

- Stein's conception of the actors in international politics: he takes the state as his unit of analysis, and assumes self-interested activity on its part. He does assume some degree of interdependence, in the sense that actors' actions do depend in some measure upon those of others. He adopts the view that states are interested in absolute gains, and not the maximization of relative gains.
- Stein advances a structural conception of state interest, whereby state interests are determined by the distribution of power, as well as the nature of knowledge and of technology (such as the perceived superiority of offensive weapons to defensive ones, and the difficulty of distinguishing between the two). The former is important for defining the incentives to adopt certain policies. The constellation of domestic interests (which are also somehow dependent upon a state's international interactions) also help determine the state's interests.
- Stein notes the range of definitions that riddles the term "international regime"—some exclude nothing, others limit regimes to institutions of formal character. Stein claims that a regime somehow imposes a constraint upon parties, without being a product of independent decision making. Domestic society and the free market are examples of regime.
- When would an international regime be consequential? Not in circumstances of no conflict (harmony) or assurance (where the actors shared a preferred outcome but lack a dominant strategy). In the latter situation, you only need some manner of communicating your preference to the other state. Nor will a regime arise when in a two-player game, dominant strategies lead to one actor's most preferred outcome and the other actor's second-worst outcome.
- One set of cases where regimes are consequential are "dilemmas of common interest," including PD, where independent rational decision-making will lead to suboptimal outcomes. This includes the provision of collective goods, such as collective security, and the establishment of international trade agreements to reduce trade barriers.
- Another set of cases where regimes are consequential are "dilemmas of common aversion," where actors have an interest in avoiding a particular outcome. Such situations are divided between ones in which players have no preference between coordination points, and ones in which players have divergent preferences between coordination points.
- Dilemmas of common interest require collaboration, whereas dilemmas of common aversion require coordination. Collaboration regimes must define proper standards of cooperation (and enable participants to identify cheating) and ensure that no one defects (via a system of monitoring and sanctioning). Regimes must also find some way of ensuring that cheating is visible.
- Coordination regimes need only facilitate bargaining. Defection is public, and preemptive action (in order to force the point of coordination) is advantageous, but it is likely that convergence on one point will follow. The results of coordination are self-enforcing.
- Stein now turns to the issue of regime change. Against those who argue that regime change is merely a function of changing distributions of power, Stein contends that regimes change only when changes in power distribution, knowledge, and/or technology that impact underlying patterns of interest occur.
- Even in the face of these changes, institutions can be sticky because states do not continually recalculate their interests, and often rely upon institutions to define their interests (and the criteria by which their interests are determined) once institutions have been established. Stein also recognizes a possibility that states develop an interest in sustaining an institution, especially considering the sunk costs already born in its creation. Finally, Stein argues that international institutions develop a legitimacy of their own, and states are loath to exit from institutions because of potential costs to their reputations.