Institutional Liberal Theory:
An Applicable Liberal Theory Framework

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Abstract:

The article seeks to provide a pragmatic framework to apply liberal international relations theory to broadly any topic. It first establishes why studying institutions are more epistemologically sound than the derivations of realism and neoliberal institutionalism. It then shows institutions are bodies that organize agents with rules that can be competed over in an arena of competition by agents who might also be institutions themselves. This framework is drawn from studying the institutional development of Europe from the 1st the 19th century, Western institutional development of the 20th century, Soviet and Nazi institutional development of the 20th century, Warring States to Qin dynasty Chinese institutional development, and Republic of China (1912-1947) and People's Republic of China institutional development. The theory is then applied to bargaining, deterrence, and warfare to gain insights to show how the theory could be used to understand those topics, while, at the same time, showing the shortcoming and fundamental flaws of realism. The theory is then applied to understanding what the West is and its institutions and institutional competition during the Cold War and modern day to show the shortcomings and fundamental flaws of neoliberal institutionalism. In all, the theory is shown to be a more explanatory theory than both realism and neoliberal institutionalism and can handle more data than either theory.

This article seeks to create an applicable liberal theory, institutional liberal theory, to challenge the dominance of realism and neoliberal institutionalism. It will be shown through example that institutional liberal theory explains better that which realism and neoliberal institutionalism each claim to explain best, conflict and institutions respectively.

Epistemological Basis

It ought to be a goal of international relations studies to best tie the field to reality and stay away from hypotheticals as to remain as empirical as possible. With the plethora of historical data available, scholars have no need to guess how things might occur. Rather, through empirical methods like statistics and abstraction, a better understanding of reality is possible by using that which is contingent on data rather than thinking up universals a priori. For example, one can think up many reasons as to why ethnic and religious diversity could increase the likelihood of civil war, and many did. However, empirical methods showed that this form of a priori guessing was simply wrong [1].

There is something in mathematics known as the inverse probability problem. The general idea is that scholars have data presented to them, and they attempt to understand the data generating process of that data (e.g. we know this dictator did this action, we want to know why).

A rationalistic epistemology (e.g. rationalism) derives the data generating process first through a priori knowledge and held assumptions, and then interprets that data through their framework (e.g. we already know/assume this dictator has these beliefs, thus we can understand why he did this given our framework). This is to say rationalism is deductive rather than inductive as an empirical argument ought to be. Rationalism does this by theorizing how the data generating process ought to be and then either ignores or misinterprets data that could be used as evidence against their preconceived 'ought'.

Any form of dogmatism can be used as an example here, ranging from the arguments made by the geocentrists to Hobbes' and Rousseau's imaginary states of nature. However, a more potent example would be realism and neoliberal institutionalism.

Realism, for its part, hypothesizes how a state would act in a state of nature and fall into systematic actions (although this is largely specifically neorealist) where all states are against all others, no state can trust one another, anarchy is the norm, only power matters, the state is the only relevant unit of analysis, and institutions either do not exist or are ineffective. This is all thought up largely a priori.

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[1] James D. Fearon and David D. Laitin, "Ethnicity, Insurgency, and Civil War," *American Political Science Review* 97, no. 01 (February 2003): 75–90, https://doi.org/10.1017/S0003055403000534.

Morgenthau starts out quite insightfully by saying, "A nation as such is obviously not an empirical thing... What can be empirically observed are only the individuals who belong to a nation." However, he then dogmatically locks in realism as just observing this construct, the state. He even says, "Besides being a member of a nation... the individual may belong to a church, a social or economic class, a political party, a family, and may think, feel, and act in these capacities" [2]. This statement alone makes it necessary to observe the internal mechanisms of the state to see what other associations individuals form that might affect the state. Admitting that the state is merely one level of organization, possibly not even the highest, urges studying all levels of organization. There is no reason to assume power is only in the hands of states as Morgenthau does[3]. There are all a priori assumptions that lead to less data being examined than there ought to be.

Waltz even stated, "How can a theory of international politics be constructed? Just as any theory must be... first, one must conceive of international politics as a bounded realm or domain" [4]. To do such a thing, one must make vast assumptions about the international scene, such as the state being the fundamental unit.

Neoliberal institutionalism, on the other hand, "takes the existence of mutual interests as given and examines the conditions under which they will lead to cooperation" [5]. This is to say, if a large enough institution was made, then states can overcome communication barriers and collective action problems to work together. This makes the same error realism makes in assuming internal conditions of states in that it assumes that all states would want to cooperate if able and have these mutual interests[6]. What mutual interests did the UK and Nazi Germany have, and, if they did indeed have them, would and should they ever seek to coexist?

Of course, all models make assumptions, but, if those assumptions are challenged too much by reality, one must be willing to give them up. Empirical epistemology necessitates abstraction from evidence to make any applicable claims and to estimate the data generating process with contingent data, while, for the rationalistic tradition, evidence is to be found after the fact as validation of their a priori theorizing.

Thus, this article will do its best to derive abstractions only from a large population of high-quality data and make as few assumptions as possible to maximize the flexibility and utility of the theory. However, because of the empirical nature of this article, this theory is

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[2] Hans Morgenthau, *Politics Among Nations: The Struggle for Power and Peace*, 1960, 73.

[3] Morgenthau, 80-108.

[4] Kenneth N Waltz, "Theory of International Politics," 1979, 116.

[5] Robert Keohane, *After Hegemony: Cooperation and Discord in the World Political Economy*, 1984, 6.

[6] Andrew Moravcsik, "Taking Preferences Seriously: A Liberal Theory of International Politics," *International Organization* 51, no. 4 (1997): 513–53, https://doi.org/10.1162/002081897550447, 536-537.

susceptible to erroring when contradictory evidence was absent from the abstraction-from population. If such a sampling bias did occur, then the newfound evidence is welcomed as it adds to the field's nuanced understanding.

Institutions as the Best Mode of Analysis

Capability to Utilize Data

When looking at any data set, scholars are looking for either understanding of what caused the data or prediction. This is to say, in international relations, scholars wish to understand why certain actions on the world stage took place and what actions are to come. Due to the complexity of human relations, it is reasonable to include, exclude, and assume some data when modeling for the sake of simplicity and applicability.

The realists claim that the only data scholars need to include to have both understanding and prediction is the external features around a state and the systematic laws of international relations derived a priori through thought experiments. In fact, scholars need no data on the individual state itself as each state is identical.

Neoliberal institutionalists, for their part, assume the same internal uniformity among states that realism holds but, contrary to realism, does observe the existence of international institutions that countries interact with each other in.

These two theories make significant assumptions and exclude vast amounts of data. Namely, they ignore other levels of analysis besides that of the state. Why not analyze all institutions that can influence the capabilities and orientation of the state? Their justification is that all states are fundamentally the same and are not affected by other institutions, but this axiom has no basis in empirical reality.

Why Institutions?

The perfect model would consider every atomized individual to predict action, but this is unrealistic in practice. Instead, institutions can be used to approximate how groups of individuals will act, how resources will flow, and power concentration as all individuals are in many institutions, institutions generally have access to many resources especially at scale, and, due to the combination of having people aligned with the institution and resources, have power. Studying institutions, therefore, provides a more comprehensive and practical basis for analysis than state-centric models, offering greater predictive power without becoming overly complex or resource-intensive.

Institutional Liberal Theory:

Rather than saying what institutions ought to do based off a priori reasoning, the empirical approach of abstraction will be employed. When abstracting, scholars search for useful traits that apply to the population, rather than a true ontology or definition that a rationalist would seek. There is a consensus to consider norms, international organizations, governments, states, and all sorts of organized bodies institutions, so these will comprise the population.

What Is an Institution?[7]

Agents

A first abstraction that can be made is that all institutions have agents—units—within them. With dating norms, for instance, each agent is an individual person, while within an international institution the agent is defined as a state. However, agents are nuanced. Most agents within institutions are other institutions themselves like the state, thus they also have institutions within them. Further, each agent can be influenced by or in different, possibly competing institutions. Lastly, each agent should not be assumed uniform within an institution.

Rules

The Qin during the Warring States Period was initially a minor power on the outskirts of the system. However, by instituting internal reforms to the effect of dictating success in society to be militant and totalitarian virtues and failure to be familial kinship, the Qin were able to brutally conquer the system through deception, bribery, assassination, and mass murder[8].

Weimar Germany, in its time, was one of the most liberal states in Europe. Telling a citizen of it that a decade from now that it would soon completely transition in orientation to conquer its surrounding states and commit the Nazi atrocities would cause the same level of confusion as telling a citizen of the moderately liberal Republic of China (1912-1949) that soon all their prosperity would vanish under the then weak and small CCP and that famine, mass enslavement, and mass murder by the 10's of millions would soon occur. Not only that, but in both cases, there is a fair chance that the person you are talking to will be complicit if not enthusiastic towards their newfound "morality" and malicious deeds that awaited their fulfillment [9].

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[7] There are likely many more abstractions to be made than simply the few below, but these are sufficient to explain all the data sampled.

[8] Victoria Tin-bor Hui, *War and State Formation in Ancient China and Early Modern Europe*, 2005, 64-101, 178-190.

[9] Christopher Browning, *Ordinary Men: Reserve Police Battalion 101 and the Final Solution in Poland*, 3rd ed., 2017.

However, de-Nazification was also quite successful and relatively quick, as was American reform in Japan after WWII. How were all these things done so quickly?

One must see that, for better or worse, people in an institution generally align with the institution to achieve either the collective goal of the institution and or the personal goals sought by being in the institution. For example, states can control one's wealth, moral and social status, honor, and power, allowing people to either align with the state ideologically or simply pursue the rewards offered by the state. Nietzsche was all too correct in saying that morality is often simply a cultural institution as in his *On the Genealogy of Morality*. The Qin, communists, and Nazis in changing what dictated success and failure in society—the rules—persuaded most of society, one way or another, to comply to their new morality.

Other institutions besides states have rules. Dating norms determine success or failure in its respective realm. The liberal economy has a set of rules on must follow to be successful, while a mercantilist or low-trust paradigm has different criteria for success. An institution tries to reward those that follow rules and punishes those who break rules.

It seems rational why an agent would follow the rules. In Nazi Germany, it is convenient to buy into Nazi propaganda and receive rewards and gain all the false-virtue, fulfillment, sense of community, and social status that comes with it than to resist and receive as dire of punishments as meeting the firing squad or being worked to death in an internment camp. Further, do you want to be the first one to break dating norms and potentially end up alone or simply suffer them for the time being, regardless of your opinion of them, and be rewarded?

Enforcing Rules

To enforce rules, institutions need a strong *administrative capability*, an institution's ability to effectively implement and enforce its rules through a combination of authority, bureaucracy, and executive leadership. This is distinct from the ability of the institution to use military and economic power to give rewards and punishments. Military power and use of force are dependent on administrative capability, not the converse.

The Papal Revolution (11th-13th centuries) is perhaps the most illustrative example of this. The Church in the 9th century had itself firmly tied to the Carolingian Empire—whose explicit goal was to make a Christian Europe. The two worked tirelessly to increase the centralization and administrative capabilities of the state to realize this. So, when the empire collapsed, the Church was devastated as all the progress they made was undone by the sudden decentralization. Thus, inspired by the Cluniac Reforms and resurgence of Roman law, the Church embarked on the Papal Revolution to turn the Vatican into a centralized authority of

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The author recommends a reading of the Afterword and the 'Twenty-Five Years Later' section of Browning's work.

all Churches through the creation of the first holistic body of law in European history that fully separated the spiritual realm from the secular realm that was managed by many "lawyer popes" who were formally law professors. The Church managed to increase its administrative capability by creating a functioning bureaucracy able to manage huge amounts of inquiries and reach out to places as far as Britain, creating a set of law for all churches to follow that greatly increased the authority of the Church—this capability was mostly due to the Cluniac Reform, and had many proactive and highly intelligent executive leaders (popes) and bureaucrats who were adaptive to the many reforms being initiated. The gains made by the Church at the time were largely political as the Church was already wealthy enough to rival their secular counterparts and had no need for military power[10]. Thus, the Church's increased ability to give rewards and punishments had nothing to do with physical force as it had none nor on its wealth as it was already wealthy, showing military and economic power to not be equivalent to administrative capability.

The collapse of the Ming dynasty is another clear example of military and economic power not equating administrative capability, The Ming dynasty ended when the general in charge of stopping the Manchus from invading China allowed the Manchu through as he believed they would be able to save China from the corruption of the Ming. Military power is only as strong as the respect the generals and soldiers have towards the state, a concept also illustrated by various juntas and coups throughout history.

Policing

Policing involves ensuring that agents of an institution adhere to its rules and do not undermine its objectives. This includes monitoring agents' behavior and taking corrective actions, such as giving punishments or offering incentives, or expelling agents who threaten the institution's integrity. This can range from a penal system to the criteria for joining the US or EU. Open, high trust societies, as spelled out by Putnam [11], are particularly susceptible to being taken advantage of, as the West has been by China and Russia (see below).

Institutions as that which Governs Interactions

One final abstraction that needs to be made for the development of this article later is that institutions, by the nature of their rules, are those which determine how agents interact with each other. This seems obvious, given that is how rules between players work, but it needs to be stated that, because of this, institutions are those which lock in one's relative status if those rules of interaction benefit one agent at the cost of another. Thus, one privileged by an institution is incentivized to maintain it like the elite in an aristocratic society like China with

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[10] Larry Siedentop, *Inventing the Individual: The Origins of Western Liberalism*, 2014, 188-236.
[11] Robert Putnam, *Making Democracy Work*, 1993.

its hukou system that sort people as urban or rural people, while those marginalized and disadvantaged by it are incentivized to try to change the rules relative how severe the punishments are for attempting changing the rules.

Changing the Rules

Given the power of institutions, one might be interested in understanding how the rules of the institution change as the rules of the institution determine the overall objective towards which it is working towards. A pragmatic dichotomy can be used to understand how rules change in institutions by separating instances where rules changed through processes built into the rules from instance of changing the rules by breaking the rules[12].

Within the Rules

Changing within the rules requires the changing institution to have a prescribed method for doing so. Take, for instance, a modern democracy. With the state as the changing institution, the legislative body, an institution itself who also has rules both written and normative, has the prescribed role of changing the rules of the state.

Changing within the rules often occurs after *institutional capture*. This occurs when the bureaucrats or agents that manage an institution change their belief from that which the institution was originally aligned towards, such as a different political party winning an election. A more insightful example of this is the Christianization of the Germanic tribes after the fall of Rome.

In the final few centuries of Rome, much of the elite had converted to Christianity, and the most vibrant intellectual class was the clergy. After Rome fell, the Germanic tribes recognized that the clergy were the most suited people for running a government and bureaucracy, so they employed them—much of the Germanic people already holding a version of Chrisitan belief. From within, the clergy made profound leaps in changing society. Most notable were that, in the Visigoth society, the clergy-dominated Council of Toledo made legislation for the Visigoths and produced such innovations as 1) replacing verdicts based on physical combat or oaths with a careful search for evidence, 2) making it so that intentions matter when deciding punishment, 3) making all free men equal under the law, 4) making great pushback against slavery that only exist where the state lacked administrative capabilities, and 5) protection for slaves. In addition, under the Carolingians, the Church and state sought to develop a Christian Empire that included 1) a push for education, 2) an oath

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[12] One could also fairly argue that institutional imperfection in transferring information such as culture and changing external and internal factors can, in many instances, lead to a natural, collective changing of institutions, constituting a third category. However, this does meet the definition of changing the institution from within and does not necessarily require its own category. Do what you see fit when applying the model.

that in principle established everyone as equals and them willingly subjugating themselves to the King, 3) further protections for slaves, and 4) belief that men cannot be coerced into faith among many other innovations. This is a complete reversal of Germanic pagan beliefs. The largest thing that held the Carolingians and the Church's ambitions back was the lack of administrative capability, not their will[13].

Lastly, an example of changing rules by using the rules from the frame of reference of institutions being that what govern interactions between agents would be the GATT and WTO rounds where states explicitly try to change how they interact economically.

Outside the Rules

Often, institutions are made without an internal institution for changing the rules. Logically, the only course of action to change the rules in this scenario is to break the rules and bear the punishments the institution can hurl. This is generally called *revolution*, like the American, Glorious, French, and so on. If successfully done, it is apt to call it an *institutional failure*.

For example, Britain and the thirteen colonies were in an overarching mercantilist institution that systematically put the colonies in a disadvantageous position in its interactions. The colonies attempted to resolve some of their grievances through the institutions that were supposed to negotiate a settlement, but the institutions failed to function. Thus, the colonies revolted and suffered war, the greatest punishment the British institution could offer. However, because it was insufficient to deter or to make the colonies, with French assistance, subservient, the colonies broke free from the institution and created an entirely new institution. This can be contrasted with the Glorious Revolution that, although did lead to significant changes, preserved a large portion of the previous institution. As a final note however, it can be said the American Revolution, by making the colonies sovereign, caused a change in the rules of interaction between them and Britain, going from unequals to equals.

Aside from revolution, changing rules can also occur through war, external or civil. For example, the Chinese literati, Confucian bureaucrats, had for centuries preserved the Qin-Han Confucian-Legalist system, a system that used Confucian values as a moral cloak to make people subservient and used legalism to brutally crush populations and extract from them. This system was complimented by the *tianxia* worldview that necessitated unification of the known world under a single despot. This *tianxia* worldview infected nearby countries such as Japan and Korea, the former even invoking the *tianxia* language when invading China in the 20th century. When the Mongols invaded China and formed the Yuan dynasty and the Manchu invaded and formed the Qing dynasty, Chinese institutions certainly changed. There

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[13] Siedentop, *Inventing the Individual: The Origins of Western Liberalism* 141-162.

are, however, two possible views. The first is that the Mongols and Manchu saw the value of the literati and the totalitarian power of the *tianxia* worldview, and thus took the already existing Chinese institutions and made them even more totalitarian. The other view is that the Yuan and Manchu brought with their them own institutions—which they certainly did and can be seen in the laws—and the literati, much like the clergy, were employed and changed the institutions from within[14] [15]. It is unclear which of these interpretations is correct. The literati thought they were preserving their culture the best they could, while the Mongols and Manchu thought they were the totalitarian despots in charge of everything but working with complaint literati.

Arena of Competition

When it comes to changes in rules, it is a fair assumption that there will often be opposing sides that want different rules, whether it be those wishing to conserve them or multiple factions of those that want to change them.

Take for example, a democratic state. Here, sides compete in elections, an institution set up by the state, for rule changes. On the international stage, states, businesses, and companies compete for prosperity in the liberal market set up by various institutions. As a final example, states compete for tourism among populations, both domestic and abroad, through institutions available to them such as the media.

It is possible to abstract from these examples and others that, for an institution to be able to change its own rules from within its rules, it creates a separate institution within itself or utilizes one outside of itself that allows agents to compete. These institutions will be termed *arenas of competition*.

However, when an institution does not offer a suitable arena of competition to change the rules of an institution, rules change when an agent causes revolution or an agent outside of the institution competes against the institution. In both cases, an arena of competition is still utilized to facilitate competition over the rules.

For example, Teddy Roosevelt making his third party run because he could not secure the Republican nominee is an example of utilizing an institution not provided by the Republican party institution to compete against the Republican institution in the arena that is the US electoral system—resulting in the Republicans and Roosevelt losing to Wilson. Another example would be a country like South Sudan or Montenegro forming its own country. In both cases of Roosevelt and state formation, the break-away agent was able to sustain the punishments the institution could use to deter it. In doing so, although they may not have

[14] Fei-Ling Wang, *China Order*, 2017, 39-74, 99-134.
[15] Patricia Ebrey, *The Cambridge Illustrated History of China*, 2nd ed., 2010, 176-179, 224.

changed how their previous institution interacts with other agents within the institution, they changed how that institution interacts with agents within their new institution and themselves.

An example of an outside agent changing an institution would be Western powers being the impetus for, first, internal reform (attempts) in the Qing and then the creation of the liberalizing Republic of China (1912-1947). Here, there arena of competition is complex. The missionaries were using Churches and the Bible to compete with Confucian and folk-lore ideas in the public forum. The Western powers had zones in which they could create laws—and thus educate and govern in a Western style—that many Chinese immigrated to, making economics and immigration another arena. Many Chinese also pursued education abroad in the West, making that another arena[16]. The is not a definite list, but it shows the complexity of competition.

Lastly, an all-too-common arena is simply warfare, which is addressed in full below. One could also argue that changing the rules *outside the rules* and the preceding two paragraphs are better explained by *institutional competition* (see below). If one focuses on how rules affect agents, then those are better explained by a change of rules facilitated by revolution or war (competition) as the rules changed for the agents. If one focuses on the institution in particular, the loss of agents may not change the rules of the overall institution, and thus a framework of institutional competition may describe the situation better.

Application of the Theory

This understanding of an institution forms the basis of the institutional liberal theory of international relations, all but concluding the development of the theory. However, although some examples involving states and international events have been cited, they do not fully demonstrate how to apply the theory. The following sections are the expansion of this theory into traditional realms of international relations that will function as examples of, not only the deeper understanding of those realms that this theory can offer, but also how to apply the theory.

Institutional Change as a Bargaining Process

A bargaining process occurs when two or more sides compete to achieve some end. The process of changing the rules of an institution can be seen as a bargaining process. For example, one can say that the bargaining process for changing the rules of a democratic state occurs in the legislative arena of competition where both sides have agreed to compete by the same rules. Through the competition, either both sides compromise or one side wins.

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[16] Wang, *China Order,* 135-158.

By the nature of competition, bargaining occurs in all arenas, those provided by the institution and those not. Schelling famously proposed war is a bargaining process[17]. This idea can be examined through this institutional liberal theory.

Take the example of a civil war. Both sides are fighting over institutional control of the state. Their arena of competition is war, but there are likely other arenas such as propaganda, economic competition, and courting neighboring powers. There are cases in history where the two sides of the civil war come to an agreement to form a coalition government. In this case, the arena is switched to the negotiating table, but often war is still used as leverage on the table. However, often one side simply wins militarily, leading to *war termination*. War termination will be defined as the process of institution building and institutional capture after the outcome of the war is accepted by the opposing side. This is to say, war termination does not occur if the opposing side is not institutionally integrated or if they continue to wage a guerrilla war.

In the case the war termination does occur, both sides, whether this be in a civil war or interstate conflict, have bargained enough to realize each other's relative position. They then move to establish a war terminating institution, often a treaty, that locks each other in their newfound relative positions, such as one side owing resources to another, one side being politically and economically subjugated, or the like. Thus, the oppressed side is now incentivized to go to war again to bargain for a better position when able. This could explain why the post-WWII order has been so stable, since the US established Germany and Japan as equals in the liberal system where they could compete fairly and did not provide an incentive for revolution.

In the case where war termination does not occur because an enemy refuses to surrender, one can instead exterminate the enemy. This will be known as a *war of extermination*. Examples of this include genocide and total war like that of the Mongols. Just because one side's proposition is the other's extermination does not mean the other side cannot bargain in turn with pain and violence. Thus, bargaining still occurs like that laid out by Schelling.

Deterrence as an Institution

Deterrence is the concept that, through the correct posturing, one can deter action, such as being invaded. It involves proper communication, having capabilities, and the willingness to use those capabilities. If one is lacking in one of those dimensions, one is punished by having their security decreased. If one makes a wrong move like showing military weakness, one is punished by increased chance of invasion. If one makes a correct move like displaying a new

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[17] Thomas C. Schelling, *Arms and Influence* (Yale University Press, 1966), https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctt5vm52s.

technology, one is rewarded with deterrence. Given the abstractions of what properties an institution has, deterrence can be seen as an institution as it has agents and rules.

This raises the question of what determines the rules of deterrence. Often, the rationalistic, a priori rules derived to estimate the rules of deterrence are proven not true because people are "irrational". This is a weak argument that lacks predictive capabilities as it simply says that states cannot know how to properly deter certain states due to the irrational nature of those state's internal decision-making processes. Rather, scholars ought to strive for a model that can account for "irrational" behavior.

Given that deterrence is dependent on internal decision-making processes, deterrence is dependent on context. This is to say, deterrence as an institution works primarily with posteriori data, and thus scholars should not expect an a priori model to be accurate.

Rather, one must identify an arena of competition for deterrence, which is primarily some vague arena of communication where one can inspires a belief in another. Thus, one should assume what deters one will not deter another as this theory holds that all states internal institutions are to be assumed to be different. Sometimes one merely needs to intimidate a dictator. Other times, one needs to morally persuade a population not to go to war. A figure like Castro might be willing to risk the annihilation of Cuba in order to try to destroy the US and could be hard to deter [18]. Other leaders will be thrown out of office if the population gets mildly disgruntled.

War and Institutions

Realism most prominently claims to be able to explain conflict best. This section will go about a critique of realism by showing its assumptions false and that institutional liberal theory gives better insight into conflict.

First, realism is based on the Hobbesian idea of anarchy that the natural state of things is a war of all against all where no one can truly trust one another nor be altruistic nor moral as power is what matters most. Morgenthau even went so far as to say realism has a "theoretical concern with human nature as it actually is [and] historical processes as they actually take place"[19] as if all theories do not also.

However, Hobbes' idea of the state of nature is simply false. Humans have never existed as lone animals in an institution-less nature. Rather, having evolved from social animals, humans have, since their inception, been social animals with ingrained norms regulating our

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[18] Fidel Castro, "Fidel Castro's Letter to Khrushchev," October 26, 1962, https://microsites.jfklibrary.org/cmc/oct26/doc2.html.

[19] Morgenthau, *Politics Among Nations: The Struggle for Power and Peace*.

interactions with one another. This is not to deny that hunter-gatherer tribes have the highest rates of violence and murder, but this still completely undermines Hobbes' theory. Going further, Hobbes' Leviathan as the state is the anti-thesis to the tested and proven liberal state that performs much better, meaning one ought not settle for the Leviathan as Hobbes prescribed.

The Hobbesian idea of the state of nature applied to international relations holds that states naturally have no overarching institutions that regulate interactions (anarchy), especially during times of war where everyone's true colors will be shown[20].

Historically speaking, however, this is not the natural state of states. State formation, in terms of what scholars think of as a state versus say a chiefdom, occurred in Europe around Early Modern Europe after the Papal Revolution gave impetus to the states to form, while it occurred in China between the Spring and Autumn Period and Warring States Period. During state formation in Europe, the many liberal institutions[21] or what Tin-bor Hui calls 'self-weakening reforms' greatly regulated interactions between states including during war. In China, the Spring and Autumn and Warring States Periods greatly resembled Early Modern Europe with diplomatic networks and normative restraints[22] and had chivalric rules to war[23] akin to those in Medieval Europe after the 10th century. Thus, at the onset of state creation in both Europe and China—the original "state of nature", there were institutions regulating state interactions.

Going further, institutions, including norms and cultural rules, facilitate communication. Without proper communication, war termination cannot occur as one needs the other side to accept it. One needs to tie military victories to political victories to lead to war termination. If there were no institutions between nations, one would expect most wars at the onset of state formation to be total wars without war termination. However, one finds quite the opposite in both China and Europe, except for the Qin at the end of the Warring States Period discussed below.

For example, the US may have dealt massive damage to North Vietnam on the understanding that this would elicit war termination and the willingness to be integrated into an institution, but the North Vietnamese did not accept war termination. This is in part because the US did not understand what would cause the North Vietnamese to accept war termination. Given the US' strategy of not pursuing counter insurgency properly and instead pursuing traditional warfare, they would need to wage a war of extermination. This is contrasted with the British

[20] Waltz, "Theory of International Politics.", 102-128.
[21] Siedentop, *Inventing the Individual: The Origins of Western Liberalism,* 252-277, 345-347.
[22] Tin-bor Hui, *War and State Formation in Ancient China and Early Modern Europe,* 109-126, 195-205.
[23] Ebrey, *The Cambridge Illustrated History of China,* 38-39.

experience of dealing with counter insurgency in Northern Ireland which was successful and the US partial success in Iraq where political victories were sought[24].

Another example of failing to pursue political victories through or by establishing institutions is Napoleon taking Moscow, thinking that would cause Russia to initiate war termination. Instead, Russia used scorch earth tactics to deny Napoleon war termination.

Often when states go to war, they are not seeking to conquer the entirety of the state they are waging war against but, rather, are wanting favorable war termination that will serve them and weaken their rival. In these cases, states do not want total war to the death. Thus, the goal is to consolidate military victories into political victories. This is to say, the goal is to bargain using military victories into a favorable war termination. In the previous two examples, both the dominant military powers failed to bargain effectively as they acted ignored the necessary institutions need to consolidate victory in a realist manner that ignores the existence of such institutions.

War of Extermination

A possibly problematic case is a war of extermination. However, even here institutional liberal theory explains conflict better than realism.

The Warring States Period Qin that used deception, bribery, assassination, and mass murder and subjugation to conquer richer, larger, and more powerful states in a time of chivalry and diplomacy ought to be the strongest case study towards realism. However, realism fails to capture the dynamics of even this period.

Can realism explain why populations in China would admit defeat put down their arms and be slaughtered in mass graves by the 100's of thousands, while Spaniards under Napoleon continued to wage a guerrilla war? Can realism explain why the multiple attempts at counterbalancing the Qin when the Qin were still a rising power failed to overcome the Qin's efforts to disrupt counterbalancing, given that, according to neo-realism, such counterbalancing is assured and should occur naturally given the overwhelming odds the Qin faced[25]? Can realism then go on to explain why the Qin collapsed after 15 years with no rivals remaining? Realism cannot as it denies the existence of internal happenings. Rather, institutional liberal theory can still capture the institutional failure that occurred in the Chinese system, while still maintaining the importance of institutions that, in another time, could have saved the Chinese system.

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[24] Martin van Creveld, *The Changing Face of War: Combat from the Marne to Iraq* (New York, UNITED STATES: Random House Publishing Group, 2008), http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/gatech/detail.action?docID=6066107, 226-232, 243-253.

[25] Tin-bor Hui, *War and State Formation in Ancient China and Early Modern Europe,* 67-79.

The West

An examination of the West will be used to critique neoliberal institutionalism:

Since 1945, there has been unparalleled peace, power, and prosperity among Western nations ranging from those in Europe, the US and Canada, and the US' Asian allies like South Korea, Taiwan, Japan, and the Philippines. This position is often misunderstood historically and taken for granted.

However, war in Western Europe and East Asia was the norm up until 1945. What caused the fundamental shift to go from the historical norm into modernity? Liberal institutional theory would answer that the rules of interaction must have changed either through institution building or institutional change.

Liberal Thought and the West

Before beginning to understand Western institutions, one must understand the Western liberal philosophy that underpins them. Since an argument for liberalism is beyond the scope of this article, a mere outline of its conclusions will be given:

1. All individuals have inherent worth and rights that should be respected
2. The principle of mutual respect and fairness in interactions
3. The principle of voluntary participation and association with no forced association
4. The right to express opinions without censorship or restraint
5. Liberty from the state
6. The principle of solving disputes and competing not through violence but other means

Suffice to say, Russia, China, Revolutionary France, socialism, and any other embodiment of totalitarianism do and did not respect these values.

Products of Western Institutions

Western institutions have created for its agents at least three things: Peace, prosperity, and military strength and security.

Peace

Historically speaking, peace in Western Europe is unprecedented—the idea of these centuries long rivals becoming each other's closest allies would have been fanciful to those living in the past. This long stretch of peace between liberal states in North America, Europe, and East Asia and the general distaste towards war developing around the world can be called the *Western Peace*. The Western Peace stems largely from the idea of sovereignty, premised on the idea individuals are allowed to freely associate to form states without force

used on them. Thus, the Western attempt to institutionalize this value with a strong enough institution, an institution with a strong administrative capability, is an attempt at permanent peace. Western institutions have, in effect, replaced power competition with economic and political competition by making the arena of competition be economics and politics, so much so it seems that Europe forgot they needed to maintain the military power needed to deal with those outside of Western institutions.

Prosperity

Following the empirical tradition, Adam Smith observed the existence of a free market enabled by institutionalized liberal values such as reciprocity and fairness backed by a high trust, entrepreneurial society. The socialists, on the contrary, used a priori, rationalistic assumptions to design an economy, placing it outside of the empirical tradition tied to liberalism.

The existence of institutionalized Western values is equivalent to an institutionalized free market, making all Western countries capitalistic and wanting to compete economically for shared prosperity rather than compete militarily. This has created a boom in wealth and technology in the West, and those developing countries that move towards the West share in its prosperity.

Military Strength and Security

One often does not think that liberalism creates military strength, but, to the contrary, it is the greatest creator of military strength ever known. Is not the US the strongest, yet most liberal, state in history? Is not the West the strongest military power in history that far surpasses all competition on the world stage? Is not a "weak" Western state still stronger than a militaristic developing state?

Not only is the West's military power granted by prosperity, its security is heightened by peace being the norm, for no states want to be the first to fire a shot at the West and incur all its directed punishing capabilities—thus also making war more likely when war has already begun elsewhere and punishing capabilities have already been spread thin.

Further, liberalism, by its free market nature, is the greatest systematic innovator of technology. WWII, as shown by Kennedy, was a victory snatched from the jaws of defeat by technological innovation at key moments[26].

Additionally, being a peaceful institution of prosperity and equality makes it easier to court new members and not lose current ones, which further enhances security. This is

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[26] Paul Kennedy, *Engineers of Victory*, 2012.

compounded by Western institutions allowing agents to overcome the security dilemma of fearing one's neighbors strengthening themselves by creating such a strong amount of trust between members that one's own security increases when another Western state becomes stronger. In fact, the hardest part, historically and currently speaking, is getting one's allies to create a stronger military!

Thus, the grand strategy for liberalism should be not just self-strengthening but also expansion by influencing other countries to join the West after implementing domestic reform. This idea justifies aid such as the Marshall Plan and other targeted foreign aid.

Western Institutions: A Brief Introduction

Having observed the position of the West since 1945, it raises the question of what Western institutions allowed such a miracle to occur.

Examining Europe first: When first examining Europe, one already knows that, due to the change in rules observed, some institution was changed or built. The EU and its preceding institutions are the most likely explanation by virtue of their importance to the European people and the power they have. One of the original EU institutions was the Coal and Steel Pact, intentionally designed to make a supranational institution that would manage France's and Germany's coal and steel, the two most important things at the time needed for war-waging capabilities, to make sure the two nations never went to war again. This then was followed up by many common market initiatives to push liberal economic competition on the two countries that many other European countries also joined in on. Soon enough, many more institutions were made that began expanding from what they were originally intended to do. In the end, these institutions were consolidated into the EU that has done such exceptional things as make a true common market, manage foreign policy and trade, and remove internal borders. Further consolidation was made in common defense with institutions such as NATO that link the US and Canada with Europe. This linkage is further solidified through economic, cultural, political, and media institutions.

Another example that is often overlooked is the US itself. The colonies were equivalent to European states, but the institution that is the US managed to unite all the states on defense, foreign policy, the economy, and law. The US also contains within itself arguably the most prosperous common market in the world. Further, there has only been one war between the states, which is an amazing track record compared to Europe's.

South Korea's, Japan's, Taiwan's, and Philippines' government institutions were all greatly inspired, if not crafted, by the US, meaning they too have institutionalized liberal values. They are slowly drawn closer to each other through the looming threat of China through US diplomacy. South Korea is now a major NATO weapons providers and is growing closer to

Europe[27]. One can imagine trade between these countries and Europe will increase once the Northeast Passage opens fully. One can imagine with trade comes cultural exchange and deepening ties.

The UN

According to neoliberal institutionalism, the UN should be the epitome of institutional development where all states can come together to overcome communication barriers and align in goals. As Keohane once said, neoliberal institutionalism "'takes the existence of mutual interests as given and examines the conditions under which they will lead to cooperation.'' And yet, there is not peace on Earth. Rather the UN is a new institution to compete over. Keohane then does admit, "I begin with the premise that even where common interests exist, cooperation often fails. My purpose is to diagnose the reasons for such failure, and for the occasional successes, in the hope of improving our ability to prescribe remedies [28]. However, one sees less cooperation failure as one sees more malicious intent caused by fundamentally different interest.

For example, there are effective institutions like the WTO that manages trade in a liberal fashion and the WHO that attempts to impolitically manage diseases, but China has largely taken advantage of the WTO[29] and coopted the WHO during Covid to suppress information and spread misinformation[30] [31]. China has also used the UN to suppress Taiwan's status.

Further, the Security Council is largely ineffective due to US, Russia, and China all being able to veto each other. If the premise of shared interest was true, one would expect the Security Council to be able to take decisive actions around the world to ensure peace and prosperity.

The UN might have been built with Western ideals, but it fails repetitively in its task, making it a somewhat effective Western institution at best and not what the neoliberal institutionalists an institution like it would be.

The Cold War: What is a Poll?

[27] "Insight: Inside South Korea's Race to Become One of the World's Biggest Arms Dealers | Reuters," accessed September 2, 2024, https://www.reuters.com/business/aerospace-defense/inside-south-koreas-race-become-one-worlds-biggest-arms-dealers-2023-05-29/.

[28] Keohane, *After Hegemony: Cooperation and Discord in the World Political Economy, 6.*

[29] Stephen Ezell, "False Promises II: The Continuing Gap Between China's WTO Commitments and Its Practices," July 26, 2021, https://itif.org/publications/2021/07/26/false-promises-ii-continuing-gap-between-chinas-wto-commitments-and-its/.

[30] Hinnerk Feldwisch-Drentrup, "How WHO Became China's Coronavirus Accomplice," *Foreign Policy* (blog), April 2, 2020, https://foreignpolicy.com/2020/04/02/china-coronavirus-who-health-soft-power/.

[31] "How China Blocked WHO and Chinese Scientists Early in Coronavirus Outbreak," NBC News, June 2, 2020, https://www.nbcnews.com/health/health-news/how-china-blocked-who-chinese-scientists-early-coronavirus-outbreak-n1222246.

As has been shown, a large portion of Western institutions were not developed by the US but were either developed independently like the EU or with the US as a partner like those in Asia—not to sell short the large burden the US carried during the 20th century when these institutions were developed. However, the traditional Cold War narrative of two hegemons slugging it out for global influence oversells US capabilities and contorts the reality of how the West was developed. Although the US was the most militarily, economically, and politically powerful Western state and the Western state that engaged the most with the wider world, one cannot deny it was dependent on its regional allies for its effectiveness and global reach.

The USSR, on the other hand, used force to expand its institution to Eastern Europe and maintain its agents, while it also later attempted a military invasion of Afghanistan. This is to say, the USSR felt the need to personally develop as many institutions as it could. However, China was strong enough to contest Soviet leadership and tried to spread a different ideology around the world, in doing so competing with the Soviets. Arguably, it was the Sino-Soviet competition that led to both the Korean and Vietnam Wars[32].

This raises a question: What was the nature of competition during the Cold War? Things such as the Truman and Brezhnev Doctrines along with Red Scares of Western institutions being compromised and Domino Theories of state institutions being compromised point towards the idea that the US was not fighting against the Soviets and their allies, but rather were competing against Soviet institutions while trying to strengthen their own. The major international institutions, whether it be the West, the USSR, or Chinese institutions, were seeking to align other states with them and integrate them into their institutions. This is most clear in the proxy war phenomenon where states would back a side who promised to build an institution that would align with that of the backing state. Thus, the most prominent feature that separates the 20th century from all those before it was this large-scale institution building and competition.

Waltz would disagree with this interpretation, having said, "if the aims . . . of states become matters of . . . central concern, then we are forced back to the descriptive level; and from simple descriptions no valid generalizations can be drawn"[33]. However, much information is lost if one sees the Cold War as merely hegemonic competition.

First, one loses sight of the bargaining that happened within the polls such as Sino-Soviet competition or the political struggles the US had with many countries ranging from Japan

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[32] Thomas Christensen, *Worse than a Monolith: Alliance Politics and Problems of Coercive Diplomacy in Asia*, 2011.
[33] Waltz, "Theory of International Politics." 65.

refusing to militarize to France constantly try to exclude the US from European affairs to constant buck-passing that continues to this day at the US' expense.

Second, it ignores that it is necessary for all agents in a poll to be proactive in building, developing, and maintaining institutions, both domestic and abroad. The US did not assert itself on other Western states to do these things. States largely did this of their own will, although often that will was influenced to some extent.

Third, it loses sight of what was truly at stake. Institutions determine how agents interact and thus the morality of their actions. The Soviets and Chinese were trying to get the world to follow their totalitarian institutions. The West saved the world from dictators trying to create a world order safe for dictators. This was not merely the US trying to increase its power and beat the USSR for its own safety.

Lastly, different institutions will function differently internally and produce different outcomes. One can better predict what a state will do if one understands its institutions.

After the Cold War, there was said to be a "unipolar moment". By this point, the Soviet institutions had collapsed, and China had already begun reserving itself for the 21st century decades earlier[34]. There were only the Western institutions remaining. However, the reach of these institutions did not dramatically change in the 90's. Eastern Europe was slowly integrated, but nothing fundamentally changed in Africa, Asia, Oceania, or South America. The unipolar moment was not a time were the West ruled the world with a Liberal International Order. It was a time where there were no competing institutions. To try to force liberal ideals on all the world would be incredibly costly. If the rest of the world wanted to interact with the West, they had to use Western institutions, but, among each other, the rest of the world were not controlled by Western institutions as they are not agents of them (aside from the UN with a weak administrative capability).

Institutional Competition

If the neoliberal institutionalist premises were true, one would expect institutions to primarily cooperate to solve collective action problems. Instead, competition between institutions is far more common.

It has already been addressed that agents of an institution can be institutions themselves. These agents use arenas of competition to compete over the rules of institutions. Thus, institutions who are agents can also use arenas of competition to compete. When two institutions fight for dominance in this manner, it will be called *institutional competition*. Of

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[34] "China's Role in Africa" (CIA, 1972), https://www.cia.gov/readingroom/docs/CIA-RDP08S02113R000100080001-0.pdf, 3-9.

course, these institutions, by virtue of communicating and using an arena, are acting within institutions too, but the end goal of this competition is much akin to war: Either create an institution that favors the winner against the loser or destroy the losing institution.

One competes by either 1) strengthening one's own institution, 2) degrading one's opponent's institutions, or 3) expanding one's institutions to encompass more agents.

This framework can be applied to understand the Cold War. The Cold War is often spoken of in just military terms, but there was, without a doubt, a great a competition to develop more prosperous and powerful institutions with better administrative capabilities and to win over the hearts and minds of people in other states. The US tried winning with just military force in Vietnam. It failed epically because they did not develop South Vietnam's institutions properly nor try to persuade those in the North.

One saw self-strengthening of institutions throughout the entire Cold War in the development towards the EU, the democratizing of South Korea and Taiwan, and increased totalitarian control in communist countries. One saw degradation of rivaling institutions in espionage and covert action and success in competition like the space race that lowers the esteem of losing institutions. Lastly, one saw expansion in the many proxy wars and successful diplomacy.

One can also use institutional liberal theory to explain why ideas failed and should not have been implemented in the first place. For example, détente was a failure. It ended with the opening up of China leading to their now near-peer status with the US and the USSR invading Afghanistan. These events should have been predictable. First, the idea of détente itself was that the West could learn to coexist with the USSR and China through more interaction and trade. This ignores the fundamentally illiberal nature of Soviet and Chinese institutions that were designed to compete with Western institutions. There were no changes within these states to suggest they would stop competing or that they could be liberalized. Why should the West enrich them with trade and degrade its future position? The idea of détente only makes sense if one ignores institutional competition and focuses solely on the hegemonic perspective of the Cold War but, even then, is open to critique.

Institutional Competition Today

Today, one can observe polar competition between the West who is largely complacent in institutional competition and Russia and China who are on the offensive with the West and each other.

Russia

Russia attempted creating a Eurasia through institutions like Eurasian Economic Union in response to China's Silk Road Economic Belt and then through the Greater Eurasian Partnership to compete against the BRI. Having to compete with China for that region, they have not been successful, having only the support of Tajikistan and Mongolia who, unlike other Central Asian countries, opted not to have a multivectorist strategy[35]. They, of course, unlike in their courting of Central Asia, have been heavy handed with their neighbors like Georgia and Ukraine in pursuit of their ambitions.

In contrast to their failures to establish institutions, they have had success at degrading domestic institutions through targeted online campaigns to sow discord and distrust[36], with such things as the 2015 Mizzou protests[37], successfully stoking racial tensions[38] [39], and their many election interferences and disinformation campaigns. In addition, their grey-zone cyber-attacks also degrade our institutions when there are no responses as it shows they can freely attack the West without punishment [40]. Even such an extreme example as the 2007 cyber-attack on Estonia had no response.

Further, the current Russian invasion of Ukraine is a great test to Western institutions[41]. The invasion sees if the West has the administrative capacity to impose costs on Russia and defend Ukraine, which, fortunately, the West has shown not only to be able to impose economic and political costs on Russia but cost them militarily via supporting Ukraine. Had the West not been able to, its deterrence would have been destroyed.

China

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[35] Gilbert Rozman and Gaye Christoffersen, "Introduction," in *Putin's "Turn to the East" in the Xi Jinping Era*, 2023, https://bookshelf.vitalsource.com/reader/books/9781000915853/epubcfi/6/14[%3Bvnd.vst.idref%3Dchapter101]!/4/2/32/6/1:644[eac%2Ch.].

[36] By Robert E. Hamilton, "Russia's Attempts to Undermine Democracy in the West: Effects and Causes," *Orbis* 63, no. 3 (January 1, 2019): 334–48, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.orbis.2019.05.009.

[37] Lt Col Jarred Prier, "Commanding the Trend: Social Media as Information Warfare," 2017, 68-69.

[38] Dylan Byers, "Exclusive: Russian-Bought Black Lives Matter Ad on Facebook Targeted Baltimore and Ferguson," CNNMoney, September 27, 2017, https://money.cnn.com/2017/09/27/media/facebook-black-lives-matter-targeting/index.html.

[39] Sam Levin, "Did Russia Fake Black Activism on Facebook to Sow Division in the US?," *The Guardian*, September 30, 2017, sec. Technology, https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2017/sep/30/blacktivist-facebook-account-russia-us-election.

[40] Simon Newton, "Hybrid Warfare: Russia Accelerates Number of Grey Zone Attacks on Nato Allies," 2024, https://www.forcesnews.com/russia/hybrid-warfare-russia-accelerates-number-grey-zone-attacks-nato-allies.

[41] But one should also not forget the first invasion of Ukraine and the invasion of Georgia the West previously failed to respond to that provides Russia evidence of Western weakness. Weakness gives evidence to them of being able to successfully invade.

China, on the other hand, has been even more successful in both regards. First, they have had successful institutions like the Shanghai Cooperation Organization and Belt & Road Initiative (BRI), the latter giving them deep access to many countries, especially African and Southern Asian countries[42] through what is now called debt-trap diplomacy[43]. They have even used the BRI to gain strategic land like Sri Lanka's main port [44]. In addition, due to their large outreach [45], they have aligned important countries like Brazil towards them.

China's grey-zone tactics are particularly problematic, especially those in the South China Sea[46] [47] such as building man-made islands, harassing states in their territorial waters resulting serious injuries to Philippine sailors [48], and tapping Vietnam's oil in their waters. China, in addition, has a ghost fishing fleet that illegally fishes around the world with no punishment [49].

In addition to spreading propaganda though apps like Tiktok that has radicalized America's youth against Israel and towards Hamas[50], China infiltrated the WHO and suppressed the truth about and created disinformation about Covid [51] that the US government has concluded most likely started, with moderate confidence, at the Wuhan Institute of Virology as a lab leak [52]. China also has gotten into the WTO[53] where it has practiced unfair practices,

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[42] Jonathan Hillman, *The Emperor's New Road: China and the Project of the Century* (New Haven : Yale University Press ; Washington, DC : Center for Strategic and International Studies, 2020).

[43] Bernard Condon, "China's Loans Pushing World's Poorest Countries to Brink of Collapse," AP News, May 18, 2023, https://apnews.com/article/china-debt-banking-loans-financial-developing-countries-collapse-8df6f9fac3e1e758d0e6d8d5dfbd3ed6.

[44] Maria Abi-Habib, "How China Got Sri Lanka to Cough Up a Port," *The New York Times*, June 25, 2018, sec. World, https://www.nytimes.com/2018/06/25/world/asia/china-sri-lanka-port.html.

[45] Tom O'Connor, "China Is the World's No. 1 Diplomatic Power, Ahead of the US, Report Shows - Newsweek," 2024, https://www.newsweek.com/china-worlds-no-1-diplomatic-power-ahead-us-report-shows-1873085.

[46] Andrew Erickson and Ryan Martinson, "Introduction. 'War without Gun Smoke,'" in *China's Maritime Gray Zone Operations*, 2023, file:///C:/Users/James/Downloads/EricksonMartinson2019.pdf.

[47] Bonnie Glaser and Matthew Funaiole, "South China Sea: Assessing Chinese Paranaval Behavoir within the Nine-Dash Line," in *China's Maritime Gray Zone Operations*, 2023.

[48] VOA News, "Philippine Navy Sailor Severely Injured in South China Sea Collision," Voice of America, June 18, 2024, https://www.voanews.com/a/philippine-navy-sailor-severely-injured-in-south-china-sea-collision-/7660678.html.

[49] Sean Mantesso, "'They Will Be Back': How China's 'dark' Fleets Are Plundering the World's Oceans," *ABC News*, December 18, 2020, https://www.abc.net.au/news/2020-12-19/how-china-is-plundering-the-worlds-oceans/12971422.

[50] David Ingram and Kat Tenbarge, "Critics Renew Calls for a TikTok Ban, Claiming Anti-Israel Bias on the Platform," NBC News, November 1, 2023, https://www.nbcnews.com/tech/social-media/tiktok-ban-israel-gaza-palestine-hamas-account-creator-video-rcna122849.

[51] Feldwisch-Drentrup, "How WHO Became China's Coronavirus Accomplice."

[52] DNI, "Unclassified Summary of Assessment on COVID-19 Origins" (DNI, 2023).

[53] The opening up to China was based on the baseless idea that economic liberation—that they never actually did—would lead to political liberation. This neoliberal idea has allowed China, a malicious actor, into the easily-taken-advantage-of liberal marketplace. This a total failing of policing. The West (US) saved the CCP and gave them power with détente. Letting them into the WTO was another magnitude of folly. Western Europe did

undermining everything the WTO stands for[54]. In addition, China is trying to become more integrated into institutions to further its aims like the Arctic Council[55] [56] and APEC[57]. Lastly, one must not also forget its many Confucian Institutes[58] and its many anti-Taiwan pressure campaigns.

Western Complacency

This summary of the West's adversaries' attacks on its institutions has been compiled merely to show that, while the West may have left its "cold war mindset"—a term often used to slander people—China and Russia have certainly not and are still trying to compete institutionally. This provides further evidence against neoliberal institutionalism and more evidence towards the explanatory power of institutional liberalism that can capture the dynamics of institutional competition.

Conclusion

The article sought to provide a pragmatic framework to apply liberal international relations theory to broadly any topic in the field. It has been shown to be able to apply to as diverse at topics as deterrence, warfare and war termination, competition on the world stage, and grey-zone tactics. At the same time, it has shown the fundamental flaws of realism by showing that states have always existed within institutions and that realism lacks the proper tools to even understand something as realpolitik and brutal as the Warring States Period properly. This article also showed the fundamental flaws of neoliberal institutionalism as it assumes that all states will be able to align with their shared inherent interests once in an overarching institution, which conflicts with the Cold War and current experience of institutional competition. Thus, not only is institutional liberal theory able to handle more data by virtue of its design and is more contingent on data with less assumptions than realism and neoliberal institutionalism that are primarily built a priori, institutional liberal theory is a

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the same thing by thinking Russia was a benign actor since the end of the USSR even though it has invaded multiple of its neighbors and made no fundamental institutional changes of note to differentiate its philosophy from the Soviet era other than not being overtly communist and attempting a democracy.

[54] Ezell, "False Promises II."

[55] Gaye Christoffersen, "The Russian Far East and China's Northeast: A Decade in the Shadow of the Belt and Road Initiative," *The Asan Forum* (blog), October 15, 2021, https://theasanforum.org/the-russian-far-east-and-chinas-northeast-a-decade-in-the-shadow-of-the-belt-and-road-initiative/.

[56] Jim Townsend and Andrea Kendall-Taylor, "Partners, Competitors, or a Little of Both? Russia and China in the Arctic - CIAO," 2021, https://ciaonet.org/record/74840.

[57] Carla Freeman, "Biden and Xi at APEC: Averting Further Crisis in U.S.-China Relations," United States Institute of Peace, 2023, https://www.usip.org/publications/2023/11/biden-and-xi-apec-averting-further-crisis-us-china-relations.

[58] Lee Edwards, "Confucius Institutes: China's Trojan Horse | The Heritage Foundation," 2021, https://www.heritage.org/homeland-security/commentary/confucius-institutes-chinas-trojan-horse.

more explanatory theory than both realism and neoliberalism in what those two theories claim to be able to explain best.

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