level, there is a tendency to add variables such as psychological characteristics of leaders, types of governments and political parties, domestic political institutions, etc., to account for different effects (Waltz, *Reductionist and Systemic Theories*, 1986). However, in order to avoid the "infinite proliferation of variables" (Waltz, *Reductionist and Systemic*

Theories, 1986, p. 52) it is necessary to not introduce specific cultural variables. All that matters is to recognize that a set of ideas exists which causes an actor to behave in a manner inconsistent with its place in the system. These ideas could come from religious philosophy, the psychology of its leaders, norms, etc.; in a systemic approach in international relations, like STC, it does not matter where these ideas originated. In STC, culture is treated as a residual factor, and structure explains why states can produce an "expected range of outcomes" (Waltz, *Reductionist and Systemic Theories*, 1986). Therefore, any behaviors and policies that are not the consequences of structure are considered culture-oriented.

According to STC, the cultural elements in the international environment that can affect states' foreign policy behaviors must have been already internalized by the states. Therefore, in order to capture the effects of the relevant cultural factors in the international system, along with the cultural factors in the domestic environment, it is necessary to analyze and view the domestic environment as socially constructed. The opposing perspective is to consider the domestic environments of states as hierarchical (domestic material structure). The actors of the supposed domestic material structure could consist of the domestic interest groups, coalitions of firms and industries most

affected by free trade or protectionism, the interactions and interests of government agencies, or the conflict between domestic social classes, etc. One cannot simply ignore the effect of the domestic material structure on the state's foreign policy; however, the issue here is how to capture these effects in an approach, theory, or model.

If the domestic environment is viewed simply as hierarchical (i.e. as a purely material structure), then when a state behaves systemically irrationally, it means that, in sum, the actors in the domestic environment have influenced the state's foreign policy to become systemically irrational. However, the systemic considerations must continue to be important, no matter how big the differences in the interests of the various domestic actors. The structural forces of the international environment are felt not only by the state but also by the domestic actors, so it is natural that the domestic actors take the international structure into account when influencing the state's foreign policy, especially because the domestic actors' own security is tied to the security of the state as a whole. This perspective is against viewing states' foreign-policy behavior as purely an effect of domestic actors and a material domestic environment.

When states pursue systems oriented foreign policies, according to *STC*, there is no need to analyze the domestic environment. Hence the only situation where the analysis of domestic environment matters is when the states behaves systemically irrationally, i.e., culture oriented risky behavior. What account for the non-systemic foreign-policy preferences of domestic actors are the cultural factors (shared ideas, ideologies, etc.) affecting them, not unit-level materialist explanations of the domestic environment.

Here is an abstract example: There are four interest groups, A, B, C, and D in the domestic environment that influence the state to pursue non-systemic foreign policy behaviors. After in-depth domestic-level study of the cultural variables, the summary of results are as follows: Interest group A shares the idea of gaining security by resistance against great powers regardless of the costs for the state, interest group B's goal is to secure itself by gaining more resources relative to other interest groups within the state regardless of the consequences for the state, interest group C's ideology is making sure the state behaves in a fashion consistent with their interpretations of their religion, and interest group D's idea is to change public opinion about the current government in power. All four domestic actors are acting against the security interests of the state, because they are under the sway of cultural

variables/factors. By contrast, a materialist interpretation of the domestic structure and the foreign-policy preferences of domestic actors would not be able to account for foreign-policy pressures from domestic actors that diverged so strongly from the state's own (systemic) security interests. So it is an oversimplification to assume that the domestic balance of power among the actors in the hierarchy produces a state's foreign policy.

Furthermore, if STC were to adopt that approach (domestic hierarchy instead of socially constructed environment), considering the assumptions already made about the structure of the international system, social factors would be entirely ignored. Moreover, the cultural factors in the domestic environment, both the internally generated ones and those internalized from the international environment, directly affect how the supposed hierarchy in the domestic environment functions and affects a state's foreign policy behavior. It is also important to note that culture, ideas, and other aspects of "social structure" are "intersubjective", and not purely objective or subjective in nature, despite having certain objective and subjective aspects. The cultural factors partly exist in and have effects through the relations between actors, and as mentioned before, the cultural factors that affect foreign policy behaviors are already internalized in the domestic environment.

Since *STC* treats culture as a residual factor, it may be implied that in *STC* constructivism covers all beliefs and behaviors that are irrational from a systemic perspective. This is not the case. Systemic behavior also includes cultural dimensions/elements; however, since the outcome (foreign policy behavior) is more or less identical to what we would predict for "purely systemic" behavior, we can streamline the model and ignore cultural factors in those cases.

#### 4.3.2. Contribution

According to *STC*, the impact of the distribution of capabilities can vary according to the subjective perceptions of the states. Therefore, it may be perceived that *STC* is similar to neoclassical realism. Moreover, since the distribution of capabilities according to *STC* can generate states' behaviors, it may also be perceived that *STC* is not any different from neorealism.

In neoclassical realism, to understand the foreign choices of the states, the leaders' "perceptions" of relative material power matter more than the actual material capabilities (Rose, 1998). Neoclassical realists try to incorporate both "structural" and "domestic" variables to explain states' behaviors (Tang, 2009). The distribution of capabilities along with the decision makers' perceptions of relative capabilities are the structural and domestic variables, respectively.

However, instead of focusing on leaders' perceptions of relative material power, STC focuses on perceptions of the security of the states' core interests and of the longevity of this security. It is also important to note that "methodological" implications are different in each approach/theory. The STC's methodological argument is that if behavior is consistent with systemic behavior, then we can stop there; but if behavior is culture oriented, we need a detailed, in-depth domestic-level study of whatever cultural variables are present and relevant. That is clearly a different approach from neoclassical realism, which simply lays out what it considers to be the relevant variables to study at the outset, and sticks to those in all circumstances and at every stage of research. By contrast, which variables are relevant to a specific empirical study using STC can vary considerably depending on context, if we've determined that the foreign-policy behavior is culture oriented.

Although the core assumptions of neorealism may be shared by approaches or theories of foreign policy, neorealism is a theory of international politics and not of foreign policy as emphasized by Waltz (Waltz, *Anarchic Orders and Balances of Power*, 1986). Neorealists argue "how the mere existence of groups in anarchy can lead to powerful competitive pressure and war—regardless of what the internal politics of those groups might be like" (Wohlforth, 2012, p.

38). STC accepts neorealism's core claim that distribution of capabilities (structure of the international system) generates state behavior, and argues that this claim can generate a theory of foreign policy. However, it must be modified to explain important exceptions. These exceptions ("non-systemic" behaviors) can be explained in terms of the varied, specific content of the cultural policies adopted by states under those specific conditions. These cultural policies emanate from the domestic realm. The conditions generating the turn to domestic cultural policies are rooted in states' perceptions (expectations) of the external environment—not of the distribution of capabilities, but perceptions of subjective security and expectations of its durability. Thus STC can be considered a neorealist approach that incorporates domestic variables, culture and states' perceptions, all the while parsimoniously specifying the conditions under which traditional (systemic) neorealist accounts of states' foreign policy will and will not hold.

#### 4.3.3. Model

The analysis relies on two important factors: status and time. "Status" refers to the actor's current condition, which can be either stable or unstable. An actor is stable when it feels that its vital interests are secured. This can be the result of internal or external incidents, such as forming alliances or

defeating the main enemy. An actor goes through instability when it feels that its interests, including economic, political, cultural, and military, are widely threatened after internal or external incidents, and the threats are perceived to be capable of lowering the actor's place in the system. It is important to note that "place in the system" is an objective concept but the perception of states about potential changes to their place in the future is subjective. To avoid misunderstanding, it is important to state the difference between "status" and position (or place) of a state in the system. "Status" is both subjective and absolute. It is subjective because it is related to how a state feels about the security of its vital interests, and it is absolute as it is not related to other states' statuses. But position or place of a state in a system is both objective and relative. It is factual while being related to other states' positions. There is also a difference in content/focus as well. "Place in the system" has to do with relative levels of power, whereas "status" has to do with the security of one's core interests. A state could be very powerful relative to other states yet be very insecure about its core interests. On the other hand, a state could be at the bottom of the distribution of capabilities, and yet feel that its core interests are quite secure/unthreatened.

"Time" refers to the period in which the actor has been in a particular status, short run or long run. Unlike in economics, the short run/long run concept here is not in terms of how much time has actually expired, but instead it is according to the subjective experience of the actor itself—the sense of uncertainty or confidence that the actor has about its status in the immediate future. The short run is the period of time in which the actor is uncertain of the continuance of its current status, and expects a change of status at any moment. The long run is the period of time where the actor no longer expects an immediate change of status. Consequently, there are four time/status phases, as shown in figure 12, below.

		Status	
Time	Short-run Stability	Short-run Instability	
	Long-run Stability	Long-run Instability	

Figure 12

#### 4.3.3.1. Phase: Short run Stability

In the short run stability phase, figure 13, the actor's behavior becomes more culture-oriented and less systems-oriented. In this phase, the actor's interests are not threatened, but the stability is not expected to last. The current status is desirable. But, since it is not well-established yet, and expected to change soon regardless of systemically rational choice of policy, structure cannot be the main generator of the state's behavior. The term "well-established" does not simply refer to how much time has elapsed. Instead, it refers to a high level of perceived future stability. Since the status is not expected to last, the actor does not yet have the confidence to behave consistent within its current place and the current distribution of capabilities across the system—structure. Consequently, the actor tends to pursue culture-oriented policies.

## Short-run Stability

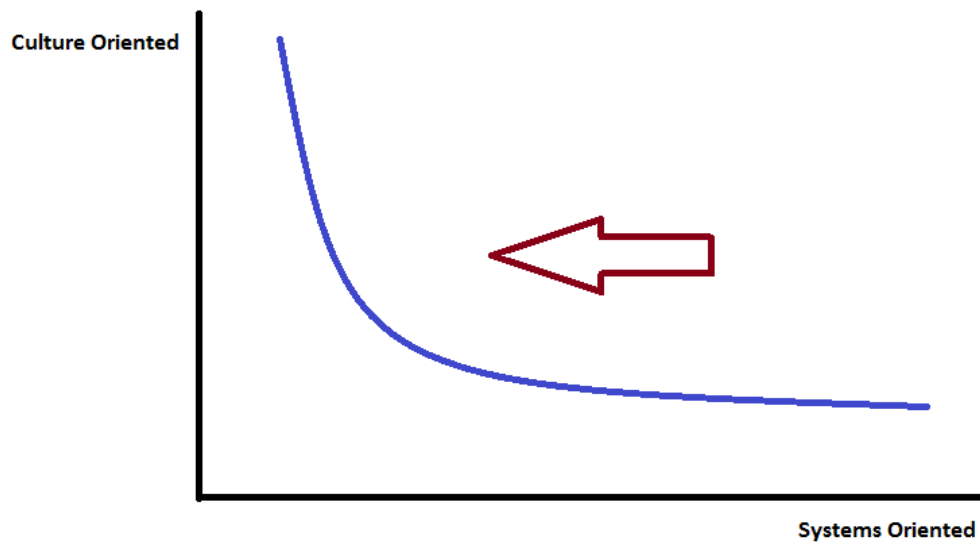


Figure 13

The short run stability phase is rare. A good example is Russia's behavior right after the Minsk Protocol. The Minsk Protocol, signed in September 2014, was meant to resolve the Ukrainian crisis, starting with a ceasefire (Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, 2014). The protocol improved Russia's relations with the Western powers and could reduce the threats against Russia's economic interests. However, Russia did not anticipate that adhering to the protocol would lead to lasting stability, considering the annexation of Crimea by Russia in March 2014 and the significant damage that was already made to Russia's relations with the Western powers because of it. Consequently, Russia pursued a culture-oriented policy and refused to adhere to the protocol, despite the fact that the policy threatened its economic

capabilities. In this situation, the cultural study of Russia can detect the domestic social factors that influence Russia's behavior.

Another example of short run stability is Israel, following the "Joint Plan of Action" agreement on November 24<sup>th</sup>, 2013 between Iran and the six world powers.<sup>2</sup> At the time, and for more than two years after the agreement, Iran was still under economic sanctions, and could not pose any (or additional) threats against Israel. But Israel's leadership under Benjamin Netanyahu anticipated that the agreement would eventually lead to a lifting of the economic sanctions against Iran, and the improvement of its economic capabilities will allow Iran to pose a threat against Israel in the future. Therefore, Israel went through a short run stability phase, and the state behaved not by rationally responding to the objective constraints imposed by the distribution of capabilities at the time (systems-oriented behavior), but by reacting based on its domestic cultural factors. The damage that was done by Israel's leadership to the relations with the state's most important ally, the U.S., (Milbank, 2015) is one of the culture-oriented policies of Israel. In order to find the cultural root causes of such non-systemic policy, it is necessary to have a cultural study of Israel.

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<sup>2</sup> See (European External Action Service, 2013)

#### 4.3.3.2. Phase: Long run Stability

In the long run stability phase, figure 14, the actor's behavior ultimately becomes less culture-oriented and stays at a high systemic level. The actor does not face major threats to its interests, and the stability is expected to last. In the long run stability phase, the actor's status is "well-established", and the actor is confident about its current desirable status; there are no threats that are perceived to be capable of lowering its place in the current distribution of capabilities. Therefore, the state's behavior is consistent with the structure, and systems-oriented policies are pursued.

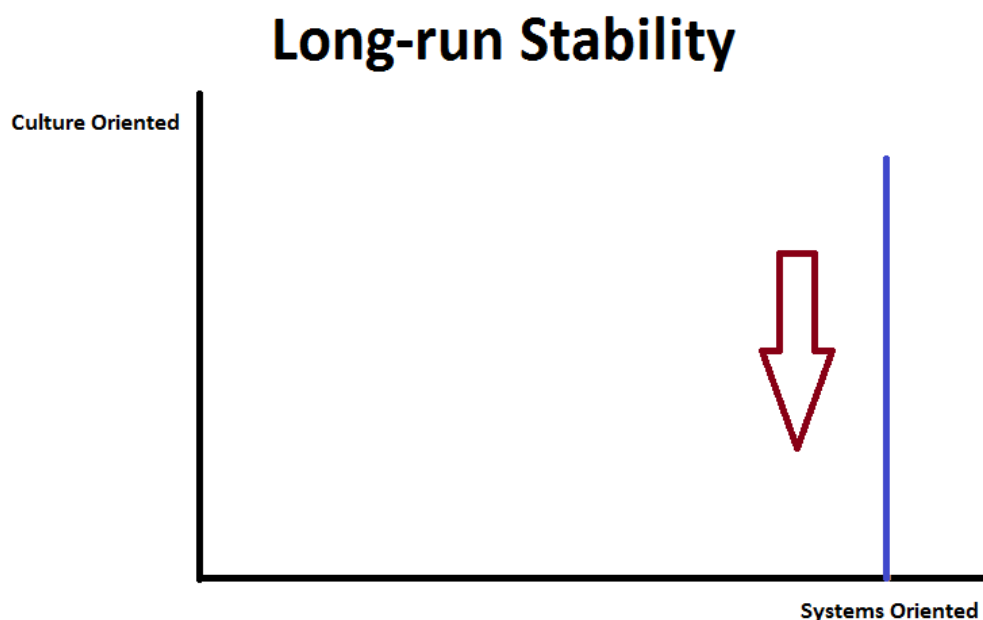


Figure 14

Today's *Germany* is an example of long run stability. The important role in EU, the active membership in NATO, and its cooperation with allies, are among the

systems-oriented policies of Germany that maintain the state's status. By rationally responding to objective constraints imposed by the distribution of capabilities, German policies have resulted in significant improvement of the economic capabilities of the state.

Post-Mao China is another example of long run stability. China's systems-oriented policies have resulted in a remarkable improvement of its economic capabilities, and even improvement of its overall place in the international system. Despite the ideological differences between China and other world powers, Chinese policies tend not to be culture-oriented. Instead, the state rationally responds to objective constraints imposed by the international power structure. Massive trade agreements with the West—which is not China's ideological partner—is an example of China's systems-oriented behavior.

Canada is another case of long run stability. Canada's core interests are secured, and the state is not facing any major threats. The state's behavior has been mostly systems-oriented. Maintaining its alliance with the United States can be considered the most important system-oriented behavior of Canada. Militarily, the alliance eliminates any potential threats from its northern neighbor, Russia. Economically, trading with the U.S. and having

access to the world's largest economy has a significant impact on Canada's economic capabilities.

There are two points to be considered for the long run stability phase: First, cooperation is not an intrinsically systems-oriented behavior. If cooperation negatively affects the capabilities, then it is not a systems-oriented form of behavior. Second, what matters the most is the overall position in the global distribution of capabilities, and not the state's position relative to the power of the state(s) it is interacting with in a given situation.

#### 4.3.3.3. Phase: Short run Instability

In the short run instability phase, figure 15, the actor's interests are threatened, and its current status is undesirable, but this current status is not yet "well-established", and the possibility of a change in status is expected by rationally responding to objective constraints imposed by the distribution of capabilities. The high level of uncertainty about the current undesirable status gives incentives to the "desperate" actor to pursue systems-oriented policies, in an effort to improve the security of its core interest as early as possible. Therefore, the culture-oriented policies give way to systems-oriented policies, in order to try to improve the potential place in the system. It is also possible for a state to expect a change in its status soon, for reasons that have nothing

to do with its own behavior. Even in that rare case, because the state foresees the desirable status (long-run stability) in the future, its behavior remains consistent with the structure.

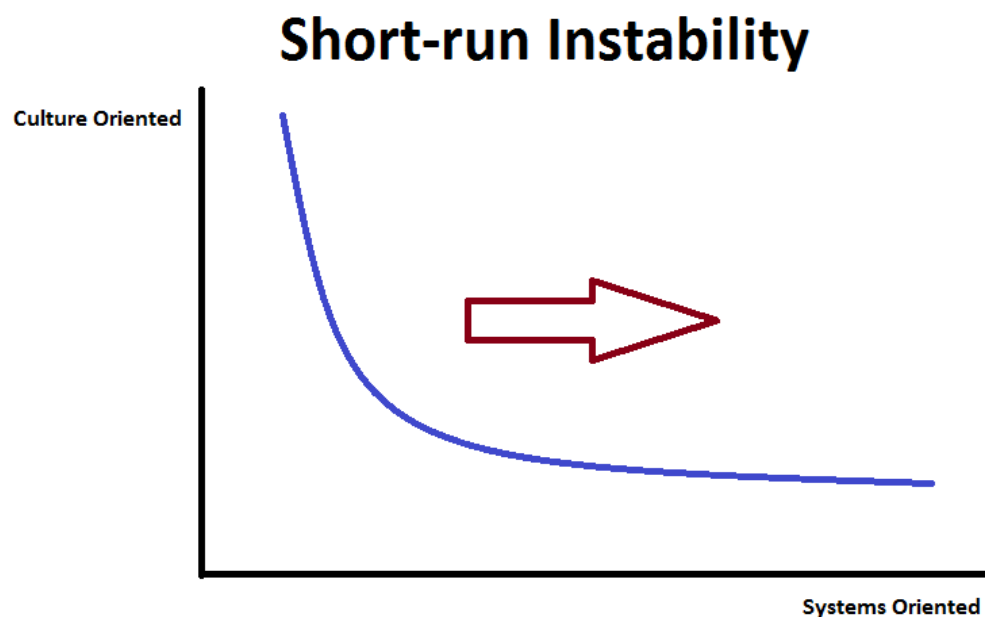


Figure 15

Iran's behavior shortly after the Rouhani's moderate government came to power in August 2013 is an example of short run instability phase. Iran's economic interests were threatened by the economic sanctions with regard to its nuclear program, imposed by great powers. In addition, the possibility of military strike against Iran's nuclear facilities by the United States and its allies further threatened Iran's interests. Iran, under a lot of pressure, was considered desperate but it perceived that the undesirable status could change at any time should the state pursue systemically rational policies.

Therefore, in order to eliminate the threats and improve its status, Iran chose to pursue systems-oriented policies, and to negotiate with the great powers to reach a "mutually-agreed long-term comprehensive solution that would ensure Iran's nuclear programme will be exclusively peaceful" (European External Action Service, 2013).

Ukraine's behavior following the annexation of Crimea by Russia is another case of short run instability. Obviously, Ukraine was facing a major threat, and became unstable at the time when Russia used its military force to take control of Crimea. However, Ukraine's leadership anticipated that by pursuing systemically rational policies, the major threat by Russia could be eliminated, or at least significantly reduced. Therefore, Ukraine went through short-run instability and pursued systems-oriented policies. Forming alliances with Western powers (EU and USA) is the main systems-oriented policy of Ukraine which eventually reduced the threats against the state.

#### 4.3.3.4. Phase: Long run Instability

In the long run instability phase, figure 16, the actor's interests are threatened, and its status is undesirable, but it is also "well-established", and this undesirable status is expected to last. Despite the expectation, an actor in the long run instability phase never gives up attempting to improve its status;

consequently, systems-oriented policies will always be pursued. On the other hand, since the state does not have the confidence that behaving consistent with the structure can improve its place in the system, the implementation of culture-oriented policies increases. The result is a mixture of highly systems-oriented and particularly culture-oriented policies.

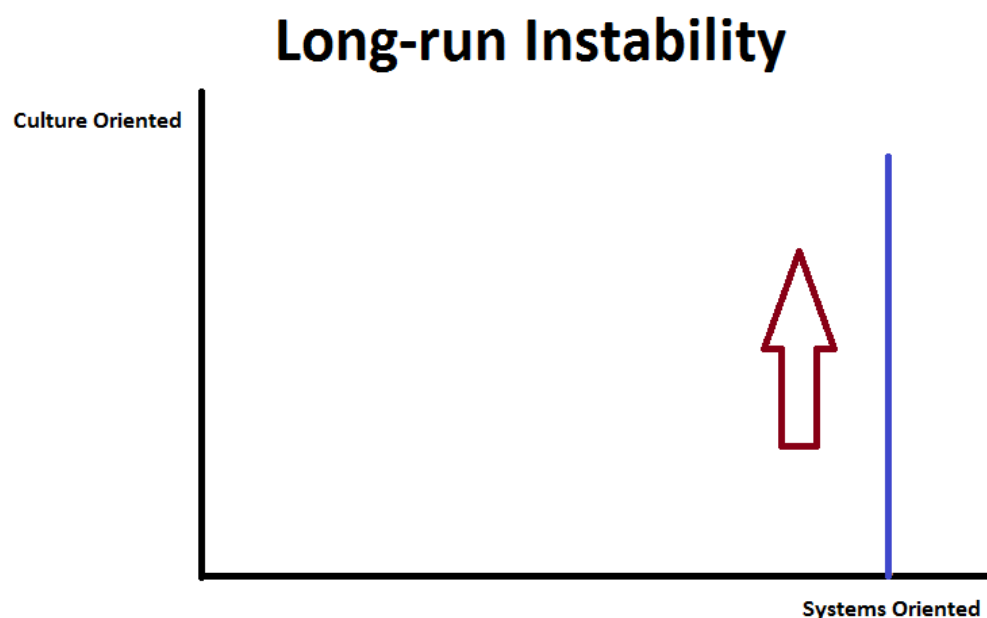


Figure 16

A classic example of a long run instability phase is North Korea in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. As an isolated state, North Korea's economic interests are drastically threatened. Also, the possibility of war with the U.S. and its allies remains a major threat to North Korea's existence. North Korea's instability is well-established and this undesirable status is expected to last. Consequently, it

pursues systems-oriented policies by having cooperative dialogues with its neighbor, South Korea, through inter-Korean summits (UN General Assembly, 2007). On the other hand, North Korea pursues culture-oriented policies such as the act of causing the 2013 Korean Crisis by issuing threats to target the U.S. with its nuclear-armed missiles (Sanger & Sang-Hun, 2013). Issuing threats to the U.S. may seem likely to increase rather than to decrease existing threats to the core interests.

Another example of long run instability is Sudan, for about a decade after the 1989 Sudanese coup d'état. By overthrowing the democratically elected civilian government, Omar Hassan al-Bashir took power illegally (Reuters, 2008). Consequently, Sudan became insecure and unstable. The state's behavior in that period was a mixture of systems-oriented and culture-oriented policies. By supporting Islamic radicals abroad, Sudan alienated many of its neighbors and the Western countries (Reuters, 2008). This is a case of culture-oriented behavior that is considered an irrational response to the structural constraints. On the other hand, Sudan's strategic relations with China improved its military and economic capabilities (Large, 2008). Benefitting from the maintenance of strong relations with a power like China is considered a rational

response to the constraints imposed by the international power structure, a systems-oriented behavior.

## 5. Conclusion

In the systems approach in IR, the key elements are "structure", "interacting units", and their distinctions. It is evident in Kaplan's international systems and Waltz's neorealism that structure is the most important determinant. In Keohane and Nye's liberalism and neoliberalism, the attributes and interactions of units are of paramount importance.

In the cultural approach, the variants of constructivism try to explain how the international relations are the result of social constructions. Wendt emphasizes "shared ideas" in the international environment (Copeland, 2000). Katzenstein indicates how "norms" and "identities" shape actors' internal and external environments (Jepperson, Katzenstein, & Wendt, 1996).

The systems thinking and culture approach (STC) is a systemic perspective, consisting of interacting units, where both culture as a unit-level force and structure as a systems-level force are crucial in analyzing state's behavior. STC's reference to the structure of the international system, and its incorporation of domestic culture in analyzing states' behavior show how STC as a systemic approach to foreign policy is influenced by both cultural and systems approaches in IR.

Neorealism assumes that a state's position in the distribution of capabilities determines its behavior. According to STC, this is sometimes true, and it tries to specify the conditions under which it is and is not. In so doing, two factors are introduced: The first is the status of the state—whether or not it feels its vital interests are threatened. The second variable is the state's perceptions of how long this status will last. Both of these appear to be subjective (perceptual) variables. This is a twist on neorealism's purely objective focus on the distribution of military capabilities. Thus STC manages to connect the distribution of capabilities, domestic sources of foreign policy, culture, subjective security, and expectations about the duration of subjective security.

Once there is a viable abstract model of STC, it thereby becomes conceivable to use it to develop a systemic theory of foreign policy (in an analogy to constructivist theories of state behavior, or the works of some of Waltz's students, like Barry Posen and Stephen Walt,<sup>3</sup> who tried to create a neorealist theory of foreign policy). This is an important possible corollary of the approach and a potentially fruitful avenue for future research.

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<sup>3</sup> See (Posen, 1986) and (Walt, 1990).

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