

Approaches - REALISM

In the news....

Theories of International Relations

- Realism
 - Classical realism, neorealism

- Liberalism
 - Classical liberalism, democratic peace theory, neoliberalism, complex interdependence

- Constructivism

- Critiques of dominant theories
 - Marxism, dependency theory, world systems theory
 - Feminism

| Feature | Realism | Liberalism | Constructivism |
|-------------------|---|---|---|
| Core concern | How vulnerable, self-interested states survive in an environment where they are uncertain about the intentions and capabilities of others | How rational egoists coordinate their behavior through rules and organizations in order to achieve collective gains | How ideas and identities shape world politics |
| Key actors | States | States, international institutions, global corporations | Individuals, nongovernmental organizations, transnational networks |
| Central concepts | Anarchy, self-help, national interest, relative gains, balance of power | Collective security, international regimes, complex interdependence, transnational relations | Ideas, shared knowledge, identities, discourses |
| Approach to peace | Protect sovereign autonomy and deter rivals through military preparedness | Democratization, open markets, and international law and organization | Activists who promote progressive ideas and encourage states to adhere to norms of appropriate behavior |
| Global Outlook | Pessimistic: great powers locked in relentless security competition | Optimistic: cooperative view of human nature and a belief in progress | Agnostic: global prospect hinges on the content of prevailing ideas and values |

About Realism

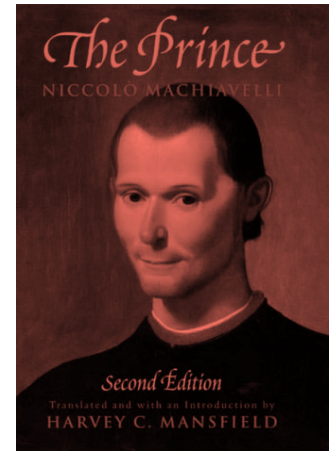
- Has held a central position in the study of IR
- Developed in reaction to a liberal tradition that realists called “idealism”
 - Idealism emphasizes international law, morality, and international organizations as crucial for averting war
- Since WWII realists have criticized idealists for focusing too much on how the world *ought* to be rather than *how it really is*
- International politics is seen as a struggle for power and prestige

Realism explained

- <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UnKEFSVAiNQ>
- 4 min.

Realism - Quotes

“...for many have pictured republics and principalities which in fact have never been seen and known, because how one lives is so far distant from how one ought to live that he who neglects what is done for what ought to be done sooner effects his ruin than his preservation; for a man who wishes to act entirely up to his professions of virtues soon meets with what destroys him among so much that is evil.”



- Niccolò Machiavelli (16th Century). *The Prince*

Realism - Assumptions

- States are the main actors in IR
 - State sovereignty
 - Promotion of the national interest is prime obligation of the state
- States are *rational* actors
 - States will act in a predictable way through rational calculations to promote their national interest (which is defined in terms of power)
- States are *unitary* actors
 - States as billiard balls ... actions of each are determined by its interactions with the others, not by what occurs inside it

Realism – Assumptions (cont'd)

- International anarchy (“every man, against every man”)
 - Self-help system
 - **Power** is critical → realpolitik
 - Distinction made between private morality and reason of state (“philosophy of necessity”) → the greatest virtue in international politics is prudence
 - International politics is a zero-sum game → *relative* gains are the focus of state actions
 - Cooperation will be relatively rare
 - Selfish considerations always trump cooperative ones → stag-hunt
 - Lack of trust among actors (e.g. security dilemma)

Classical Realism

- Emerged on the eve of WWII
 - “Founding Fathers”: E.H. Carr, Reinhold Neibuhr, **Hans Morgenthau -> six principles**
 - Insight from earlier works of Sun Tzu (The Art of War), Thucydides (History of the Peloponnesian War), Niccolo Machiavelli (The Prince), and Thomas Hobbes (Leviathan)
- Emphasized a pessimistic view of human nature
 - “And the life of man, solitary, poore, nasty, brutish, and short.”
- State interests defined in terms of power
 - States are driven by ambition

Classical Realism

- Level of analysis = state
 - Sources and amount of state power to explain international politics
- Realpolitik – state decisions made in consideration of power and practical considerations, not ideals or morals
 - Goal-oriented ... not guided by fixed principals

“We assume that statesmen think and act in terms of interest defined as power, and the evidence of history bears that assumption out.”

“The concept of interest defined as power imposes intellectual discipline upon the observer, infuses rational order into the subject matter of politics, and thus makes the theoretical understanding of politics possible.”

- Hans Morgenthau (1973). *Politics Among Nations*

Realism - Quotes

“Our opinion of the gods and our knowledge of men lead us to conclude that it is a general and necessary law of nature to rule wherever one can.”

“...the strong do what they have the power to do and the weak accept what they have to accept.”

- Thucydides (5th Century BC). *The Melian Debate*

Neorealism – “Defensive Realism”

- Developed by Kenneth Waltz
- Advocates the inclusion of analysis at the systemic level to explain international politics
 - International anarchy is important
 - Distribution of power: multipolar vs. bipolar vs. unipolar
- States should have an *appropriate* amount of power
- State interest defined as security, not power
 - States driven by fear of others' possible ambitions
- General trends and the *likelihood* of war

Neorealism – “Offensive Realism”

- Developed by John Mearsheimer
- Also points to the systemic level (international anarchy) for explaining competition and conflict
- Argues that states seek to *maximize* their power in order to ensure security

“Given the difficulty of determining how much power is enough for today and tomorrow, great powers recognize that the best way to ensure their security is to achieve hegemony now, thus eliminating any possibility of a challenge by another great power.”

- John Mearsheimer (2001). *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics*

Discussion Questions

Are sanctions the most effective way to handle a rogue state?

- Will North Korea / Iran be more secure if it obtains a usable nuclear weapons arsenal?
- Dilemma: if N. Korea does not build nuclear weapons it might be attacked/threatened by more powerful states. But if it does, it might face additional hostile powers and increase US incentives to attack.

Is there any way out of this dilemma?

Criticisms of Realism

- Failure to account for increased cooperation after WWII and growth of the European Union
- Assumptions are misleading
 - State sovereignty and states as only important actor
 - International anarchy
- Difficulty in testing many propositions of realism
- Disregards ethical principles
- Focus on military strength at the expense of economic and social concerns:
- Conceptual imprecision

Conceptual Imprecision

▣ Various ways to define “power”...

| Rank | Country | GDP (purchasing power parity) |
|------|-----------------------|-------------------------------|
| 1 | <u>European Union</u> | \$ 14,450,000,000,000 |
| 2 | <u>United States</u> | \$ 13,860,000,000,000 |
| 3 | <u>China</u> | \$ 7,043,000,000,000 |
| 4 | <u>Japan</u> | \$ 4,417,000,000,000 |
| 5 | <u>India</u> | \$ 2,965,000,000,000 |
| 6 | <u>Russia</u> | \$ 2,076,000,000,000 |
| 7 | <u>Brazil</u> | \$ 1,838,000,000,000 |
| 8 | <u>Mexico</u> | \$ 1,353,000,000,000 |
| 9 | <u>Canada</u> | \$ 1,274,000,000,000 |
| 10 | <u>Korea, South</u> | \$ 1,206,000,000,000 |

| Rank | Country | Oil - exports (bbl/day) |
|------|-----------------------------|-------------------------|
| 1 | <u>Saudi Arabia</u> | 8,900,000 |
| 2 | <u>European Union</u> | 6,971,000 |
| 3 | <u>Russia</u> | 5,080,000 |
| 4 | <u>Norway</u> | 3,018,000 |
| 5 | <u>United Arab Emirates</u> | 2,540,000 |
| 6 | <u>Iran</u> | 2,520,000 |
| 7 | <u>Canada</u> | 2,274,000 |
| | <u>Mexico</u> | 2,268,000 |
| | <u>Venezuela</u> | 2,203,000 |
| | <u>Kuwait</u> | 2,200,000 |

| Rank | Country | Strategic Warheads |
|------|-----------------|--------------------|
| 1 | USA | 5,521 |
| 2 | Russia | 5,682 |
| 3 | France | 348 |
| 4 | UK | 185 |
| 5 | China | ~130 |
| 6 | Israel | 100-200 |
| 7 | India | ~50 |
| 8 | Pakistan | ~60 |

Questions?