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Relational Authority and Legitimacy in International Relations

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This article develops a theory of relational authority in the most unpromising setting of international relations. Relational authority locates legitimacy in a social contract between a ruler, who provides a social order of value to the ruled, and the ruled, who comply with the ruler's commands necessary to the production of that order. International politics are nearly universally assumed to be an anarchy devoid of authority. Through the lens of relational authority, however, one sees that relations between states are better described as a rich variety of hierarchies in which dominant states legitimately rule over greater or lesser domains of policy in subordinate states. After contrasting alternative approaches to authority, the article identifies international hierarchies and summarizes a suite of measures that capture variations between the United States and other states. The article then deduces a set of international behaviors that follows from relational authority and demonstrates that (a) the United States is more likely to join international disputes in which its subordinates are involved and (b) subordinates acknowledge the authority of the dominant state by engaging in actions of symbolic obeisance, of which the most costly and salient form is following the United States into war.

Keywords: *anarchy; authority; crisis behavior; hierarchy; legitimacy; social order; symbolic obeisance*

Political scientists have long relied on a formal-legal conception of political authority. In this approach, duly constituted legal rules are understood to confer authority on individuals. One day, for instance, Arnold Schwarzenegger is simply a B-grade actor famous for his bodybuilding and bloody, violent action movies. The next day, after winning an unprecedented but constitutionally permitted recall election against a slate of more than 100 candidates, Schwarzenegger became the governor of California, with all the rights, duties, and powers—indeed, the authority—of that office. This formal-legal conception of authority may be appropriate for established regimes in which the rule of law prevails. But it is only one possible conception of authority.

In this article, I develop and test a theory of relational authority in the most unpromising setting of international relations. Relational authority locates legitimacy in a

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social contract between a ruler, who provides a social order of value to the ruled, and the ruled, who comply with the ruler's commands necessary to the production of that order. Relational authority is similar to "big man" theories of social hierarchy, in which an individual uses his (less commonly, her) comparative advantage in material accumulation, hunting and violence, gardening, or ritual knowledge to generate public goods and, in turn, to earn authority (Godelier & Strathern, 1991; Sahlins, 2000). In this way, even "prelegal" societies create authority. By focusing on the effective provision of social order, I emphasize performance legitimacy—the ability to get things done—as the foundation of authority.

Reflecting a formal-legal conception, international politics are nearly universally assumed to be an anarchy devoid of authority and characterized by a Hobbesian state of nature. Because there is no law superior to that of states themselves, there can be no authority over states in general or by one state over others. Through the lens of relational authority, however, we see that relations between states are not purely anarchic but better described as a rich variety of hierarchies in which dominant states legitimately rule over greater or lesser domains of policy in subordinate states. The assumption of international anarchy is not only ill suited to describing and explaining international politics but also can be positively misleading.

After laying out an essential definition, I contrast these two conceptions of formal-legal and relational authority. In the next section, I outline how authority results in varying international hierarchies and summarize a suite of measures that capture variations in hierarchy between the United States and other states. The next section deduces a set of international behaviors that follow from the theory of relational authority and demonstrates that (a) the United States is more likely to join international disputes in which its subordinates are involved, an indicator that it is, indeed, attempting to produce the social order demanded by those states, and (b) subordinates acknowledge the authority of the dominant state by engaging in actions of symbolic obeisance, of which the most costly and salient form is following the United States into war.

Political Authority

Political authority is most simply defined as rightful or legitimate rule.¹ When political authority is exercised, the ruler, A, commands a set of subordinates, B, to alter their actions, where command implies that A has the *right* to issue such orders.² This right, in turn, implies a correlative obligation or *duty* by B to comply, if possible, with A's order. As Richard Flathman (1980) observes, "If A has authority X, those persons (B) who are in A's jurisdiction therefore have an obligation or obligations Y" (p. 35). In short, B surrenders judgment and accepts the force of A's command.

B's obligation implies a further correlative right by A to enforce its commands in the event of B's noncompliance. As John Day (1963) notes, "those who possess

authority in political life, the rulers, are authorized not only to make laws and take decisions but to use coercive power when necessary to ensure obedience to those laws and acquiescence in those decisions" (p. 260). In an authority relationship, individuals choose whether to comply or not with a ruler's commands but are bound by the right of the ruler to punish their noncompliance. Many drivers exceed the speed limit, for instance, but if caught they accept the right of the state to issue fines or other punishments for breaking the law.

Authority and, specifically, the right to punish noncompliance ultimately rests on the collective acceptance or legitimacy of the ruler's right to rule. In this way, authority is fundamentally a social construct. As Flathman (1980) notes, "sustained coercion is impossible without substantial agreement among the members of the association about those very propositions whose rejection commonly brings coercion into play" (p. 29).³ If recognized as legitimate, the ruler acquires the ability to punish individuals because of the broad backing of others. Political authority is thus never a dyadic trait between a ruler and a single subject, but rather derives from a collective that confers rights or legitimacy on the ruler. Recognizing the collective nature of legitimacy helps resolve the apparent contradiction that from the perspective of a collectivity, compliance with authority is voluntary, but from the standpoint of any particular individual, compliance is mandatory (see Bernard, 1962, p. 169; Blau, 1963, p. 312; Day, 1963, p. 268; Lasswell & Kaplan, 1950, p. 133). Legitimacy is the bridge between compulsion and choice, the alchemist's dross through which pure coercion is transformed into rightful rule or authority.

Formal-Legal Authority

In formal-legal authority, A's ability to command B and the willingness of B to comply follow from the lawful position or office that A holds.⁴ In this conception, A, the person (or unit) in authority, possesses the right to issue laws and rules due to the office that A occupies, and not to any personal qualities that A may possess. Authority does not inhere in A as a person but in A as an officer. The formal-legal approach implies that "authority can be correctly predicated of A only if there are established rules by virtue of which A has authority" (Flathman, 1980, pp. 17, 35). In other words, the formal-legal structure precedes authority and, in turn, confers authority on its officers. This view of authority resonates with common experience in institutionalized polities, reflected in expressions of support by citizens for their political leaders even though they may not respect them as individuals.

Despite its debt to Hobbes, formal-legal theory founders on how authority emerges from the state of nature. If political authority derives from lawful office, law must precede authority. But if political authority creates law, then authority must precede lawful office. In building the preconditions necessary to transcend the state of nature, we cannot conceive of law without authority or authority without law. Like the joke about which came first, the chicken or the egg, we are left with a conundrum, the only

correct answer to which is “neither” or “both emerged simultaneously.” Even if a formal-legal conception is useful once authority is created, this conception does not contain within itself an explanation of its own origins. The origins of authority must rest on something other than a formal-legal order. In turn, it is misleading to imply that absent a formal-legal structure there can be no authority. Authority must in practice be able to rest on some other foundation.

Relational Authority

Social contract theories contain within them an alternative conception of authority in which obligation does not follow from the office of the ruler but from a bargain between ruler and ruled.⁵ Relational authority is premised on an exchange between ruler and ruled in which A provides a social order of value to B sufficient to offset the loss of freedom incurred in his subordination to A, and B confers the right on A to exert the restraints on his behavior necessary to provide that social order. In equilibrium, a ruler provides just enough social order to gain the compliance of the ruled to the taxes and constraints required to provide the social order. A gets a sufficient return on effort to make the provision of social order worthwhile, and B gets sufficient social order to offset his loss of freedom. If A extracts too much or provides too little social order, B can withdraw his support—and A’s authority evaporates. In this way, relational authority is contingent on the actions of both the ruler and ruled.

Following Hedley Bull (1977), a social order is “a pattern of human activity that sustains elementary, primary, or universal goals of social life” (p. 5), including security against violence resulting in death or bodily harm, an assurance that property will not be subject to challenges that are constant or without limit, and an expectation that promises and agreements, once made, will be kept. As a shorthand, then, we can think of social order as the “4 Ps”—the protection of persons, property, and promises. Social order, in turn, is a prerequisite for investment and other economic activities (Olson, 2000). The “rule of law” is now recognized as a fundamental determinant of economic development (see Carothers, 1998). Social order possesses large externalities and, in some ways, approaches a public good. As a result, individuals will typically seek to free ride on the efforts of others, purely voluntary efforts will produce less social order than desired, and the net outcome will be collectively sub-optimal (see Olson, 1965).

Despite the suboptimality of voluntary efforts, social order does not necessarily require an “orderer,” an entity responsible for producing that pattern of activity. Bull (1977) argues that the society of states, even under anarchy, produces a rudimentary social order. And as a generation of research has shown, cooperation is clearly possible between formally equal actors both within and between states (see Ostrom, 1990; on international cooperation, see Lake, 1988; Oye, 1985; Snidal, 1985). Authority is not a prerequisite for social order. Nonetheless, authority is generally a more efficient or appropriate mechanism for producing order than anarchic cooperation. Because

holders of political authority can legitimately use violence to enforce rules, such actors are uniquely adapted to solve collective action problems. They can extract taxes, labor, or other resources necessary to pay for the production of social order, and they can limit behaviors by individuals that would weaken that order. This can be done directly by the ruler. Alternatively, the ruler can produce order indirectly through what is commonly referred to as leadership. Rulers may not actually defend property rights themselves, for instance, but they may facilitate the organization of property holders to defend their own rights. As long as rulers are consequential for resolving such collective action problems, they can still be credited by the ruled with fulfilling their part of the social contract (Blau, 1964, pp. 213-215). In turn, because the ruled anticipate the suboptimality of strictly voluntary provision, they grant authority to the ruler necessary to solve the free rider problem and consent to the extractions and constraints imposed by that ruler. It is the ability to use violence legitimately that makes the modern state so effective in producing social order on a large scale, and it is this same force that makes hierarchy between states viable and possibly even attractive.

Relational authority between ruler and ruled can be an equilibrium or a self-enforcing contract. Social order is the glue that binds ruler and ruled in an authority relationship. Without the desired social order, the ruled have no reason to subordinate themselves voluntarily to the commands of the ruler, and without the compliance of the ruled, the ruler lacks the endogenous means to produce the social order. This equilibrium becomes more robust as members of the community of subordinates are vested in the existing social order or acquire assets that are themselves specific to the particular order obtained. Actors acquire a wide variety of assets in everyday life, both at the individual and state levels. Individuals buy property, pursue an education, develop specialized knowledge and skills suited to particular occupations, and save for retirement. States invest in infrastructure, specialize in different industries or economic sectors, and develop the ability to project violence to some areas of the world (and not others). Some assets will be generic, easily switched with little loss in value from one use or regime to another. Other assets will be highly specific to a particular authority relationship and the policies it produces, and they can be redeployed to other uses or used under alternative regimes only with substantial loss in value.⁶ In the United States, for instance, Social Security remains the “third rail” of national politics because so many individuals now premise their lifetime consumption and savings decisions on its continued existence. Similarly, given 50 years of increasing globalization, firms make important investment decisions on the expectation of continued trade openness. As actors invest in relationally specific assets, they become dependent on the authority structure that produces a particular social order and, in turn, acquire incentives to support the ruler and suppress possible dissidents who would overturn that order. In this way, the group as a community vested in a particular order and relationship further legitimates the ruler’s authority. Authority becomes more robust—more legitimate—as subordinates acquire more assets that depend on that authority.

Both ruler and ruled benefit from a relational authority contract. The ruler benefits from the social order herself, but pays the costs of providing that order. The subordinates benefit from the social order and the greater prosperity it generates, but give up some measure of autonomy and accept commands to act in ways they would otherwise not choose. Even though both actors benefit, this does not mean that ruler and ruled benefit equally from the relationship. In some cases, subordinates may be able to exploit the ruler and extract a disproportionate share of the joint benefits created by order—the proverbial strong power of weak allies (Keohane, 1971). But more frequently, the ruler will use her ability to set the rules to bias the social order toward her own interests. The power to write rules has been long recognized as an awesome power and may be one of the most important benefits of ruling. Indeed, at the extreme, the ruler may skew the rules to such an extent that subordinates are indifferent between remaining in the contract and reverting back to anarchy, although most rulers likely value future gains sufficiently not to push subordinates toward such fragile, knife-edge equilibria that can be easily perturbed by exogenous shocks. The bias in the ruler's favor is ultimately constrained only by the willingness of the ruled to comply with her commands. Nothing in a relational conception implies that authority is fair or equitable, or that fairness is a requirement for legitimacy.⁷ All that is necessary is that both parties be marginally better off under authority than in the anarchic state of nature they would otherwise inhabit.

Relational Authority, Hierarchy, and International Relations

The formal-legal conception of authority or, more precisely, the absence of formal-legal authority lies at the heart of our prevailing theories of international politics. International relations began to emerge as a distinct discipline about the turn of the last century. Not only was the state then regarded as a normative ideal, but it was the central analytic unit of the positive study of politics. The prevailing “juristic” theory depicted the state as the expression of supreme authority over a territorially defined political community. So constituted, the state was, in turn, regarded as equivalent to a legal person with a will of its own (Schmidt, 1998, pp. 79, 88). This early view of the state heavily influenced the development of key ideas in international relations, enjoying a more enduring intellectual legacy than in any other area of political science.

Taking the state as the natural embodiment of supreme authority, juristic theory necessarily implied an international realm of formally equal and autonomous states interacting in what was already referred to as an anarchic system (Schmidt, 1998, pp. 79, 90, 171, 173). As would later analysts, juristic theorists first excluded from the state system those entities that did not fit their definition of a proper state. “Internal anarchies” that lacked a clearly established hierarchy of authority or otherwise failed

to conform to the European ideal were considered to be “uncivilized” and thereby outside the international system (Schmidt, 1998, pp. 148-149). Having limited analysis to only those units that could be considered supreme authorities, juristic theorists then treated these primordially given states as equivalent to individuals and understood them to live within a state of nature (Schmidt, 1998, pp. 84, 159). Building on John Austin’s conception of law as “a rule laid down for the guidance of an intelligent being by an intelligent being having power over him,” this approach rejected the possibility of international law or authority more generally, seeing what others considered to be international law as norms or guidelines for behavior but not “positive law or . . . law strictly so called”; because law could flow only from duly constituted authorities, international law was conceptually impossible (as cited in Schmidt, 1998, p. 65). In its earliest formulation, then, a particular conception of the state led directly to a particular conception of the international system: Only duly constituted states were members, and all members were formally equal in a system that lacked any authority. Because there is no duly constituted *legal* authority above the state, there could be no authority between states. Thus, even before the school of political realism came to dominate the study of international relations after World War II, the concept of anarchy was already firmly rooted in prevailing theories of world politics.

This formal-legal conception of authority, and the implication that international relations lack authority, are given their most modern and explicit form in the writings of Kenneth Waltz, the founder of the so-called neorealist school. In *Theory of International Politics*, Waltz (1979) posits three dimensions of international structure: the ordering principle, the differentiation of the units, and the distribution of capabilities. Of these dimensions, only the first bears directly on authority and concerns us here. Emphasizing their formal attributes, Waltz defines the ordering principle by how the units stand in relation to one another. In hierarchic systems, according to Waltz (1979), units “stand vis-à-vis each other in relations of super- and subordination . . . [in which] political actors are formally differentiated according to the degrees of their authority,” (p. 81). In such systems, “some are entitled to command, others are required to obey” (Waltz, 1979). In anarchic systems, by contrast, “the parts . . . stand in relations of coordination. Formally, each is the equal of all others” (Waltz, 1979). Reversing the syllogism, he concludes that “none are entitled to command; none are required to obey” (Waltz, 1979, p. 88). Dependent on earlier juristic conceptions of the state in an often unrecognized way, Waltz reaches the same conclusion as earlier formal-legal theorists that the first and most basic dimension of a system is defined by the degree of authority possessed—or not—by the units. States themselves are characterized by internal hierarchies and, in their relations with one another, external anarchy. Relying on a formal-legal conception, international relations rejects the concept of authority as “inappropriate to an international setting” (Clark, 2005, p. 11).

Yet seen through the lens of relational authority, international hierarchies are pervasive. Both in the past and present, states subordinate themselves in whole or

part to the authority of other dominant states. Some subordinate states acknowledge the authority of another in only limited areas, recognizing as legitimate perhaps just the right of a dominant state to regulate their interactions with third parties—traditionally known as a sphere of influence, in military affairs, or an economic zone. This was the price paid by the states of Western Europe during the early Cold War for joining the American-led international order. Following Washington's lead, they sided with the United States against the Soviet Union, foreclosing a possible "third way" in the East-West split, and gave up imperial trade and financial preferences with their current and former colonies. Other subordinates grant a dominant state deeper and more extensive authority, ceding the right to make security policy in a protectorate or economic policy in a dependency. The states of the Caribbean littoral are informal U.S. empires, with Washington exercising substantial but not complete authority over their security and economic policies since the turn of the last century under the Roosevelt Corollary to the Monroe Doctrine. A few states, at an extreme, may even yield complete authority over their security and economic affairs, as in the classical European empires and found most often today in weak form in the "residual" European colonies, between Russia and the states of the near abroad, or between the United States and its dependencies. These relationships—and especially their labels—may seem archaic, but such international hierarchies continue to exist in today's world and, indeed, continue to be formed. Hierarchies remain very much a fact of international politics.⁸

Hierarchy

Hierarchy exists when one actor, the ruler or A, possesses authority over a second actor, the ruled or B. Authority is never total, of course, but varies in extent. A may possess authority over B and issue commands regulating possible Actions 1-5 but not Actions 6-*n*, which remain "private" to B or beyond A's ability to expect compliance. In other words, B may recognize the legitimacy of A's commands regulating its security relations with third parties (A commands B not to ally with others), but not that of any commands A may or may not issue on security cooperation with itself (A cannot command B to join it in a war). In this case, a partial hierarchy exists. In turn, hierarchy increases with the number of B's actions that A can legitimately regulate. If A previously possessed authority over Actions 1-5 and now exerts authority over Actions 1-10, for instance, A's hierarchy over B has increased; A and B now stand in a relationship of greater hierarchy.

All areas of social interaction can be divided into public and private spheres, with political authority exercised over subordinates in the former and excluded from the latter. The greater the number of private actions unregulated by the ruler, the less hierarchical the relationship. Conversely, the greater the number of public areas legitimately controlled by the ruler, the more hierarchical the relationship. So defined, hierarchy is a continuous variable that varies by the number of actions over which

A can legitimately issue commands and expect compliance by B. At one extreme, A possesses no authority over any action B might perform. This is the condition of anarchy that its admirers defend (Wolff, 1998) and the ideal of “Westphalian sovereignty” commonly (but mistakenly) thought to characterize all relationships within the international system (Krasner, 1999). At the other extreme, A possesses the authority to regulate all actions B might perform. In this extreme of complete or pure hierarchy, B possesses no independent rights or autonomous ability to decide anything and is subservient to A in all aspects of social life. Except perhaps in human infancy, cults, and the most totalitarian states, this extreme is seldom approximated. Even within modern states normally regarded as hierarchies, substantial ranges of private action remain. In common language, therefore, in even relatively hierarchical relationships, A possesses authority over many but not all actions by B. In international relations, the most hierarchical relationships take the form of empires, where B is subordinate to A in a broad range of economic and security actions.

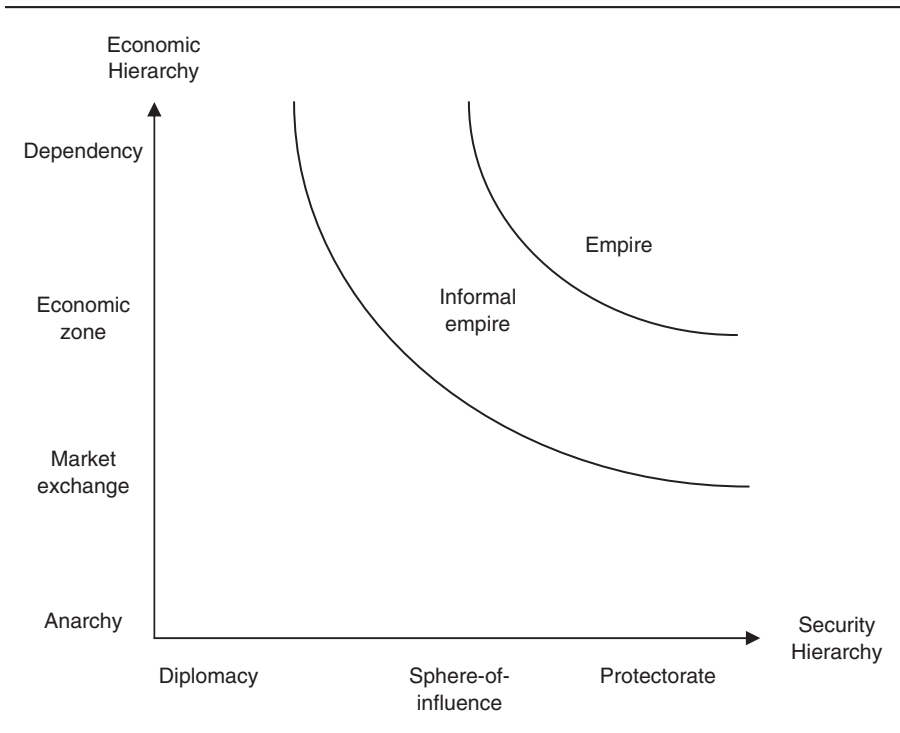
Hierarchy in International Relations

Authority can be disaggregated and hierarchy constructed in any number of ways. Following common practice in international relations, I first distinguish between the broad issue areas of security and economics. These broad issues are then disaggregated into the near infinite number of actions that B might perform that constitute security or economic policy (see Figure 1).

Security policy includes all diplomatic, military, and even economic actions available to a state to lower the risk and effectiveness of coercion from other external actors. Security relationships (the horizontal axis in Figure 1) vary from diplomacy, at the anarchic end of the continuum, to protectorates, at the hierarchic end. Security hierarchy can be captured by two sets of indicators, which I compile for the United States for each country in the international system from 1950 to 2000. Unfortunately, similar data on these indicators are not available for other countries, limiting analysis here for practical purposes to patterns of U.S. hierarchy in the modern world system.⁹

First, authority is suggested by the presence of military forces from the dominant state, A, on the territory of the subordinate state, B. Military troops enable A to influence the security policies of B. A can embroil B in foreign conflicts if it chooses; by launching attacks from B’s territory, for instance, A automatically implicates B in the conflict and makes it a target for retaliation by A’s antagonist, as was the case with the United States and Saudi Arabia in the 1991 Persian Gulf War. In turn, military bases and personnel enable A to restrain possible foreign policy initiatives of B. In South Korea, for instance, the American troops stationed near the border not only serve as a tripwire to immediately draw the United States into any possible conflict started by the North but also insulate North Korea from any potentially provocative actions by the South, important in the early years of the Cold War. Thus, military

Figure 1
Two Dimensions of International Hierarchy



personnel give A positive and negative control over B's security policy. The larger the deployment of A's forces in B relative to B's home population, the more control A can be expected to exert. To the extent that B accepts A's personnel, and indeed integrates these forces into its own defense planning, this control can be regarded as "normalized" or legitimate and, therefore, authoritative. Overseas troop deployments by the United States are divided by national population to adjust for differences in country size. The indicator is then normalized to 1 by its highest value in 1995 (Panama) to make the measures comparable both over time and with the others explained below.

A second indicator of security hierarchy is the number of independent alliances possessed by B, the potentially subordinate state. Two states may share many alliances, indicating only that they are both embedded in a common security network. Such shared alliances may contain within them a security hierarchy, but this cannot be discerned simply by observing the pattern of relationships. If A and B possess an alliance but also enter into alliances with other states that are not shared—referred

to here as independent alliances—this is *prima facie* evidence of foreign policy autonomy. Neither is then obviously dependent on the aid of the other. Most important, B has an “outside” option that reduces A’s ability to exercise control. Alternatively, if all of B’s alliances are shared with A, this may indicate a security hierarchy. B is then dependent on A or A’s other allies for assistance and has no established claims on states not allied with A. The larger the number of such independent alliances possessed by B, the less hierarchical the security relationship is likely to be. To the extent that B’s lack of alternative alliance support makes it dependent on A and therefore subject, at least in part, to A’s influence over its security policy, and B does not undertake actions to diversify its sources of support or break its own alliance and dependence on A, then B is likely to regard A’s influence as necessary and legitimate and, like military personnel, authoritative. Independent alliances are defined as $1 / \text{number of alliance partners of B that are not also alliance partners of A}$.¹⁰ Higher values represent fewer independent alliances and, by implication, greater hierarchy. In cases where A and B are not themselves allied, the number of independent alliances is treated as zero (no security hierarchy). This measure is also normalized to 1 by its highest value for 1995 (shared by nearly all countries in the Americas and Western Europe).

I also compute an aggregate indicator of U.S. security hierarchy as the simple sum of the indices of U.S. troops deployed per capita and the number of independent alliances, again, normalized to 1 for 1995. According to the aggregate index, Panama was the most subordinate state in the system in 1995. All statistical results reported below use either this aggregate measure or both of its components.

Economic policy is quite broad and includes all actions that affect the accumulation and allocation of resources. It ranges from creating property rights and a monetary system, to infrastructure, macroeconomic management, regulation, and—at an extreme—to setting prices and output. Economic relationships between states vary from market exchange, at the anarchic end of the continuum, to dependency, at the hierarchic end (the vertical axis in Figure 1). Economic hierarchy is also captured by two indicators.

First, economic hierarchy varies inversely with a country’s monetary policy autonomy, which is defined, in turn, by its exchange rate regime.¹¹ Key to any economy’s prices and monetary stability is its exchange rate regime, or how the price of its national currency is set relative to the price of other currencies. At one extreme, a country can allow its currency to float against others, with its exchange rate being determined by demand and supply in financial markets. Under floating exchange rates, domestic monetary policy is freed from concerns about the current account balance and, thus, implies no economic hierarchy. At the other extreme, a country adopts the currency of a foreign state as its own, a process known as “dollarization” but actually more general than the name implies. Even though small amounts of the national currency may remain in circulation, the country uses the foreign currency as its primary legal tender. At this step, without variable foreign reserves to cushion the impact

of external shocks, the country directly imports A's monetary policy; the quantity of currency in circulation depends not on B's policy decisions but entirely on A's monetary policy. Exchange rate regimes are coded here into a 4-point scale ranging from various floating exchange rate mechanisms, to a crawling peg relative to the dollar, a fixed exchange rate to the dollar, and finally to a "merged" currency in the form of either a currency board or dollarization. At each step on this scale, the tie between the country's currency and the dollar becomes tighter and more costly to break, giving the United States more control over the subordinate country's monetary policy. This index is also normalized by its highest value in 1995 (common to 11 countries, mostly in the Caribbean and Central America).

Economic hierarchy is also implied by trade dependence. Trade has long been understood to create the potential for political influence. This key insight parallels that on independent alliances in security hierarchies. If a state has many trade partners, it is likely to have greater political autonomy, and any attempt to manipulate trade for political purposes will be ineffective. If a country is highly dependent on trade with another, however, it is vulnerable to the influence of that state. Countries trade for many reasons. Nonetheless, the failure of governments over the long term to diversify their trading partners indicates a tacit acceptance of the dominant state's potential influence and therefore its legitimacy and authority. Relative trade dependence is measured as each country's total trade with the United States divided by its own GDP, minus similar ratios for the other permanent members of the United Nations Security Council (China, France, the United Kingdom, and Russia, along with the United States, collectively known as the "P5"). The index is truncated at 0 (no hierarchy) and normalized to 1 for the highest value in 1995 (Canada). Countries that trade more as a percentage of GDP with the United States than with all the other P5 states are relatively trade dependent, and countries that trade more with the other P5 states than with the United States are relatively independent.

As with the security measures, I compute an aggregate indicator of U.S. economic hierarchy as the simple sum of two indices, again normalized to 1 for 1995. According to this measure, Canada is the state most economically subordinate to the United States in 1995.

These two sets of measures are clearly tailored to the modern international system. I do not pretend that they are universally valid.¹² But importantly, they are intended to capture not purely coercive relations between states but, rather, the authority and legitimate coercion that are central to hierarchical relationships between states. All four indicators reflect the more or less discretionary nature of the ties between dominant and subordinate states, and thus the implicit conferral of authority by the latter to the former. Subordinates confer authority on a dominant state when they accept its troops on their soil or use its currency as their own. Likewise, states are indirectly signaling that they recognize the authority of the dominant state when they fail to make efforts to diversify their alliances or trading partners. Without detailed, case-specific information, we cannot know whether subordinate states and their populations accept

these hierarchical relationships as truly legitimate or not, and even in specific cases legitimacy may not be directly knowable. But the discretion in these policies and their enduring nature clearly separate these measures analytically from those intended to capture more purely coercive or nonauthoritative relationships between states.

Relational Authority in Action

As explained above, the exchange or contract between ruler and ruled is central to the relational approach to authority. The ruler provides a social order of value to the ruled while the ruled confer legitimacy on the ruler and accept those commands necessary to bring about that social order. In short, the ruled give up some measure of their autonomy—or, in the case of states, their sovereignty—in exchange for valued services provided by the ruler. Social order provides a degree of security for the subordinate in return for its compliance. Through this exchange, relational authority affects the choices and policies of states in important and fundamental ways. The resulting syndrome of behaviors is, if not inconsistent, at least unexpected in current theories of international relations premised on the condition of international anarchy. Verifying these patterns of behavior thus supports the theory of relational authority and the presence of hierarchy in international politics. This syndrome of behaviors has four major components, the third and fourth of which are presented here in detail.

First, as I demonstrate elsewhere, security hierarchy reduces the level of defense spending relative to the GDP in subordinate states (Lake, 2007). Subordinate states depend on dominant states for a measure of social order and, having received protection for their persons, property, and promises, divert scarce resources to other valued uses. It follows, therefore, that countries in hierarchical security relationships, all else held constant, spend fewer of their own resources on security and rely more on the efforts of their dominant protector. This is a key national benefit for which states are willing to give up or “sell” some measure of their sovereignty.

Second, as also shown elsewhere, security and economic hierarchy increase trade openness in subordinate states, and this effect is stronger in pairs of countries that are subordinate to the same dominant state (Lake, 2009). To the extent that subordinates escape the state of nature through international hierarchy and enjoy a measure of social order, they are more willing to open themselves to international trade and investment and to risk becoming dependent on others. Where international rules governing exchange are secure, and especially when the dominant state itself has an interest in enforcing those rules, states are more likely to engage in international commerce and seek the benefits of an international division of labor. Thus, the greater the security and economic hierarchy exerted by the dominant state over a subordinate, the more economically open it will be. This effect is particularly evident when both parties to an exchange are subordinate to the same dominant state.

In such cases, not only does the dominant state protect both parties to a degree, but also they enjoy similar rules governing exchange, thereby reducing transactions costs, and can expect assistance from the dominant state in adjudicating disputes should they arise. Greater openness to international exchange, a deeper division of labor, and by inference greater economic welfare are immediate benefits for subordinate countries of the social order provided by a dominant state.

Protecting Subordinates

If subordinates are exchanging sovereignty for protection, in equilibrium, dominant states must actually provide the promised defense or else the former will withdraw their legitimacy. Both dominant and subordinate states must fulfill their parts in the exchange for any authority relationship to endure. This implies in a third behavioral component of hierarchy that the United States is more likely to come to the aid of subordinate than nonsubordinate states and that this effect will be increasing in the level of hierarchy.¹³ The obligation of the United States to come to the aid of its subordinates is not ironclad, however, as one means of limiting opportunistic behavior or moral hazard by subordinates is not to make absolutely binding commitments to their defense. Not all subordinates will be bailed out in all circumstances. Nonetheless, some number must be protected for subordinates to believe on average that they will benefit from their relationship with the dominant state. Thus, I hypothesize that the United States is more likely to join conflicts in which a subordinate is involved than crises in which no subordinate is involved, where joining means that the United States itself becomes a crisis participant by bringing its diplomatic support or military force to bear on events. This relationship, moreover, is continuous: The more hierarchical the relationship between the United States and the subordinate state, the more likely it is to join an ongoing dispute.

This proposition can be assessed directly by examining whether the United States is more likely to join ongoing disputes in which one or more of its subordinates are involved than otherwise. The set of international disputes examined here is drawn from the Militarized Interstate Disputes (MID) data set, compiled by the Correlates of War project (<http://www.correlatesofwar.org>; see also Ghosn, Palmer, & Bremer, 2004). I include all eligible conflicts between 1950 and 2000. The dependent variable is whether the United States joined an ongoing dispute. I exclude from analysis all conflicts in which the United States is coded as an original participant; if the United States is an originating actor, it cannot be considered to "join" in any meaningful sense. This may misidentify cases, of course, where the United States enters a conflict immediately or even preemptively to assist a subordinate, but I err on the side of exclusion.

The MID data set includes 1,218 disputes between 1950 and 2000 in which the United States is not an originating party. A state joins an ongoing dispute when it initiates a militarized action or is the target of a militarized action by one or more

Table 1
U.S. Hierarchy and the Probability of Joining
a Militarized Interstate Dispute (MID), 1950-2000

	Model 1 (<i>n</i> = 761)		Model 2 (<i>n</i> = 760)	
	β	<i>SE</i>	β	<i>SE</i>
Index of Security Hierarchy _(<i>t</i>-1)	1.1146**	0.3559		
Index of Military Personnel _(<i>t</i>-1)			0.7488***	0.1860
Index of Independent Alliances _(<i>t</i>-1)			-0.6961	0.7760
Index of Economic Hierarchy _(<i>t</i>-1)	1.6458*	0.7039		
Index of Exchange Rate Regimes _(<i>t</i>-1)			1.7747*	0.7671
Index of Relative Trade Dependence _(<i>t</i>-1)			2.0501***	0.4264
Duration of dispute	0.0009	0.0006	0.0007	0.0007
Level of violence in dispute	0.4650**	0.1776	0.4950**	0.1738
Constant	-5.2409***	0.4825	-5.2642	0.5579

Note: Dependent variable: U.S. joins an ongoing MID (*no join* = 0; *join* = 1). Rare events logit; robust standard errors. Excludes three high-leverage outliers.

p* < .05. *p* < .01. ****p* < .001.

states already involved. By requiring some military action, this creates a relatively high threshold for joining. Of the 764 disputes for which we have complete data, the United States joined only 20 (approximately 2.6%). Although the United States is frequently involved in militarized disputes, according to the full data set, it is most typically an originating state and not a joiner. Nonetheless, the hypothesis being tested here is not about overall involvement but about aiding subordinates.

Hierarchy is operationalized as above. I measure hierarchy for the originating state with the highest level on each indicator. For those disputes that the United States did not join, I use the highest level of hierarchy on each measure of any originating state. In disputes that the United States did join, I code for the highest level of hierarchy on each measure of any originating state on the side it eventually supported. It should be noted that this construction biases the test against finding any significant effect for hierarchy on joining. By coding for the highest level for any originator in those cases where the United States did not join, it raises the hurdle over which levels of hierarchy must pass in those instances where it did join.

The effects of hierarchy on the likelihood that the United States will join a dispute are presented in Table 1. Because joining is a dichotomous variable and a rare event, I use rare events logit to estimate the models (King & Zeng, 2001). I include as covariates the duration of the crisis and the highest level of violence eventually reached in the crisis to control for the joint possibility that states at risk of longer and more intense conflicts may seek shelter in a hierarchical relationship with the United

Table 2
U.S. Hierarchy and the Relative Risk of Joining a Militarized
Interstate Dispute (MID), 1950-2000

Hierarchy Indicator	Relative Risk
Index of Security Hierarchy _(t-1) (Model 1)	75
Index of Military Personnel _(t-1) (Model 2)	6
Index of Independent Alliances _(t-1) (Model 2)	<i>ns</i>
Index of Economic Hierarchy _(t-1) (Model 1)	103
Index of Exchange Rate Regimes _(t-1) (Model 2)	83
Index of Relative Trade Dependence _(t-1) (Model 2)	19

Note: Based on models reported in Table 1, increase in the likelihood (in %) of the United States joining an ongoing MID as each index increases from its minimum value (0, no hierarchy) to its 75th percentile. All estimates are significant at $p < .01$. *ns* = coefficient not significant.

States and that the United States itself may join longer and more violent crises.¹⁴ All independent variables are lagged 1 year from the start of the crisis to deal with potential problems of endogeneity.

As expected, the United States is significantly more likely to join a dispute the greater its level of hierarchy over an originating party. Because the coefficients cannot be interpreted directly, the easiest way to understand these results is by calculating the relative risk that the United States will join a dispute as each hierarchy indicator is increased from its minimum value (zero) to its 75th percentile while holding all other variables at their mean values.¹⁵ These results are presented in Table 2. The substantive effect of hierarchy is large. Increasing economic hierarchy to the 75th percentile, for instance, increases the likelihood that the United States will join a dispute by 103%.

The United States is more likely to come to the aid of its subordinates than it is to aid other states, and this effect is increasing in the level of hierarchy. Subordinates have some justification for expecting the United States to fulfill its commitment to help defend them from foreign threats. These results provide relatively direct and powerful support for the importance of performance legitimacy and the theory of relational authority outlined above.

Legitimizing Dominant States

In return for social order, the theory of relational authority implies that subordinates legitimate dominant states by accepting their authority and usually (but not always) complying with their commands. Living within a social order and respecting the authority of another state implies that subordinates alter their behavior from what they would otherwise choose in the state of nature. Demonstrating that subordinates

comply with the wishes of a dominant state, however, remains difficult. Compliance with authority is observationally equivalent to states cooperating under autonomous but similar preferences, compliance under the shadow of coercion, or abdication by the dominant state. Given a social order provided by the dominant state, in turn, compliance is often in the self-interest of the subordinate state. We can best see the role of authority in altering behavior, instead, in the costly actions of subordinate states through which they signal their assent to the authority of the dominant state. Subordinates demonstrate respect for authority by engaging in what might be called symbolic obeisance, a fourth component of behavior that I define as costly acts that do not involve direct compliance with commands but are nonetheless public, often collective displays of submission that acknowledge and affirm the authority of the ruler.¹⁶ Symbolic obeisance, in fact, legitimates and strengthens a ruler by reinforcing the beliefs of other subordinates that the performer also respects the authority of the ruler. Importantly, to the extent that states engage in symbolic obeisance we can infer that at least some portion of their broader pattern of compliance is a product of their respect for authority.

Within countries, symbolic obeisance takes many forms, including parades and patriotic celebrations on holidays, respect for the flag or other national symbols (monuments, ancient battlegrounds), and deference to political leaders (including the use of titles or grants of special privileges). In the United States, two of the most visible symbolic rituals are reciting the Pledge of Allegiance in schools and singing the national anthem before sporting and other public events. None of these actions is very costly to any single individual—if they were, more individuals would opt out and the actions would lose their collective, affirming purpose—but summed over all individuals and events the costs are not inconsequential.

In international relations, where the authority of one state over another is not legally recognized, symbolic obeisance is less overt but nonetheless important. Despite the often visible trappings of formal equality between states, newly elected presidents and prime ministers of subordinate states nearly always visit the U.S. president at the White House first, rather than the president visiting their national capitals. Following the ancient pattern of imperial supplicants, for instance, postwar British prime ministers have on average visited the president within 6 months of assuming office and all have visited within the first year. Israeli prime ministers have on average called at the White House to pay their respects in less than 2.5 months, and some have appeared in Washington within days of their elections (U.S. Department of State, n.d.). Similarly, American naval ships routinely make ports of call in subordinate states to “show the flag,” whereas far fewer foreign vessels visit U.S. ports. The United Nations, International Monetary Fund, World Bank, and Organization of American States, to name but a few international organizations, are all headquartered in the United States not because of its neutral status but because Washington, D.C., or New York form the “imperial” centers of an international

Table 3
U.S. Hierarchy and the Iraq War Coalition, 2003

	Model 1 (<i>n</i> = 119)		Model 2 (<i>n</i> = 119)	
	β	<i>SE</i>	β	<i>SE</i>
Index of Security Hierarchy	3.943***	1.175		
Index of Military Personnel			8.359	6.385
Index of Independent Alliances			1.625**	0.591
Index of Economic Hierarchy	-0.357	0.837		
Index of Exchange Rate Regimes			-0.47	0.862
Index of Relative Trade Dependence			0.406	1.243
Member of former Soviet Union or Warsaw Pact	2.771***	0.624	2.992***	0.664
Democracy	0.09	0.057	0.126*	0.059
Constant	-2.643***	0.547	-2.905***	0.64
Pseudo <i>R</i> ²	.261		.298	

Note: Dependent variable: join coalition of the willing (*no* = 0, *join* = 1). Logit; robust standard errors. All independent variables measured in 2000.

p* < .05. *p* < .01. ****p* < .001.

social order. If we but peel back the surface of Westphalian international relations, we can see many rituals of obeisance in the everyday practice of world politics.

More systematically, states signal their subordination in their strong tendency to follow the United States into war. Much of this follow-the-leader behavior is purely symbolic, as the subordinates contribute few and often no resources to the effort and have little prewar trade or investment at stake. Nonetheless, declaring war on another state is always a costly act. Where the forms of symbolic supplication just described might be dismissed by skeptics, declarations of war lay at the heart of a subordinate's sovereignty and security. Even if active hostilities are not engaged, war places a country at risk of retaliation—as the terror attack on Spain on March 11, 2004, for its largely symbolic participation in the war on Iraq visibly attests. Joining a conflict is particularly costly for small and distant states that could otherwise hide and safely avoid becoming embroiled in wars fought by others over issues in which they do not have a direct stake. Following a leader into such wars is, then, a bit of a mystery for conventional theories of international relations but makes sense here as an act of obeisance that affirms and legitimates the authority of a dominant state.

There has been a clear pattern of subordinates following the United States into war over the last century. The participation of Latin American states in World War I is telling, as few had any significant interests in the distant conflagration. Although we lack systematic data on security or economic hierarchy in the pre-World War I era, there is little doubt that the United States possessed at least a measure of authority over most countries in its hemisphere after 1900. Prior to the entry of the United States into the largely European war on April 6, 1917, no Central or South American

country had declared war or broken relations with Germany or Austria-Hungary. In the succeeding months, however, 12 Latin American states joined the hostilities not as combatants but by severing their relations and, in some cases, officially declaring war against the Central powers.¹⁷ A similar trend arose in World War II. Despite strong fascist sympathies in some countries, with Paraguay even contemplating joining the Axis in the opening months of the war, no Latin American state had severed relations or declared war on Germany, Italy, or Japan before the attack on Pearl Harbor on December 8, 1941. Yet by the end of the war, most Latin American states had joined the Allies, although some did so rather late in February 1945 only when victory was imminent.¹⁸ For all, declaring war was largely a symbolic gesture aimed not at the Axis powers but at the United States.

The effects of U.S. hierarchy on participation in Operation Iraqi Freedom in 2003 are particularly striking (see Table 3). Although few countries actively supported the regime of Saddam Hussein in Iraq, the preventive war undertaken by the United States was widely opposed internationally. Indeed, in the days preceding the outbreak of hostilities, the United States withdrew a draft resolution authorizing the war from the United Nations Security Council once it faced inevitable defeat. In response, the United States leaned on its subordinates to support the war and thereby legitimate its actions, finally putting together a coalition announced with great fanfare at the White House (White House, Office of the Press Secretary, 2003). Some traditional subordinates, like Germany, refused to join. Compliance was by no means universal. Yet as shown in Table 3, states that were subordinate to the United States in security relations (Model 1), and especially states that lacked independent alliances (Model 2), were much more likely to join the coalition.¹⁹ Holding other variables at their means, the likelihood (relative risk) that states would join the U.S.-led coalition increased by 318% as the index of security hierarchy increased from its minimum value to the 75th percentile and by 245% as the index of independent alliances increased by a similar amount. Economic hierarchy, in this instance, appears to have had no effect on the probability of joining the coalition (and may have exerted a negative effect). States from the former Soviet Union and Eastern Europe who were actively courting the United States to protect them from a possibly renewed Russian hierarchy were also highly likely to join. Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld's much publicized and criticized distinction between "Old Europe" and "New Europe" had a real basis in the pattern of support for the United States. Democracies were also disproportionately likely to join the coalition.

In the end, virtually all members of Operation Iraqi Freedom were subordinates of the United States in some degree.²⁰ When support was needed to legitimate its preventive war, the United States could count on its subordinates to lend a symbolic hand. These results give new meaning to the phrase "coalition of the willing." More important, for my purposes, they also provide strong evidence that subordinate states undertake costly actions that legitimate a dominant state.

Conclusion

We have all seen “Gestalt shift” pictures. In one, we naturally focus on the white outline and observe a goblet, but when we focus on the black outline we see, often with some initial difficulty, two faces in profile. These “trick” pictures are designed to remind us that perception is more complex than it might at first appear and that we need to look differently at the world around us. Authority in international relations is like such a picture. We are drawn by our dominant theories to see the international system as an anarchy, a state of nature, a world of self-help. Refocusing on hierarchy, however, alters that perception. States possess and exert relational authority over other states, they command and receive compliance, they create a social order with differing roles and responsibilities. Seeing hierarchy does not erase the prior vision, just as seeing the faces does not mean that the goblet has literally disappeared. To accept that authority can and does exist within the international system does not negate everything we once knew about world politics. Great powers may still engage in *realpolitik* in their more anarchic relations with each other. But refocusing on hierarchy shows us an alternative, more complex, and less unique political world that affects national behavior in profound ways—whether we choose to see it or not.

International politics is a most inhospitable realm in which to find authority at work. Observing relational authority in what is normally regarded as a wholly anarchic environment suggests its importance in other venues as well. Like other articles in this collection, the notion of relational authority developed here depends on the concept of performance legitimacy. For the authority contract to be an equilibrium, the dominant state must deliver the goods, in this case a relatively secure social order. More generally, relational authority can be understood to underlie many established and even legal institutions. In the introduction, I alluded to the role of relational authority in prelegal societies. Others point to the role of performance legitimacy in established states. To earn legitimacy, as Margaret Levi (1988, 1997) has shown, even democratic governments must be understood as fulfilling their part of the authority contract. As the literature on state failure shows by inverse example, regimes that fail to provide basic public goods and services are much more likely to collapse. Collectively, this focus on performance legitimacy moves us away from established notions of formal-legal authority and toward a richer and more complex view of authority in the modern world.

Notes

1. The literature on authority is substantial. For a useful guide to the various approaches and debates, see Simmons (2002). For a collection of the classic readings, see Raz (1990).

2. Throughout, A will be used to refer to the ruler, B to the ruled or subordinate. Although B is used in the singular, it is always a *set* of subordinates conceived as individuals as the fundamental units of analysis. Where otherwise unavoidable, I shall use the gendered pronouns of “she” for A and “he” for B.

3. On the social nature of legitimacy, see Reus-Smit (2007, p. 159).
4. This conception of authority is rooted in the work of Max Weber (1978, pp. 215-226), who referred to it as rational or legal authority. It was later incorporated into and evolved as the juristic theory of the state. See below.
5. There is a long philosophical tradition underpinning contractual theories of the state, but several of the most important contemporary works include Auster and Silver (1979), North (1981), Levi (1988), and Olson (2000). For recent extensions of this approach, see Lake (1992), Lake and Baum (2001), and Baum and Lake (2003).
6. On asset specificity, see Williamson (1975, 1985). On the role of specific assets in international hierarchy, see Lake (1999).
7. Work on the psychology of legitimacy, which emphasizes notions of fairness, would disagree. See Tyler (1990, 2001).
8. For other studies that use a related conception of hierarchy, see Cooley (2005), Donnelly (2006), Hobson and Sharman (2005), and K. Weber (2000).
9. The continua and measures discussed in this section are defined in greater detail in Lake (2003, 2007, 2009). Data sources and definitions are available as an appendix to Lake (2007) at http://dss.ucsd.edu/~dlake/documents/ISDataAppendix_000.pdf.
10. B is assumed to be allied with itself: The denominator is always at least 1.
11. On exchange rate regimes as hierarchies, see Cohen (1998, especially chap. 5).
12. For a longer discussion and defense of the construct, face, convergent, and discriminant validity of these measures, see Lake (2007, in press).
13. The theory does not expect any particular pattern of conflict involvement by subordinate states. A promise by a great power to protect a subordinate state may deter challenges, but it may also prompt the target state to engage in more risky behavior by provoking potential challengers or taking a more intransigent stance in negotiations. In turn, the dominant country also exercises increasing control over the subordinate's foreign policy as hierarchy increases. Indeed, it is precisely the desire to limit the risks of opportunistic behavior by partners, such as that stimulated by guarantees of protection, that prompts dominant countries to invest in more hierarchical relationships (Lake, 1999). Without a fully developed model, and theoretical expectations about where and how these thresholds might possibly operate, the net effect of hierarchy on conflict behavior is ambiguous.
14. The results are robust to the inclusion of additional but theoretically unmotivated covariates, including the number of actors in the crisis and the Cold War.
15. Relative risk will be familiar to most readers from medical studies that typically report results in the form of, say, smoking increases the risk of lung cancer by some specified percentage, bike helmets reduce the risk of serious injury in an accident by some percentage, and so on. The percentage of change figures in the final column of Table 2 should be interpreted in the same way.
16. Symbolic obeisance, then, is a performative, a term introduced to the English language by John Austin for verbs that refer to actions that are not true or false but are themselves actions and carry meaning only through what they signify. See Laitin (2006), citing Austin (1961, pp. 66-67) and Pitkin (1972, p. 280).
17. Only two nonsubordinate countries (Greece and Thailand) joined the war after the United States (U-S-History.com, n.d.).
18. Some 19 Latin American states eventually joined World War II either by severing relations or, more commonly, declaring war on the Axis powers. Only Brazil contributed troops. For a concise description of the actions taken by various countries in World War II, see *Kommersant* (2005).
19. It is not entirely clear what the relevant covariates are for these two models. The security hierarchy variable is, nonetheless, highly robust to the inclusion of a battery of control variables, including GDP per capita, democracy, and geographic proximity.
20. The exceptions are Afghanistan (which was not subordinate in 2000, but was in 2003), the Slovak Republic and Latvia (which were courting the United States to become subordinates), Rwanda, and the microstates of the Solomon Islands, Monaco, Sao Tome and Principe, and Andorra (for which we lack data on the hierarchy measures).

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