Revolutionary Contagion and International Politics
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Introduction
Ideologies and International Relations

Do ideological differences between states affect their relations? Is there likely to be more conflict between states that have different ideologies to justify their right to rule? Are states that resemble each other ideologically more likely to get along? There has clearly been tremendous debate in the past several centuries over how to organize domestic politics. Monarchists have clashed with democrats, fascists with communists, Arab nationalists with Islamists, and so on. But do these struggles fundamentally affect how international politics has been conducted?

Some examples from history seem to suggest that they have. The Cold War seemed to divide the world into rival blocs of communist and democratic states. The French Revolutionary Wars pitted monarchs against democrats. The Arab Cold War at first pitted leftist Arab nationalists and conservative Arab monarchs against each other. The Three Emperors’ League bound conservative monarchs together against liberal states.

On the other hand, there are many cases in international politics where states with drastically different domestic systems align and states with a similar ideology conflict. What followed the Three Emperors’ League was an alliance between autocratic Russia and republican France. The Arab Cold War moved from a clash between monarchs and Arab nationalist republics to a clash within the Arab nationalist camp—Nasserist versus Baathist. The Cold War often had democracies siding with autocrats, and the major communist states—Russia and China—at loggerheads.

There is a long-standing tradition in international relations (IR) that argues that how states use ideologies to justify their rule matters for international politics, and that states similar in this regard are more likely to cooperate, while dissimilar states are more likely to conflict. Raymond Aron, for example, suggested that heterogeneous systems, “where the states are organized according to different principles and appeal to contradictory values,” are more conflict-prone than homogeneous systems.¹ Likewise, Mark Haas argues that greater

ideological distance between states will increase threat perceptions and lead to conflict.2

Much of international relations scholarship, though, either implicitly or explicitly, disagrees with this “ideological” tradition. One prominent tradition in the study of international politics, the realist school, argues that international relations are driven by the distribution of capabilities in the international system, and that ideological differences are irrelevant.3 Others simply ignore the notion that these ideological debates have been important—an implicit rejection. Most of the scholarship on how different regime types affect international politics divides those types into democratic and autocratic regimes and makes claims about how democratic regimes have certain domestic properties that make their foreign policy different, or about how democratic dyads are different from the alternatives.4 Even the dichotomy of democratic and autocratic regimes masks much of the ideological struggle that has occurred between regimes grouped together as autocratic. This does not capture, for example, any differences between fascists and communists, or between conservative Arab monarchies and Arab secular nationalists.

If the “ideological” tradition makes too strong an assumption that ideological differences between states will always matter, those that reject the notion that ideological differences can be salient for international politics also go too far. One of the basic insights that drives this book is that ideological differences between states do matter, but they matter in certain times and certain places, for particular political reasons. Ideological differences between states do not always


3 My use of “realism” in this book refers to the argument that, given anarchy, the distribution of capabilities shapes international politics, and domestic characteristics such as ideological regime types are irrelevant. This is characteristic of what is variously termed “structural realism” or “neorealism” or “balance-of-power realism.” For representatives, see Kenneth Waltz, Theory of International Politics (Reading: Addison-Wesley, 1979); John J. Mearsheimer, The Tragedy of Great Power Politics (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 2001).

prompt conflict, nor do similarities prompt cooperation. A better question than whether ideological differences matter in international politics is when, why, and how much they matter. Because ideological differences between states might matter at some times and not others, we need mechanisms that vary. A social identity mechanism, for example, asserts that states sort into in-groups and out-groups based on commonalities and differences. Such an approach would expect like states to universally gravitate toward each other and unlike states to repel each other. It cannot explain why such differences would be sometimes politically salient and sometimes not.

Is there a mechanism that explains why ideological differences between states become salient for international politics in some times and places and not in others? I propose that there is. One principal mechanism explaining why there could be conflict between ideologically different states is when rulers think an ideology is spreading. This is not something that is always salient across time and space. Ideologically different states can coexist. Some ideological differences between states might be irrelevant in terms of fear of contagion. The United States, for example, does not fear that the Islamic theocracy that is Saudi Arabia is a serious threat to its democratic order. But in certain circumstances, where there are fears that a rival way of organizing domestic politics is catching on, this can have a profound effect on international politics.

An examination of states’ response to revolutions provides a particularly useful window into the question of the ideological differences between states. Revolutions are in some respects natural experiments. While certain attributes of the system, such as the distribution of power, often remain relatively constant, a stark change in the principles upon which one of the states is organized creates ideological differences between that state and others in the system. Revolutions are inherently transformations in the “political institutions and the justifications for political authority in a society.”

The outcome of revolutions—that there is a

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5 Jack A. Goldstone, “Toward a Fourth Generation of Revolutionary Theory,” *Annual Review of Political Science* 1 (2001): 142. Revolutions are defined as broadly as Charles Tilly’s “a forcible transfer of power over a state in the course of which at least two distinct blocs of contenders make incompatible claims to control the state” and as narrowly as Theda Skocpol’s “rapid basic transformations of a society’s state and class structures … accompanied and in part carried through by class-based revolts from below.” Jack Goldstone’s four criteria accord more with the common usage of the term: (1) new ways to justify political authority, (2) accompanied by formal or informal mass mobilization, (3) accompanied by noninstitutionalized action (which encompasses both violent and nonviolent revolutions), and (4) existing authorities are undermined. Two of these involve the outcome and two involve the process. Scholars of the causes of revolutions, given their focus, often define revolution according to a particular process, but arguably what is most important in whether an event is commonly dubbed a revolution is the outcome. The old elites are removed and there is a new ideology justifying power. For example, the Free Officers’ coup in Egypt in 1952 is often called a revolution because the officers displaced the monarchy with a new regime based on pan-Arabism. Charles Tilly, *European Revolutions, 1492–1992* (Cambridge: Wiley-Blackwell, 1996), 8; Theda Skocpol, *States and Social Revolutions: A Comparative Analysis of France, Russia, and China* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1979), 4.
new regime that is based on a different legitimating ideology—is often what is most salient for the international effects of revolutions. Revolutions also point to a dynamic that helps to explain why ideological differences might be salient at particular times and not others. One reason heterogeneous systems—systems with different regime types—may at times be conflict-prone is that the different types fear the possibility of the other type spreading. This prospect is not something that is constant throughout time. It is salient in particular periods, when it is alternately hoped and feared that an ideology is on the march, and a revolution associated with the ideology is seen as the beginning of a larger wave that will sweep up other nations. This, however, is not consistent even across revolutions.

This book asks two main questions. First, if variations in fear of foreign revolutions cause variations in state reactions, then when exactly do leaders fear the domestic repercussions of revolutions abroad? To draw an analogy from the field of epidemiology (as leaders themselves do when discussing “revolutionary contagion”), I argue that the fear of contagion is derived not primarily from the infecting agent (the revolutionary state) but from the characteristics of the host (the established ruler). Whether the revolutionary state merely serves as a model for revolution or whether it also acts as a platform, attempting to spread revolution abroad, is not the crucial distinction. The fear of contagion is salient when rulers fear a foreign revolution will inspire movements within their country to subvert the existing order. I show that a useful proxy for the salience of this threat is the presence of significant opposition groups of the same character as the revolution. In short, I show that established leaders reason by analogy: they fear foreign revolutions when those events empower groups that they perceive to resemble their own existing opponents.

The second, more important question this book addresses is how and to what extent the prospect of a revolutionary wave affects international affairs. One possibility is that such fears do not have much of an effect—leaders of other states successfully repress their opposition while maintaining their usual geopolitical priorities. I assume, however, that when leaders have reason to fear that a revolution will spread, that fear will indeed affect patterns of cooperation and conflict in predictable ways: fearful leaders will align against the revolutionary state and with other states that face the same threat. These states are often of a similar regime type, though not necessarily so. Rather than engage the revolutionary state, they will try to destroy it or at least isolate it to prevent it from becoming a successful model and/or acting as a platform. Further, they will cooperate with states that face the same threat in order to coordinate both their policies against the revolutionary state and their efforts to suppress the transnational ideological movement. These priorities lead to policies that are otherwise puzzling, such as states shifting their alignments based on ideological changes rather than changes
in the balance of power, policies of hostility toward countries that one might expect to be allies, and unexpectedly restrained relations with former rivals.

My argument, which I will call the domestic contagion effects theory, does not exhaust the ways in which ideologies can affect international politics. There are a variety of ways to define political ideology. Political scientists who are interested in explaining the behavior of individuals, such as voting behavior, often define ideology as a personal belief system that is relatively stable and coherent and that guides the individual’s behavior. One way ideology can impact international politics is through the belief systems of leaders. However, in the “ideological” tradition of international relations that I refer to, and here in this book, ideology is defined at a more macro level. An ideology is a particular vision “for ordering domestic politics.” In other words, an ideology can be a broad framework or set of principles that legitimizes rule. In practice, it refers to broad camps of regime types that have similar principles for legitimating rule, such as fascist, democratic, monarchical, Arab nationalist, or communist regimes. I focus on how leaders can fear the spread of an ideology to their own polity following a revolution elsewhere. There are other ways in which ideologies can spread as well. Seva Gunitsky, in his work on how hegemonic shocks have helped determine the nature of regimes, examines how hegemons that emerge apparently successful from such a shock, such as victors of a major war, can prompt emulation of their regime type, in addition to using coercion and inducements to spread their type. Even given the fear of contagion from a revolution, there are two conceptually distinct reasons leaders could have such a fear. They may fear revolutionary contagion for geopolitical reasons—that is, they fear the wave will displace the regime of an ally. Or they may fear it for domestic reasons—that is, they fear the wave will envelop their own polity. I focus on the latter—how fears of domestic disorder affect relations with other states. This is one of the main ways leaders find ideological differences between states politically alarming, and it is both theoretically interesting and neglected by scholars.

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Leaders are faced with various challenges to their rule. Some challenges are direct, in the form of armed conflict, and some are indirect. Some indirect challenges emanate from abroad, and others come from within the state. The way indirect challenges to leaders’ rule coming from abroad affect foreign affairs has not been extensively addressed in the study of international relations, but such an approach posits interesting ways in which international and domestic factors interact, causing outcomes that are anomalous from a geopolitical perspective. The focus of leaders is the interests of the political regime or the social order, which does not always coincide with the international interests of the state.\(^\text{10}\)

Scholars have increasingly been aware that international factors can have domestic effects—the “second image reversed” effect.\(^\text{11}\) The diffusion mechanism has received particular attention, especially regarding the spread of liberalism—free markets and democracy.\(^\text{12}\) This has also reached the literature on revolutions and why they sometimes spread.\(^\text{13}\) If leaders are cognizant of how international factors could affect their polity, one would expect that this awareness would affect not just their domestic policy but their foreign policy as well.\(^\text{14}\) They would anticipate or experience such an effect and therefore pursue a foreign policy that shapes international politics in a way that benefits them domestically. In

\(^{10}\) For some of the literature explaining international politics in terms of the security of regimes, or leaders, or social orders, see, for example, Giacomo Chiozza and H. E. Goemans, *Leaders and International Conflict* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011); Bruce Bueno de Mesquita et al., *The Logic of Political Survival* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2003); David Skidmore, ed., *Contested Social Orders and International Politics* (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 1997).


other words, if international factors play a role in preserving or eroding a regime, leaders have a strong incentive to shape those factors if they can. This second-image-reversed approach to the study of foreign policy provides a more interactive understanding of the relationship between domestic instability and international conflict than does the dominant narrative, the diversionary theory, which holds that the causal arrow runs only from the domestic independent variable to the international dependent variable. One reason scholars study the outbreak of revolution is because it provides us with clues about what constitutes domestic order. The effects revolutions can have on international politics likewise give us an insight into what constitutes international order, and how order at the domestic and international level interact.\textsuperscript{15}

Beyond the theoretical insights, I aim to show that in certain periods in international relations, one simply cannot make sense of international politics—patterns of alliances and wars—without considering the fear of contagion. The contest over regime types has had a profound effect on international politics in certain times and places. The mechanism I examine is a principal way that this effect works.

In this book, I examine the major-power response to ten revolutions or revolts: the American Revolution; the Dutch Patriot Revolt of the 1780s; the 1820–21 revolutions in Spain, Portugal, Naples, Piedmont and Greece; the Russian communist revolution; the Italian fascist revolution; and the Iranian Revolution of 1979. Explaining the international response to these revolutions is important in explaining the outcome of the revolution in many cases. We would not have had a successful American Revolution, for example, without the support of the French and the Spanish, and we would have had a successful democratic revolution in the Netherlands in the 1780s if the Prussians had not crushed it. But it also gives us insights into international politics.

One of the main contributions of the book is that my theory helps us explain when ideological differences between states matter and when they do not. In some cases we see states acting in ways that the ideological theory would not predict; in other instances, we see states taking ideological differences very seriously. The domestic contagion effects theory explains why the French monarchy sought geopolitical gain by aiding democratic revolutionaries in America and the Netherlands just prior to the French Revolution, yet forswore opportunities to aid revolutionaries to undermine their rivals when revolutions broke out in Italy. It explains why communism was viewed as a major threat in interwar Europe and fascism was not. Another contribution is demonstrating that a revolutionary state’s policy about exporting revolution is usually not a large factor in prompting hostility

toward the revolutionary state. Rather, hostility is based on contagion concerns, which are independent of the revolutionary state’s policy. Finally, I show just how powerful the contagion effects are for international politics. The fear of contagion is essential in explaining such things as the transformation of European politics toward a more cooperative order in post-Napoleonic Europe, why interwar Europe had no strong balancing system against Germany, the origins of the Iran-Iraq War, and the sea change in alliance patterns in the Middle East ushered in by the Iranian Revolution. In Chapter 2, I elaborate the specific questions I am addressing, the domestic contagion effects theory, and my method for testing that theory.
A Theory of Domestic Contagion Effects

One key mechanism for how ideological differences between states can become salient for international politics is when states fear that a different regime type, an alternative way of organizing domestic politics, will spread to their own polity. That is the focus of this book. This prompts two questions. First, when will leaders fear these contagion effects? Second, what are the international effects of such contagion fears? This chapter will elaborate my answers to these questions, which are interrelated. We need to know the answer to the first question because I assume that the mere presence of an ideologically different state will not necessarily prompt fears of contagion, even in the context of the appearance of a new regime due to a revolution. I use the answer to this question to get at the second, and more important, question: how does the fear of ideology spreading affect international politics?

**Question 1: When Do Leaders Fear Contagion from Abroad?**

When do leaders anticipate contagion from revolutions? We can address this question by considering how revolutionary states can encourage the spread of other revolutions. They can do so in two ways: they can act as platforms and they can be models. When a revolution acts as a platform, the revolutionary state directly acts to spread its revolutionary ideology abroad. When revolutions serve as models, the cause is indirect—the appearance of a revolution in one place inspires revolutionary movement in other places, without the direct action of the revolutionary state.

I argue that leaders fear contagion when the revolutionary state serves as a model and the leaders have their own significant revolutionary movement that resembles the foreign revolution. The fear of contagion is primarily derived not from the infecting (revolutionary) agent but from the characteristics of the (established ruler) host. In other words, contagion fears are not about what the revolutionary agent does, but what it is, when the established ruler has their own opponents of the same character as the revolution. In those circumstances, the model prompts contagion fears.

How can a revolution serve as a model for revolutions elsewhere? Why would leaders fear models? What are the mechanisms? When revolutionary states serve

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as a model for revolution abroad, contagion occurs due to a demonstration effect or diffusion of a revolutionary ideology. Both these terms are characterized by “uncoordinated interdependence”: interdependence, because the effect of something happening somewhere changes the probability it will occur somewhere else, and uncoordinated, because it is specifically set apart as distinct from when there is direct coordination, by either cooperative or coercive means.¹

There are a variety of mechanisms by which revolutions could diffuse that, to varying degrees, can fall under the terms “learning” and “inspiration,” the inspiration mechanisms being particularly important in explaining leaders’ contagion fears from a successful revolution. The first cluster of mechanisms is about emboldening a preexisting opposition. Opposition groups in other states can learn techniques or tactics from the experience of other revolutions that make it easier for them to revolt successfully. Of course, this narrow sense of learning can cut both ways—opposition groups can learn strategies of revolt, but states can learn strategies of repression from how the old regime fell and the tactics of the resistance, and more successfully stifle the opposition. More significantly, revolutions could cause opposition movements to reassess the plausibility of their regime toppling after seeing a similar regime crumble. Also, the occurrence of revolutions elsewhere can enable the opposition by providing something of a focal point in time—an opportunity for opposition to act simultaneously and overcome collective action problems.²

Revolutions elsewhere can cause not just the emboldening of existing opposition, but also the creation of new opposition. Enlarging the opposition further emboldens the existing opposition, as more actors decide the regime must go, ¹ Elkins and Simmons convincingly argue that “diffusion” should be used to describe a particular process that is uncoordinated, in contrast to mechanisms that involve coercion or cooperation. Zachary Elkins and Beth Simmons, “On Waves, Clusters, and Diffusion: A Conceptual Framework,” The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science 598, no. 1 (2005): 35. This is a process rather than outcome, because the process might not lead to an outcome of conversion, and an outcome of conversion could be the product of a different mechanism. Scholars often use “diffusion” in the broader sense of the “prior adoption of a trait or practice in a population alters the probability of adoption for remaining non-adopters.” David Strang, “Adding Social Structure to Diffusion Models: An Event History Framework,” Sociological Methods and Research 19, no. 3 (1991): 325. Diffusion in this sense could involve direct coordination in the form of cooperation or coercion. This direct coordination is sometimes referred to as vertical diffusion, as opposed to horizontal diffusion. For examples of the use of diffusion in this broader sense, see Gunitsky, Aftershocks, 55; Erin R. Graham, Charles R. Shipan, and Craig Volden, “The Diffusion of Policy Diffusion Research in Political Science,” British Journal of Political Science 43, no. 3 (2013): 673–701; Beth A. Simmons, Frank Dobbin, and Geoffrey Garrett, “Introduction: The International Diffusion of Liberalism,” International Organization 60, no. 4 (2006): 781–810. In the way I am using the term, “diffusion” and “demonstration effect” are interchangeable. The term “demonstration effect” originates from the economist James Duesenberry’s discussion of how the dissatisfaction with one’s habitual set of goods after observing higher consumptive patterns of one’s neighbors drives consumption expenditures up. James Duesenberry, Income, Saving and the Theory of Consumer Behavior (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1949), 27–32. ² The discussion of focal points in terms of coordination began with Thomas C. Schelling, The Strategy of Conflict (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1960), 54–58.
and/or that they are going to do something about it. Opposition can mount as it becomes perceived as more probable that a regime will fall, but a prior cause of this may be that the regime is seen as increasingly illegitimate—the old ideology justifying the ruler’s right to rule is increasingly discredited and new ideologies are seen as the wave of the future—powered by the example of a revolution somewhere else. Alternatively, it may be that actors that previously regarded the existing regime as illegitimate but were acquiescent are now inspired by another revolution to take action.3

It is the “inspiration” mechanisms that embolden and enlarge the opposition that are particularly salient if it is the case that rulers fear contagion from a revolution that has already succeeded. Much of the learning mechanisms take place when a regime falls. From this perspective, after the fall of the old regime, there is no new information that affects the fear of contagion. But the focus on the eroding legitimacy of the state and the inspiration of new opposition is affected by the continuing presence of the revolutionary state.

Rulers often face challenges to their rule, but the assumption here is that the frequency and nature of these challenges vary over time and space. In some periods and places the very basis of political authority is openly called into question. Rulers obviously have vested interests in seeing that these challenges do not arise, or at least remain contained. This involves crushing resistance and, more commonly, deterring those opposed to their rule from taking action. It also involves preserving their legitimacy among the population that accepts their rule. Rulers do not rely on coercion (or the threat of it) alone to provide order and preserve their rule. As one scholar has stated, Machiavelli “gave a misleading account of the choices open to rulers when he advised that it was better to be feared than to be loved. Certainly if rulers are not feared they cannot rule, for the law depends upon the ultimate sanction of enforcement. But fear works best when clothed in authority.”4 The more regimes lose even a veneer of legitimacy, the more they risk losing consent even by sources within the regime, the more governing becomes a risky and dangerous game.5 Rulers thus go to great

5 This may seem commonplace, but the concept of legitimacy has often been dismissed by scholars, including the scholarship on revolutions. Legitimacy has been characterized as amorphous and difficult to measure; it also assumes a type of political support that is grounded in shared moral evaluations, which does not fit with the assumptions of some scholars’ models. Both structuralist and rationalist accounts of revolt assume actors are only waiting for their opportunity to pounce— they are not motivated by new goals or values. For an elaboration and critique on this point, see Jeffrey Berejikian, “Revolutionary Collective Action and the Agent-Structure Problem,” American Political Science Review 86, no. 3 (1992): 647–57. Gilley makes an argument for a return to the concept; see Bruce Gilley, The Right to Rule: How States Win and Lose Legitimacy (New York: Columbia University
lengths to preserve their legitimacy and to prevent those who regard the regime as illegitimate from acting. They attempt to keep any contestation within certain bounds—not questioning the fundamental right of the rulers to rule. And part of preserving their rule is maintaining an international system that supports rather than casts doubt on their regime type. They want to snuff out sources of inspiration.

How can a revolutionary state act as a platform? Why might leaders fear revolutionary states acting as platforms? The most direct way a state can act as a platform is to invade other states and impose similar regimes. Less directly, it can engage in subversion to foment revolution in another state—organizing and aiding opposition groups, disseminating propaganda, even attempting to assassinate leaders in other states. Leaders will obviously fear revolutionary states that attempt to act as a platform in the strongest sense—invading them to impose their regime type. But that is uncommon. The instances of this occurring to a major regional power, which is the focus of this book, are limited to the most prominent case—the French Revolutionary Wars. Revolutionary states often desire that their regime type spreads, but they are not in a position to be the cause of the spread in such a matter. More common are revolutions acting as a platform in less direct ways. Revolutions always serve as models, and sometimes it is just that—doing little more to spread their regime type beyond their mere existence.

When will leaders fear contagion? One could argue that leaders fear contagion only when revolutionary states are directly fomenting revolution abroad. Leaders may be concerned only with what states do rather than with who they are: the indirect mechanisms outlined previously are simply too peripheral to have much of an effect. I will argue that while of course leaders will not be indifferent to the policies of the revolutionary state—they will not appreciate attempts of subversion, and such policies may increase their hostility toward the revolutionary state—their fears of contagion, and thus the international effects, are orthogonal to such policies.

The fear of contagion involves characteristics of the infecting agent and characteristics of the host. The infecting agent can be what the revolutionary state does (platform) or what the revolutionary state is (model). Regarding the latter, the “ideological” tradition in IR that argues ideological differences between states create antagonism supposes that the more difference there is, the more antagonism there is. The fear of contagion, though, does not necessarily increase with ideological distance. In fact, regimes of a completely different nature
probably do not pose a serious threat of contagion, just as a Catholic may see Protestantism as more threatening than Hinduism. Ideological differences are not inherently threatening. At minimum, an ideology must make some claim to target some other state—for example, ideologies that are universal or based on religious/ethnic “imagined communities” that spill across borders. This one factor alone explains a good deal of the variation of the international effects of revolutions rather than, say, whether revolutions are mass-based or elite-driven. For example, the 1952 Egyptian Revolution, which was a coup of army officers that subsequently mobilized the masses with their pan-Arabist ideology, had a much greater international impact than the Mexican Revolution, a mass-based social revolution, simply because Arab nationalism was more threatening to surrounding states than Mexican nationalism. All revolutions serve as models in the narrow “learning” sense—opposition movements can learn from the weaknesses of existing regimes and so forth. But only revolutions with transnational ideologies serve as models in the “inspiration” sense. However, even if ideologies potentially target other states, the threat will not necessarily be salient. One must examine characteristics of the host.

An ideological threat is salient when rulers fear it will inspire movements within their country to subvert the existing order. I argue it is not ideology per se that they fear, but how ideologies translate into social power when revolutions threaten to embolden and enlarge opposition groups. A useful, if imperfect, proxy for the salience of the ideological threat is the presence of significant opposition groups of a similar character as the revolution. To be of a similar character as the revolution does not mean that these groups are advocating for precisely the same system. Indeed, Kurt Weyland’s work on revolutionary waves has shown that people use heuristics when they interpret events from abroad, and sometimes what they regard as an inspiring model is quite different from the one they want to implement. Rather, it means that the revolutionary opposition movements share the same ideological family—Islamist, socialist/communist, fascist, liberal—as the revolutionary state. The presence of such groups captures characteristics of the revolutionary state as well as the established ruler’s polity. It means the ideology legitimating the revolution is a transnational phenomenon, targeting other states. And it means that a state is already somewhat vulnerable—there is a level of organization and resistance that makes contagion plausibly threatening. Why there is a significant revolutionary opposition in the first place can be indicative of vulnerabilities in the regime. What lies outside the theory is the possibility that leaders might consider an ideological movement a salient threat and act to preempt such opposition from forming in their country in the first place. I suppose this level of threat remains too abstract for leaders to care.

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I assume a soft rationality of leaders, or at least do not assume they are irrational. Just as leaders do not act on threats that are too abstract, I assume that when they have contagion concerns, those concerns are plausible. Sometimes leaders’ fears of contagion are dismissed as irrational misperceptions perhaps due to their ideological blinders. For example, Stephen Walt assumes the fear of revolution spreading is a misperception, or myth, and thus mistakenly argued in the aftermath of the Tunisian Revolution in 2011 that there would be no contagion effects. Michael Carley, in his historical analysis of the response to the Russian Revolution, assumes that the Western powers were foolish for thinking that communism would spread. Revolutionary waves are admittedly rare events, but they might be rare events in part precisely because leaders take the necessary steps to prevent them from happening. In other words, there might be what Robert Jervis calls a “domino theory paradox”: the mechanism is present, but its very anticipation provokes countervailing policies. In addition, leaders have good reason to fear events such as revolutions that are rare but have severe consequences. Wars are also rare, and yet IR scholars often suppose that the fear of war drives behavior. Just because their fears of contagion do not come to fruition is not proof that their fears are irrational.

To summarize, I argue that rulers fear revolutionary threats to their regimes when revolutions are associated with existing opposition groups. Already challenged, the revolution threatens not just to embolden but greatly enlarge this opposition. I argue that this fear exists irrespective of the actual policies of the revolutionary state—that is, whether or not it seeks to actively promote its revolution abroad.

**Question 2: What Are the International Effects of the Fear of Contagion?**

Determining when leaders will fear contagion is a necessary part of this book, but even more important is what effect this fear has on international affairs. One possibility that runs counter to my domestic contagion effects theory is that it does not have much of an effect. First, there can be policy substitution. Leaders can repress opposition while maintaining their usual geopolitical priorities. Another possibility is that they can just switch sides. This seems to be a dubious strategy, because the goals of the revolutionaries and ruling class are usually

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incompatible, and the revolutionaries will not be content to leave the old elites in power. But certainly there can be a degree of co-option, whereby leaders use carrots along with sticks to concede to some of the demands of the opposition.

Leaders may increase their use of carrots and sticks toward their domestic opposition, but I assume that they will not consider this sufficient. I argue that ruling class strategies will extend to not just domestic but international affairs. When leaders fear revolution spreading, they will not be content with internal policies. It will have a discernable effect on patterns of cooperation and conflict: they will align against the revolutionary state and they will align with other states that face the same threat, which are often, but not necessarily, states that are of a similar regime type. The mechanism is political—leaders preserving their domestic regime—and it is not driven by ideological distance. Leaders of different regime types can face the same ideological threat and band together to defeat it. When leaders have a similar opposition, leaders will fear that revolutionary states will act as platforms and serve as models that will encourage the spread of revolutionary instability to their own polities. They will thus try to reverse or at least contain revolutions, which entail policies of hostility ranging from an invasion of the revolutionary state to diplomatic isolation.

Leaders’ hostility toward revolutionary states follows from the discussion of revolutionary states as platforms and models. If it was just revolutionary states acting as platforms that leaders feared, then those states not acting as a platform, either because they are too weak to muster much of a threat or because they have chosen not to pursue such a policy, would not generate a hostile response. Even with those revolutionary states that did act as a platform, one could presumably bargain with such a state—attempt to cut a deal that involves the revolutionary state ceasing its exporting of the revolution in exchange for its survival. But if the problem is the revolutionary state acting as a model, then a bargain cannot be struck, because the issue is the revolutionary state’s existence. Henry Kissinger claimed that the “distinguishing feature” of a revolutionary state is that nothing can reassure it.

Leaders’ hostility toward revolutionary states is driven by a desire to “kill the baby in the crib”—to prevent a successful revolution or to reverse an already successful revolution. Even when leaders recognize that they will not be able to

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10 As Edmund Burke said about England’s policy toward France, “we were at war not with its conduct, but with its existence.” Edmund Burke, *Letters on a Regicide Peace* (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 1999 [1796]), 155.

11 Henry A. Kissinger, *A World Restored: Metternich, Castlereagh and the Problems of Peace, 1812–1822* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1957), 2. Kissinger considered revolutionary states as those who do not accept the international order. He was thinking of the French case, where there was both a revolution and a state that did not accept the international order, but these are conceptually different—not all states that reject the international order have had a domestic revolution, and not all states that have had a domestic revolution reject the international order.
suppress a revolution entirely, they are hostile as a means of isolating the state and preventing it from becoming a successful model and/or acting as a platform. Because the fear of contagion is not contingent on states acting as a platform, leaders’ hostility will not be dependent on whether a state is acting as a platform. Certainly, leaders will not appreciate other states meddling in their affairs. That claim is unsurprising. My argument, though, is that the model drives contagion fears independent of the state acting as a platform.

When arrayed with the options of aligning with, remaining neutral toward, or aligning against states, leaders facing revolutionary contagion will not just engage in hostility toward the revolutionary state, but will align with states facing similar threats. That is, they will have broadly cooperative security strategies. They will have similar aims and aid one another diplomatically and possibly materially, rather than exploit or undermine one another. Leaders will cooperate with states that face the same threat in order to coordinate their policies against the revolutionary state as well as coordinate their policies of suppressing the transnational ideological movement. In these instances, I argue, it is not the balance of power or other pressures that determine patterns of cooperation and conflict, but the anticipation of revolutionary contagion. This creates policies that would otherwise be puzzling: states shifting their alignments based on ideological changes rather than changes in the balance of power, states intervening in revolutions they do not have much geopolitical interest in, or unexpectedly restrained relations with regimes of a similar nature. On the other hand, when leaders do not have revolutionary opposition movements and thus fear of contagion, other factors can come to the fore, such as realpolitik policies of using revolutions to exploit one’s rivals, irrespective of ideological concerns.

The answers my domestic contagion effects theory gives to the questions of when leaders fear revolutionary contagion and what the international effects of that fear are is summarized in Table 2.1.

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12 I use “alignment” because the more formal written agreement, sometimes implied by the word “alliance,” is not necessary to indicate a broadly cooperative relationship. The classic example is US-Israeli relations, where there is no formal alliance. Stephen M. Walt, *The Origins of Alliances* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1987), 12

13 The threat of revolution also encourages cooperation in general to prevent revolutions from erupting in the first place because war, and the preparation for war, can make regimes more vulnerable to upheaval. War can weaken the state to the point of breakdown, providing opportunities for revolutionary movements to strike. See Theda Skocpol, *States and Social Revolutions: A Comparative Analysis of France, Russia, and China* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1979). Rulers, especially in the aftermath of major wars, are often aware of the strain interstate competition can place on the stability of the state. This has at times been a powerful factor in preventing conflicts between states. States also often face trade-offs of efficiency in whether their armed forces are structured to internally repress or to engage effectively in interstate war, which also promotes cooperation. See Stanislav Andreski, “On the Peaceful Disposition of Military Dictatorships,” *Journal of Strategic Studies* 3, no. 3 (1980): 3–10. I touch on these issues, but do not systematically address them.
This table is an explanatory typology that maps the property space of the theory’s two variables: whether the revolutionary state acts as a platform and whether other states have significant revolutionary movements or not. Because I assume that all revolutionary states are models, being a model is not a variable and I do not include it in the table. Cells 2 and 4 are situations where there are significant revolutionary movements and thus fears of contagion that lead to the pattern of conflict with the revolutionary state and cooperation with states that have similar movements and thus similar fears. As argued, I expect these patterns to exist whether the revolutionary state is acting as a platform or not, so there should not be variation in the outcome in Cell 2 and Cell 4 in terms of the basic patterns predicted. That is not to say that actions of the revolutionary state in spreading revolution will have no effect. They could further exacerbate the tensions with other states. But that does not alter the patterns of alignments and hostility. The fact that the basic outcome of these cells is the same is perhaps surprising, and highlighted by this table.

In Cell 1, where the revolutionary state is not acting as a platform (and is by implication only a model) and there are no significant revolutionary movements, there will be no domestic contagion effects. This could mean international politics as usual, and what that might mean is a realpolitik policy whereby ideological
differences between states are irrelevant and revolutions are exploited as a means to further a state’s geopolitical position. I do not assume, though, that a realpolitik policy is necessarily the default position in international relations. The revolution could simply not disrupt existing patterns of cooperation and conflict. On the other hand, there could be non-domestic-contagion-related policy effects from the ideological change of the revolution. I argue that my mechanism will not be present, but others could be.

In Cell 3, states that are directly acting to foment revolution in these situations—that is to say, doing more than rhetorically denouncing other regimes—are likely to be rare in nature. If there is no significant opposition movement in a state, one option a revolutionary state has in spreading revolution is to invade that state and impose its regime type. This clearly requires a significant power disparity between the revolutionary state and its targets, one that we are unlikely to observe if we are considering only major regional powers, as this book is. As stated, the case of the French Revolutionary Wars is the only example in history. In this situation, there are obviously major international effects of the revolution. States will not take kindly to being invaded. If a foreign-imposed regime change is off the table, then the revolutionary state has the option of trying to organize from relative scratch a revolutionary opposition movement or aiding an insignificant movement, but this is the equivalent of trying to harvest a crop that is not ripe. If it does occur, it may be a source of irritation from the target state’s perspective. But it will not fundamentally affect bilateral relations, given the insignificance of the movement and thus the lack of contagion concerns. This book has cases that fit in each of these cells, as I explain in what follows.

Testing the Theory

Based on my proposed answer to the questions given earlier, I need to assess the nature of the opposition in states and whether the revolutionary state tries to spread revolution abroad. I want to ascertain whether leaders fear contagion from a revolutionary state, to what extent that fear is driven by the policies of the revolutionary state acting as a platform, and to what extent it is driven by the presence of a revolutionary opposition at home. Then I want to see whether the fear of contagion leads to policies of hostility toward the revolutionary state and cooperation with states that have the same contagion fears.

I use qualitative methods in this book in two senses. The first is that I provide a qualitative description of the independent variables: I begin each case with a description of how the revolution acted as a platform and/or a model in spreading revolution, and the nature of the opposition within the major powers of the region. I then describe the relations between states before the revolution to provide
a baseline to determine how the revolution affected international politics. I discuss the domestic contagion effects theory’s predictions given those independent variables and alternate theories. Second, I use process tracing to determine the effect the independent variables had on the dependent variables: the patterns of cooperation and conflict between the major powers of the region.16

My answer to the questions about when leaders fear revolution spreading can be broken down into two specific hypotheses, as can my answers about the international effects of that fear. I will elucidate these four hypotheses and the evidence needed.

Hypothesis 1.1: Given a revolution, leaders anticipate revolutionary contagion affecting their own regime only when they perceive there is a significant revolutionary movement in their state of the same character as the revolution.

There are several things to unpack. First, what is “revolutionary”? Opposition groups are revolutionary when they are bent on radically changing the nature of the regime. In many cases, whether opposition groups are revolutionary is easy to determine because they are partaking in violent attempts to overthrow the regime, and the regime type advocated by the opposition movements is fundamentally inconsistent with the ruling regime. In other cases, differences may not necessarily be fundamental, but depend on the strategies of the opposition and ruling regime. For example, western European communist parties during the interwar period openly advocated the downfall of existing regimes (even while participating in elections), while those same parties during the Cold War accommodated themselves to democratic regimes. On the other side, the monarchies of France and Britain in the 1830s and 1840s accommodated themselves to liberal movements, whereas for the absolute monarchies of Austria, Prussia, and Russia these movements were revolutionary. To detail the strategic interaction between these players would be a book of its own. Instead, I focus on whether there was or was not a significant revolutionary movement.

What is a “significant movement”? Revolutionary movements suppose a certain level of organization dedicated to overthrowing the state, rather than isolated intellectuals haranguing against the regime. Revolutionary movements need not be vast to be significant. Indeed, most revolutions only involve a small minority of a state’s citizens. But they need to be of sufficient size and/or placement to be a credible threat to the regime. It is difficult to postulate a clear dividing line between what is significant and not that cuts across a variety of

historical contexts. The ends of the spectrum are uncontroversial—historians concur that there was a significant segment of the population in France in 1820 that wanted to overthrow the Bourbon monarchy and there were people organizing to bring this about, just as they concur that there was no sizable constituency for overthrowing the monarchy prior to the French Revolution. But there can be borderline cases. Historians still debate the level of support for revolution in Britain in the 1790s.\footnote{For a summary of this debate, see Edward Royle, Revolutionary Britannia? Reflections on the Threat of Revolution in Britain (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000), 1–10.}

One clear marker for whether such movements are significant is whether there has been an uprising in the recent past. That supposes a movement with a significant following to make a bid for power. The Bourbon monarchy in 1820, for example, was well aware that it had been overthrown only a few years previously and was reinstalled by the great powers. Even so, a recent history of revolt is not the only indicator of the presence of a significant revolutionary movement. There could also be straightforward evidence of revolutionary parties garnering a significant percentage of the vote (say, 5 percent) or clear evidence of revolutionary organizations with sizable followings. The idea is simply to get at whether the movements exist and are not isolated and marginal—that is, whether they pose a potential threat. The domestic contagion effects theory is a threshold theory: that when there is a significant revolutionary movement, there will be fears of contagion and concordant international effects. Thus, I assess these movements in binary terms rather than comparative metrics. I also do not consider trends. Even if a significant movement has been recently successfully suppressed, I argue leaders will fear the possibility of it reconstituting itself.

Part of the strategy of the case selection elaborated in what follows is to choose cases where there clearly is or is not such opposition so that I can minimize ambiguous coding. In only one of the cases I deal with in this book is there a substantial historiographic debate over the significance of the revolutionary movement, and that is the French fascist case. This is due to discrepant views of what constitutes fascism, as I will discuss.

Judging a movement’s level of support and thus significance can be difficult, for both the scholar and the ruler. Given that the opposition in question is revolutionary, these groups tend to be outlawed and heavily suppressed. If there are ambiguities about the strength of the movement and the nature of the movement—whether the groups are committed to overthrowing the current regime—I err on the side of classifying the movement as significant and revolutionary. If the size or nature of the movement is ambiguous, I assume rulers will err on the side of caution and think they have a significant revolutionary movement on their hands. This makes for a harder test of the theory, because I am assuming